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A Comparative Analysis of Reading Habits among Standard Eight Students across Different School Types

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the reading habits, preferences, and challenges of Standard VIII students across government, government-aided, and private schools in Thoothukudi District. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 130 students through a structured and validated questionnaire covering aspects such as reading frequency, book preferences, sources of reading materials, language preferences, digital engagement, and library usage. The findings revealed significant association between the type of school and key reading behaviours. Private school students showed greater access to books and digital platforms but surprisingly reported lower daily reading frequencies and underutilization of school libraries. In contrast, government-aided school students demonstrated structured reading patterns and higher library engagement and government school students largely depended on informal sources like peers and exhibited stronger preferences for traditional books and mother tongue reading. Educational implications underscored the need for equitable access to resources and tailored reading interventions.

1. Introduction

The Reading is more than just a skill; it is a gateway to knowledge, imagination, and intellectual growth. For students, strong reading habits are instrumental in shaping their academic performance and lifelong learning capabilities (Johnson & Roberts, 2019). However, reading behaviours are not uniform across all learners, they are shaped by multiple factors, including access to books, the availability of reading spaces, motivation from educators and parents, and, significantly, the type of school they attend. This study examines the reading habits of students in Standard VIII across different types of schools, government, government-aided, and private, investigating how their educational environment affects their engagement with reading. Research suggests that school infrastructure and resource availability play a crucial role in shaping students' literary outcomes (William et al., 2025). Additionally, external encouragement from teachers and parents has been found to significantly impact reading motivation and frequency (Miller, 2018). Research further emphasizes that students' learning behaviours and reading engagement are strongly shaped by intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors (Sharma, 2024). By identifying trends and disparities, this research aims to provide actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and parents, enabling them to cultivate a more inclusive and enriching reading culture in schools.

1.1 Rationale of the Study
Reading is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in academic success and personal growth. The

development of strong reading habits in students has been widely acknowledged as a key predictor of cognitive and linguistic proficiency. Despite its significance, disparities in reading habits persist among students based on various factors, including socio-economic background, availability of resources, parental influence, and most notably, the type of school they attend. Government, government-aided, and private schools often differ in infrastructure, library facilities, teaching methodologies, and parental expectations, all of which may contribute to variations in students' reading engagement. Recent studies also show that students' motivation is closely linked to the availability of support structures in their learning environment, which directly influences their reading habits and academic engagement (Sharma, 2024). This study aims to investigate these variations, offering a comparative analysis of reading habits among VIII standard students across various school types.

Existing literature has examined the factors influencing students' reading habits, such as access to books (Garcia & Lee, 2020), parental encouragement (Johnson & Roberts, 2019), and digital distractions (Miller, 2018). However, a critical gap remains in understanding how the type of school influences reading frequency, book accessibility, language preference, and engagement with different reading mediums. Moreover, while the majority of the studies have explored the impact of technology on reading habits, fewer have examined how students in different school settings balance traditional book reading with digital reading platforms. This gap is particularly relevant in today's educational landscape, where digital literacy is becoming an essential skill.

Additionally, while government and private schools often receive research attention, government-aided schools remain an understudied category. The reading habits of students in these schools, which operate under unique administrative and financial conditions, require deeper investigation. Another gap is the limited research on how school libraries are utilized across different school types and whether they significantly contribute to reading engagement. By addressing these gaps, this study aimed to provide insights into the reading behaviours of students from different educational backgrounds and offer practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and parents. Understanding these patterns can help design targeted interventions to foster a stronger reading culture among students, regardless of their school type.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

i. To find out the general reading habits of standard VIII students across government, government-aided, and private schools.
ii. To investigate the reading preferences and motivation of standard VIII students across government, government-aided, and private schools.
iii. To investigate the reading resources and challenges of standard VIII students across government, government-aided, and private schools.
iv. To investigate the digital reading and media influence of standard VIII students across government, government-aided, and private schools.
v. To provide recommendations for enhancing reading habits among students in different school environments.

1.1 Hypotheses of the Study

H_{01}: There is no significant association between type of school and the frequency of reading among students.
H_{02}: There is no significant association between type of school and students' preferred type of books.
H_{03}: There is no significant association between type of school and the sources from which students obtain books.
H_{04}: There is no significant association between type of school and the daily reading time of students.
H_{05}: There is no significant association between type of school and the primary source of motivation for students to read.
H_{06}: There is no significant association between type of school and students' preferred reading language.
H_{07}: There is no significant association between type of school and the source of reading encouragement received by students.
H_{08}: There is no significant association between type of school and the availability or utilization of school library facilities by students.

H_{09}: There is no significant association between type of school and students' access to books at home.

H_{010}: There is no significant association between type of school and the reading challenges faced by students.

H_{011}: There is no significant association between type of school and the type of support students expect from schools to enhance their reading habits.

H_{012}: There is no significant association between type of school and students' frequency of online reading.

H_{013}: There is no significant association between type of school and students' preference for reading mediums.

H_{014}: There is no significant association between type of school and students' preference for audiobooks or video-based learning materials.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the reading habits, preferences, and challenges faced by Standard VIII students in Thoothukudi District. The survey method was chosen as it facilitates the collection of quantitative data from a large group of participants, enabling a comprehensive and comparative analysis of variables such as reading frequency, book preferences, motivational factors, and access to reading resources.

2.2 Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample comprised 130 Standard VIII students drawn from three different school types: government, government-aided, and private. To ensure diverse representation, a random sampling technique was employed to select one school from each category. Within each selected school, students were randomly chosen to participate, ensuring an equal and unbiased distribution of responses across school types.

2.3 Tool

A structured questionnaire was developed by the investigators to assess students' reading habits, preferences, and the challenges they face in reading. The questionnaire consists of multiple sections, including:

- General Reading Habits – Frequency of reading, type of books read, sources of reading materials, and time spent in reading.
- Reading Preferences & Motivation – Preferred reading materials, language preference, motivation for reading, and enjoyment of reading aloud.
- Reading Resources & Challenges – Availability of books at home and school, access to libraries, and obstacles to reading.
- Digital Reading & Media Influence – The use of digital reading platforms, preference for digital vs. printed books, and media consumption habits.

2.4 Reliability and Validation of the Instrument

To ensure the instrument's validity, the initial draft of the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of three subject experts in education and language pedagogy. They evaluated the items for clarity, relevance, and content adequacy and revisions were made based on their feedback. Thus face and content validity of the tool were ensured.

To establish reliability, a pilot study was conducted with 30 students who were not part of the main sample but represented similar demographic and educational backgrounds. Responses were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha, which produced a coefficient of 0.82, demonstrating good internal consistency. Items with low item-total correlations were refined for clarity. These procedures confirmed that the instrument was both valid and reliable for assessing students' reading habits.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was conducted in person by the investigators. Prior to administration, formal permission was obtained from the respective school authorities. Students were briefed on the purpose of the study and given clear instructions for filling out the questionnaire. Emphasis was placed on anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest and uninfluenced responses.

The questionnaire was self-administered and completed under the supervision of the researchers within a time frame of approximately 30 minutes. Researchers were present to provide clarification if required, ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the data collected.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings

To understand the findings further, the standard residuals of the chi-square output were considered and the following interpretations were made:

3.1.1 *Frequency of reading and Daily Reading Time*

Statistically significant relationship was found between the frequency of reading and daily reading time based on type of school. Private school students reported greater access to reading resources but showed irregular reading patterns, with some reading less frequently than expected. Government-aided school students displayed more consistent and structured reading habits, while a few government school students reported long daily reading periods, reflecting individual motivation despite limited institutional resources.

Table 1: Relationship Between Type of School and Students' Reading-Related Variables (Chi-Square Analysis)

Association of Type of School with	Pearson Chi Square Value	df	p value	Result
Frequency of reading	29.77	8	0.000	Significant
Students' preferred type of books	8.652	8	0.372	Not Significant
Sources from which students obtain books	88.749	8	0.000	Significant
Daily reading time	41.904	8	0.000	Significant
Primary source of motivation	14.772	8	0.064	Not Significant
Students preferred reading language	20.013	4	0.000	Significant
Source of reading encouragement	27.631	6	0.000	Significant
Availability or utilization of school library facilities	23.065	2	0.000	Significant
Access to books at home	7.881	4	0.096	Not Significant
Reading challenges	10.734	6	0.097	Not Significant
Type of support students expect from schools	2.917	6	0.819	Not Significant
Frequency of online reading	9.453	4	0.051	Not Significant
Preference for reading mediums	11.709	4	0.020	Significant
Students' preference for audiobooks or video-based learning materials	19.158	4	0.001	Significant

3.1.2 *Book Preferences and Sources of Reading Materials*

The analysis revealed a significant relationship between students' preferred types of books and source of

reading materials with type of school. Students in private schools preferred fictional books, while students in government schools relied more on school libraries, indicating institutional support. Government school students depended on peers or borrowed materials and leaned toward academic or curriculum-based reading. These patterns point to disparities in resource access and reading opportunities across school systems.

3.1.3 Students' Preferred Reading Language

A significant association was found between the preferred reading language and the type of school. It was also found that private school students show a preference for English as their reading language, while government school students predominantly prefer their mother tongue. Government-aided school students demonstrated bilingual tendencies. These results reflect differences in language emphasis and exposure across school curricula.

3.1.4 Reading Encouragement

The source of reading encouragement varied significantly among school types. Teachers were the main motivators in government and aided schools, whereas parental encouragement was more common in private schools. A small proportion of private school students reported receiving little or no reading support.

3.1.5 Library Utilization

Significant differences were found in library usage patterns. Government-aided and private school students reported higher access to library facilities; however, private school students underutilized them compared to government-aided students, who exhibited a more active library culture. Government school students reported limited library use despite availability.

3.1.6 Reading Medium

School type significantly influenced students' preferred reading medium. Government school students showed a stronger preference for traditional books, government-aided school students demonstrated balanced use of books and digital screens, and private school students displayed diverse preferences. Aided school students also showed greater acceptance of audio and video learning materials, suggesting adaptability to multimodal literacy.

3.2 Discussion

The findings highlight clear variations in reading behaviour across different school types, shaped by access to resources, institutional support, and motivational factors.

Students from private schools generally had better access to reading materials and digital platforms, yet their reading frequency was inconsistent. This contrasts with government-aided school students, who maintained structured reading habits and frequent library use despite moderate resource availability. Such findings reinforce prior evidence that access alone does not guarantee reading engagement (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Krashen, 2004).

Government-aided school students demonstrated a balanced reading culture supported by teachers and library programs, while government school students showed resilience and self-motivation despite constraints, echoing the idea that intrinsic motivation can sometimes outweigh external limitations (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Language preferences mirrored school curricula: private schools emphasized English literacy, while government and aided schools supported bilingual or mother-tongue reading, consistent with Cummins' (2000) framework of language proficiency development.

The variation in reading encouragement also reflects social and institutional roles. Teachers play a critical role in fostering reading among government and aided school students, while parental support dominates in private schools. These patterns align with findings that the source and strength of student motivation significantly shape learning behaviour and academic engagement (Sharma, 2024). However, reports of minimal encouragement among some private school students highlight the need for more active collaboration between school and home (OECD, 2011).

Library usage patterns further underline institutional culture. Government-aided schools demonstrated strong library engagement, whereas private and government schools showed underutilization. As Elley (1992) emphasized, well-integrated library programs are key to developing reading fluency and fostering independent learning.

Finally, differences in digital and multimodal reading preferences indicate evolving literacy practices. While private schools offer greater technological access, government-aided students exhibit a more balanced integration of print and digital reading. Schools must adapt their literacy programs to promote both traditional and multimodal reading competencies (Rowsell & Walsh, 2011; Leu et al., 2013).

Overall, the results demonstrate that school type significantly shapes reading behaviour through varying levels of access, encouragement, and cultural emphasis. Promoting equitable access to books, strengthening teacher and parental involvement, and integrating library and digital literacy programs are essential to nurturing consistent and meaningful reading habits among students.

3.3 Limitations

While the study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged.
a. The results and findings relied on self-reported data, which may involve minor response bias.
b. The sample size was limited to 130 students from three schools in one district. This may reduce the generalizability of findings.
c. The cross-sectional sampling captures reading behaviour at a single point in time and does not reflect long-term trends.
d. The study used only quantitative methods; incorporating qualitative approaches could provide deeper insights into students' reading motivations and contexts.

Future studies with larger, multi-district samples and mixed-method designs are recommended to build on these findings.

3.2 Educational Implications

The findings have several practical implications for teachers and policymakers seeking to strengthen students' reading habits across school types.

For Teachers
a. Introduce structured reading programs (e.g., daily reading hours, silent reading time).
b. Diversify reading materials to include both fiction and academic texts.
c. Revitalize school libraries through guided sessions and reading challenges.
d. Promote bilingual reading (English and mother tongue) to support inclusive literacy.
e. Integrate digital tools—such as e-books, audiobooks, and videos—to enhance engagement.
f. Encourage parental involvement and teacher-student collaboration in reading initiatives.

For Policymakers
a. Ensure equitable access to reading materials through community libraries and mobile book drives.
b. Invest in library infrastructure and teacher training to promote reading culture in all schools.
c. Bridge the digital divide by supporting technology integration for reading and literacy.
d. Design literacy policies that embed regular reading into the curriculum.
e. Develop context-specific reading interventions responsive to local language and resource needs.

Conclusion

This study examined the reading habits, preferences, and challenges of Standard VIII students across government, government-aided, and private schools in Thoothukudi District. Results indicated that school type significantly influences reading frequency, material preference, daily reading time, language choice and library use.

Private school students had greater access to reading materials and parental support but showed lower reading frequency, highlighting a gap between availability and engagement. Government-aided students demonstrated balanced reading habits and consistent library use, while government school

students relied on teachers and informal sources, often reading less due to limited resources.

A digital divide was also evident—government-aided and private schools embraced mixed reading mediums, whereas government school students preferred traditional books. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for equitable resource distribution, structured school-based reading programs, and active collaboration among teachers, parents and policymakers to cultivate sustainable reading habits across educational contexts.

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Declaration

We hereby declare no part of this manuscript involves plagiarism or fabrication of data, and all ethical guidelines for educational research have been strictly adhered to during the conduct of the study. AI tools, if used, were solely for language refinement, grammatical clarity and formatting assistance. No AI tool was used for generating the core ideas, analysis, interpretations, or findings of the research.

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