



Fostering a Culture of Reading: The Evolving Role of Libraries in Knowledge Societies

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ABSTRACT

Reading is more than just a cognitive skill, it is a gateway to lifelong learning, creativity, and informed citizenship. In a digitally, driven world, the value of developing and nurturing reading habits cannot be overstated. Libraries, whether academic, public, or special, serve as dynamic spaces that cultivate reading culture through access, environment, technology, and programming. This paper explores the broader idea of reading culture, investigates barriers affecting reading habits, and suggests actionable strategies libraries can employ to reinvigorate reading among diverse communities.

1. Introduction

The practice of reading transcends the pages of a book; it reflects a society's intellectual health. In an era dominated by instant digital content and fragmented attention spans, cultivating consistent and meaningful reading practices, especially among the younger generation, is essential.

Reading not only helps individuals access knowledge but also enhances critical thinking, emotional development, and personal growth.

Developing a reading habit should begin in early childhood and extend through every stage of life. While parents and educators serve as initial motivators, libraries play a sustained, lifelong role in maintaining



this engagement. Libraries act as both custodians of literature and dynamic learning environments that promote curiosity, intellectual inquiry, and literacy.

2. Understanding Reading Culture

Reading culture refers to the ingrained habit and societal value placed on reading as a daily, enjoyable, and purposeful activity. A true reading culture is evident when individuals choose to read independently, voluntarily, and regularly, not merely out of academic compulsion. It includes both intensive (in-depth) and extensive (broad) reading and extends beyond academic success into leisure, creativity, and lifelong learning.

Reading involves emotional (affective), sensory (perceptual), and intellectual (cognitive) engagement. It requires individuals to decode, interpret, reflect upon, and apply the content to broader life experiences. Thus, fostering a reading culture goes beyond teaching literacy, it's about shaping values and motivation.

3. Barriers to Reading Culture in Contemporary Society

Despite its significance, several systemic and socio-cultural challenges obstruct the development of reading habits:

- **Shift to Digital Distraction:** Prolonged screen time, especially on social media and streaming platforms, diminishes interest in traditional reading.
- **Economic Constraints:** Limited purchasing power among families often results in inadequate access to books or reading materials.
- **Education System Focused on Exams:** Reading becomes synonymous with passing exams rather than exploration or enjoyment.
- **Institutional Gaps:** Insufficient investment in libraries, absence of reader development policies, and underfunding hinder access and motivation.
- **Cultural Stigma:** In some contexts, reading is seen as a luxury or as elitist rather than a universal right and habit.
- **Language and Literacy Barriers:** Poor foundation in reading languages contributes to disengagement from books and literature.

4. The Role of Libraries in Reviving Reading Culture



Libraries are uniquely positioned to combat these challenges and foster reading habits through innovative practices:

4.1 Creating Reading-Friendly Environments

A peaceful, organized, and aesthetically pleasing environment motivates users to stay longer and explore. Comfortable furniture, silent reading zones, and natural lighting contribute to a positive reading atmosphere.

4.2 Resource Accessibility

Libraries offer an inclusive platform to access a wide variety of print and digital resources, including books, journals, newspapers, and multimedia content. Through equitable and open access, they level the playing field for economically disadvantaged readers.

4.3 Recognition and Motivation

Instituting 'Reader of the Month' awards or reading challenges can incentivize regular reading. Organizing reading clubs, essay contests, or storytelling events can further engage users in fun yet meaningful ways.

4.4 Personalised Reader Engagement

By maintaining user profiles that track reading interests, libraries can recommend materials aligned with individual preferences. Displaying curated booklists and providing advisory services helps users discover new authors and genres.

4.5 Incorporation in Curriculum

Integrating dedicated library hours in school and college timetables encourages students to view libraries as active partners in learning. Teachers and librarians should collaborate to recommend reading beyond textbooks.

4.6 Outreach Through Mobile Libraries



Mobile libraries and reading tents can bring books to rural and underserved areas. This outreach not only improves access but sparks interest in reading where traditional infrastructure is missing.

4.7 Leveraging Digital Tools

With the rise of e-resources, libraries can use RSS feeds, blogs, virtual book clubs, and social media to promote reading. Providing access to platforms like Project Gutenberg or NDL can also expand reach

4.8 Organizing Author Talks and Book Discussions

Hosting in-person or virtual events with authors fosters interaction and deepens interest in literature. Technology platforms like Zoom or Google Meet make these sessions feasible even with limited budgets.

4.9 Developing Reading Strategies

Libraries should have a strategic vision for promoting reading. This includes aligning efforts with national literacy programs, engaging families, and building partnerships with local publishers, NGOs, and educational institutions.

5. Case Insight: Reading Promotion in Medical Libraries

Even in academic health institutions like SKIMS Medical College, Bemina, fostering a reading culture is vital, not just for academic excellence but also for developing compassionate, well-informed healthcare professionals. Initiatives like library orientation sessions, themed book displays (e.g., empathy in healthcare), and creating a “Silent Study Zone” can stimulate reading interest even among busy Medic students. Moreover, integrating reading habits into wellness programs can aid stress reduction and improve mental well-being.

6. Reimagining Libraries: A Case of Zinda Kitab Ghar

In an era where libraries are being reconceptualized as vibrant community spaces, the Zinda Kitab Ghar initiative offers an inspiring local example of grassroots innovation. Launched in Jammu & Kashmir, this model transforms conventional reading spaces into interactive cultural and moral learning hubs.

Unlike traditional libraries, Zinda Kitab Ghar promotes a “library without walls” concept, combining elements of storytelling, emotional literacy, and cultural exchange. Its core philosophy rests on creating



inclusive spaces where oral histories, folk traditions, and life experiences are shared alongside books especially in underserved areas. Community members become “living books,” and mobile reading units extend access to remote villages.

This aligns strongly with global efforts to revive reading culture by making libraries more participatory, experiential, and locally relevant, especially in post-conflict or rural contexts.

7. Conclusion

The development of a reading culture is both a personal and societal responsibility. Libraries must reinvent themselves not just as information centres but as vibrant community spaces that inspire, support, and sustain the joy of reading. By combining physical access, digital innovations, motivational strategies, and active outreach, libraries can continue to shape informed, thoughtful, and literate societies.

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