
Stress Management during Stressful Times: Using reading as a Tool

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Abstract

In the troubled times of Pandemic due to Covid -19, every aspect of our lives went an unusual change and it left deep and everlasting effect on human society. Our lives stood stand still and we were forced to stay behind the closed doors and windows to ensure safety. During the process of protecting our physical existence on this earth, our brain, the superior most body part was undergoing certain undesirable changes which eventually affected our mental health. It was all the more challenging for children of this generation who were already dealing with mounting academic pressure. This trial was unexpected for all of us .In the midst of very alarming first and second covid waves, we saw the grief stricken nations, the gloomy and confined days and nightmarish images in the media. The research part intends to gauge the effect of reading Ruskin bond's work on improving the quality of life and more so creating a positive mind set in young readers during the Covid times. The research tried to find the effect of reading, particularly the literature related to celebration of everyday life. This mixed research has tried to penetrate deeper into the fact and is an effort to find a correlation between reading habits and management of stress related to pandemic. A survey form for adolescent readers was created to collect the data from six different schools. To address the research question, the data was subjected to descriptive, inferential and correlational analysis. To connect the quantitative data and qualitative part, further group discussions were conducted focusing on the follow up of the quantitative results. The data collected through survey forms was transcribed, analyzed and categorized. After the analysis of

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the results obtained, various conclusions were drawn in consideration of the research question dealt with. Quantitative and Qualitative results revealed few challenges that young readers faced, role of technology in reading and use of Ruskin Bond's work fighting the stress due to pandemic.

Keywords : troubled times, unusual changes, undesirable changes, transcribed, analyzed, categorized.

1)Introduction

The more than one year long period from the on set of first wave in April 2020 to the deadliest second wave in May and June 2021, we lived a life which was beyond our imagination. It felt that the nature had plans to teach humanity a lesson in the language it understood most. The virus was spreading at the jumbo speed the helplessness of a medically advanced and well equipped human race was making headlines Every day, citizens all over the world found themselves trapped in four walls and the Lockdown became the only flavour of the season.

The real world transformed into virtual one and sharing of meeting links for professional and personal work and family business became the talk of the town. But the Pandemic related closure of the offices and academic institution had far reaching negative effects. It added to the anxieties and restlessness of adult citizen and adolescents who were already trying to cope up with it physically. It robbed the confidence of planning for future. The very unexpected and sudden closure of schools forced the institutions to on line teaching mode and resorting to various technologies and promotion of app based learning atmosphere too. It was then only when the idea of conducting such a research where reading could be a possible solution for the poor mental conditions of adolescents who had faced or were facing, the after effects of Pandemic on their lives and were undergoing a recovery phase. The study examined the use of reading as a tool to fight the pandemic stress or stress management during stressful times by using reading as a tool. The nationwide school closure was a serious

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blow to the minimal world of children and adolescents. The school was not only an epicentre of their academic activities but also a place where their emerging social lives take shape. The poor mental health due to the prolonged circuit breaker was the biggest challenge that the young population of all the nations faced. The big question was not only to address the problem of reading loss but also to find reading resources ,preferences and role of school and individuals as young readers to make up the loss. Was there any motivation to read on their own ?Were they able to differentiate the curriculum reading from hobby reading or leisure reading? The use of free time available to them in the interest of their intellectual growth still remains an area to be explored. The survey brought into focus, the use of reading simple and delightful literature for children and particularly of Ruskin Bond’s work in fighting Pandemic blues. It tried to find a correlation in reading the literature related to celebration of our daily lives thus and creating a positive mind set in young readers. It also tried to find the role of such work in the development of their high order learning skills. The mixed method design for the research examined all these specific nodes of the research question and intended to create a better understanding of these key issues for the educators and policymakers for not just our own country but also on global basis.

2)Literature review

1. Readers verses Non readers(Of Fatiloro.O A Adesola,B A Hameed,2017)

Reading is a perfect gateway to success. It is a determining factor in the development of better skills in students.

“People who are literate and do not read have no advantage over them who are illiterate and can not read”

The above quote by legendary writer Ruskin Bond emphasizes the importance of reading in shaping of an individual. Various researches have proved that the children who out perform in their academics as well in extra curricular activities are avid readers. it offers them not only educational but also sociocultural benefits. The report from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study done for ten- year- olds too has

supported the same fact where the children who enjoyed reading showed better cognitive abilities than ones who do not enjoy reading.

2. Access to reading (Access To Books-Scholastic)

“Ensuring that books are available to any child at any time of the year will be a good first step in enhancing the reading achievement of low-income students and an absolutely necessary step in closing the reading achievement. {Anne McGill Franzen and Richard Allington,2009}

The school closure during the prolonged period of COVID -19 forced the authorities to switch to on line mode of learning for students. It seriously curtailed their access to reading material and literary activities which school could offer them. The ones who had an exposure of printed text at home and were enjoying reading before resorted to the material available to them on primary basis. Out of these ,most of them preferred printed text even if they could switch to digital mode or e books. The young population who were not inclined to reading as their leisure activity felt better motivated during the phase.

3. The difference in medium or schools (Aser report.2021)

Access to on line education was not equal nation wise as govt school students found themselves struggling themselves with the learning loss and reading loss too. As per the govt report 29 million students had no access to any digital devices or internet.[Hindustan Times, Dec ,21}.Efforts were done by the govt to provide e content through Digital infrastructure like DIKSHA .But was to deal with course learning and not to promote any kind of hobby or summer reading.

Public school and convent school children were at advantage in their access to online education. Still during the prolonged school closure, the steps to counterpart the reading loss were self dependent.The young readers who enjoyed reading tried to utilize the available time in picking up a printed text. During the recovery phase after the second wave, a majority of them enjoyed work specially written for them.

3)Methodology And Material Used

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The study is part of a larger research project investigating the effect of Ruskin Bond's Work on love, life and childhood where a reading survey was to be conducted in the month of June and July where the author's work was to be used as a sample of work in creating a positive mind set in young readers. But the period coincided with recovery phase after the severe second wave. The not so conducive atmosphere for students dealing with prolonged on line learning and daily lives overshadowed with the gloomy environment and pathos of losing the dear ones ,became the budding ground for this kind of survey .This is an attempt for a narrower study on reading habits during the pandemic times and in the recovery phase.

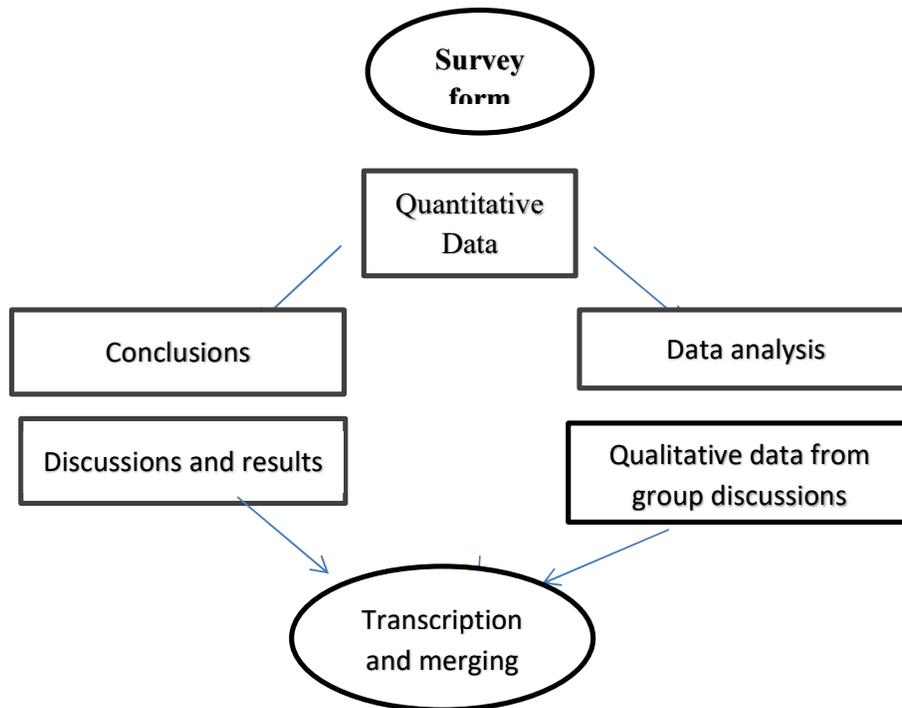
i) Quantitative Analysis

The survey through structured questionnaire was conducted in dual mode mode i.e. off line and on line mode. The respondents were from Government, Public and convent schools. The sample size consisted of 60 respondents from adolescent age group. The percentage composition of each being 40 percent,30 percent and 30 percent respectively. Gender distribution was roughly 60 percent(female) to 40 percent(male) The quantitative data was collected from the survey that was done in the months of November and December in GGIC Unnao and in two famous public and convent schools of Lucknow through convenient and purposive sampling methods. The questions covered mainly three topics a.the adaptability of students to online mode of learning b.their reading preferences i.e. printed or digital mode c.the influence of the author's work in creating a positive mindset and in improving their language skills.

ii) Qualitative Analysis

The follow up of quantitative data was done by conducting group discussions. The data retrieved was transcribed and analyzed to create a better understanding and deeper insight of reading patterns of young readers as a whole particularly in the times of Pandemic

Procedure Cycle



Results

I) Quantitative Results

1. More than 90 percent of the school authorities switched to online mode for the completion of the curriculum while a small percentage of them sent only online modules for studying. It was class dependent too.
2. The two most preferred activities during the pandemic closure of schools for using free time were Indoor Games (57.1 %) and Leisure reading (28.65%). Coincidentally these two activities are picked by a majority of students to fight the stress and negativity due to home bound conditions too.
3. A majority of adolescents accepted the role of digital media in spreading the negativity though they accepted its positive role in disseminating correct information and awareness too.

4. At least 78.6 % of them liked reading books with 85 % of them wanting to read printed text only

5. Ruskin Bond and J.K Rowling are the two most loved author of the children with a major percentage of 78.6 and 14.3. The Blue Umbrella and A Room On The Roof are the two most liked books by survey sample. The most liked themes are life and nature only with a percentage share of 42.9 and 35.7. Only 21.4 percentage of young readers liked childhood theme

6. A big number of respondents (92.9%) were sure of the improvements in their Narrative skills after reading the text offered them which was written by Ruskin and related to the nature, life and friendship. They also accepted the role of such literature in creating awareness about nature.

7. The responses related to Higher Order Learning Skills showed that the young readers did find the role of literature related to celebration of daily life in creating a positive mind set and affected their attitude in positive ways. They accepted that during the recovery phase and during the troubled times reading such text would be useful to them up to some extent. Responses in the survey were also indicative that young readers who enjoyed reading were able to cope with the stressful times in a better way.

An important point here to mention is that even the Government school students find it easy to comprehend the literary text by Ruskin Bond as compared to other authors of children. Students going to Public Schools or Convents were better motivated for reading English texts written for children.

ii) Analysis of Qualitative Data From Group Discussions

Five group discussions each consisting of four students were held to develop a deeper insight of

the data collected from survey forms. As far as staying behind doors during Pandemic times, all of them expressed about the period to be very boring and negative. Losing physical contact with their friends and staying in front of the screen added to their sadness. Few of them said that they did not enjoyed reading much before school closure

due to Covid -19, but developed a liking for the same to spend the free time available to them. The ones who were involved in any kinds of literary activities resorted to available means and materials at home and found it better to cope up the stress and Boredom of staying back at home for a long time. Most of them preferred printed text even if they has access to digital or on line mode. One major reason was the compulsion of on- line mode of learning of curriculum and hence an already bigger screen time. On being asked about the role of literature related to celebration of life in creating a positive attitude, a majority of them supported the theory. Particularly for the work of Ruskin Bond, most of them said that they like his writing style, themes and simplicity of texts though J K Rowling too is liked by a good number of young readers. All of agreed that such simple and relatable text could create a healing touch to fight the Pandemic blues. Few of non readers who did not enjoyed reading before the Covid 19 school closure found themselves better inclined to read post Pandemic and during the recovery phase. One major drawback in promotion of reading during this prolonged school closure was the absence of the substantial support from the institutions and adults around them. Distraction of Digital devices was another reason for reading loss as a whole.

6)Discussion

The research tried to find the significance of reading in coping the stress related to Pandemic and how far the on line platform could help in doing so. It could be inferred that the role of academic institutions was restricted to course completion without any attention to reading loss. While it tried to create a better understanding about the kind of work liked by children of all three domains of school systems, i.e Government Schools, Public schools and Convents, it also emphasized upon the role of work specially meant for young readers in creating a soothing and calming a sought after activity while staying indoors. Also the prolong school closure was a pushing factors for adolescents as well to become better inclined to read. Reading even promoted the achievement of Higher Order Learning Skills.

Conclusion

While the research results were supportive of earlier finding of similar kind of research done in South India in Sept 21, which was purely on line and few others published in newspaper giants like The Hindu and Indian Express, it further asks us to ponder upon the current scenario .The stress ,anxieties and boredom were the major issues faced by adolescents with an added compulsion of on line learning. Books offered them the peace of mind up to a remarkable extent. The population of young readers used the books available to them and were better skewed towards the simple relatable text .During the recovery phase it was evident that the population of young readers like the soothing touch of stories celebrating life written by Ruskin Bond. It is also needs to be noted here that schools and family need to form some cooperative systems to promote reading on everyday basis. It urges the policy makers and institutions to prepare better plan to make up the learning loss during such negative times and working upon the mental well beings of students using such texts. With the advancement of technology, the blended mode of learning is new normal and as the current third wave of Covid expanding its wings again, we need to create a better awareness for productive utilization of free time available to adolescents. The results of the survey and group discussions can be a motivating factor to conduct bigger research on this issue particularly for stressful times like Pandemic and its recovery phase.

Further it is also calls for a continuous research to study the reading patterns of young readers and use of technology during this kind of times and ways to develop efficient systems like reading campaign or reading hours on nation-wise basis. One fact to notice here is that while the government schools are already promoting the Reading through such efforts and using apps like Goggle Read-along with words counts and awards to children, the public schools and convents still need to accelerate the cause .

8) ***Declaration of competitive interest***

The authors declare that they have no financial interests or personal relations to the concern members that may influence the findings reported in the paper.



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