

LIBRARY REFERENCE ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE OF SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Libraries are the backbone of education at schools. Earlier library books were considered as the greatest treasure a school has, but at this era of technology libraries are considered as a waste of time for education. Books in the library are meant for leisure time reading. The academic intervention study conducted by DIET Thrissur with the support of SCERT Thiruvananthapuram identified a new instructional tool named 'Library Reference' as an effective method for using libraries for academic excellence of students. The study revealed that Library reference could be spread all over the world to use school libraries not only for academic excellence but also for creative writing.

Keywords: Library Reference, Academic Excellence

Introduction

Almost all schools have libraries and as per records every library has enough number of books in stock. But it is doubted that whether the school libraries have the needed books to improve the academic quality of students.. It was found as per the timely curricular reform, the school libraries do not ensure a satisfactory stock of reference books that could assist the easy transaction of text books in classrooms. There were many reasons behind the inadequate stocking of reference books like the lack of funding. Excluding libraries from the real classroom teaching learning process was also found to be another main reason for this inadequacy. Most schools limit their library empowerment activities to Readers Day programs. It is sad to point out that many schools fail to accept the fact that library books foster extra reading habits and they should be made as an essential part of teaching- learning process.

District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) Thrissur with the support of State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT) Kerala conducted an Academic Intervention Study in 2019-20 in Kerala to investigate how school libraries could be made use for academic excellence of students. DIET Thrissur suggested a new teaching strategy called 'Library Reference' as solution for the inactive library system at schools. 'Library Reference' is a teaching strategy in which teacher uses an additional reading material as an instructional tool to enhance academic excellence of students in a scientific and systematic manner. Additional reading materials could be any reading materials including library books, magazines, pamphlets and notice etc.

The study aimed to remove the prevalent prejudice from the mind of teachers, learners and parents that school libraries are a place for leisure reading. The school libraries have a rich collection of books under different categories like children literature, novel, short stories, science fiction and historic novels. Yet, these treasure houses of knowledge are not being made an integral part of the actual class room activities. It is important to identify and ensure the availability of books that could help learners to carry out classroom activities, their follow up activities and creative writings. It is

equally important to convince the academic circles about the impact of library reference as an instructional strategy for improving the quality of learning among learners.

Reading activities at school give importance to reading and learners will get more opportunities to enrich their critical thinking skills and creative writing. Library referencing can eventually provide a learner with great possibilities to attain the qualities of a global citizen. Hence it is highly significant to include reading and referencing as a daily routine in classrooms activities. To construct a creative learning atmosphere at schools, teachers and learners should realize the importance of referencing skills and utilize its benefits in their daily teaching -learning process. The study intended to identify the possibilities offered by school and class libraries in making learning a creative experience and also suggest ways to use Library Reference as a strategy for ensuring academic improvement in upper primary schools.

The Objectives of the study are given below.

- 1 To identify the present status of school libraries
- 2 To find out how far school libraries are used by teachers and students
- 3 To develop a Library Reference Package for improving academic quality of upper primary school students.
- 4 To assess the effectiveness of Library Reference Package
- 5 To empower the libraries of the selected schools
- 6 To identify the difficulties faced by teachers in implementing Library Reference Package
- 7 To disseminate Library Reference Package to other schools in the district
- 8 To share with the public, the academic benefits attained by learners through library referencing skills
- 9 To collect suggestions with regard to the empowerment of school libraries for academic improvement.

The study adopted survey cum experimental method. The fifth-grade students of five randomly selected government schools of Thrissur district constituted the sample of the study. The headmasters, teachers, teacher in charge of the library and parents of the selected schools were also included under the sample.

The main tools used for collecting responses with regard to the present status of school libraries were given below:

1. Questionnaire for teachers
2. Interview schedule for headmasters
3. Focus group discussions for parents
4. Group discussion for students

The following tools and techniques were used to assess the effectiveness of the strategy adopted

- Interview schedule for Headmasters
- Interview- schedule for Teacher in charge of library

- Questionnaire- for Teachers
- Focus group discussions for Parents
- Group discussions for Students
- Questionnaire for teachers participated in the Twinning programme
- Achievement test for students

Qualitative and Quantitative methods were used for the study. Percentage analysis was used for analyzing quantitative data.

A baseline study was conducted as part of the study. It was conducted in the 18 Upper Primary schools of Thrissur District. One school each from the eighteen Block Resource Centre (BRC) of Thrissur. Among the eighteen nine were Government schools and nine were aided schools. The baseline study revealed that school libraries were used vary rarely by teachers for classroom activities. Majority of sample collected showed that school libraries are used for leisure time reading by students and teachers. Both students and teachers were unaware about the books available in the school libraries.

As part of the study a study group was organised at DIET Thrissur. Five government schools from five different regions of Thrissur district were selected for the study. An orientation programme was conducted to selected school Headmasters of the school. The idea of Library Reference was presented before them. Three creative workshops were organised at DIET Thrissur for the preparation of the Library Reference Package. The fifth standard Malayalam, Basic Science and Social Science were selected for preparing the package. Resource Persons of Malayalam, Basic Science and Social Science from Upper Primary schools in Thrissur district were participated in the package preparation. The teachers of the sample schools were also allowed to participate in the package preparation workshop. All the teachers participated in the workshops came with the books collected from their school libraries, which has connection with the textual content of fifth standard. They identified the library text materials that could be used as a classroom aid with the support of special library catalogue prepared earlier. In each lesson plan teachers skilfully integrated additional reading material as an aid for classroom process.

The package was introduced in the sample schools and it was administered by the teachers of sample schools at their class. Students were given content selected from the libraries as a part of the classroom activities. The package was conducted from August to February. The process was reviewed and monitored by DIET Thrissur and the Research group throughout the period. During the time of intervention itself positive feedbacks were received from students, teachers and parents. A twinning programme was organised in five BRCs to identify the possibilities and effectiveness of Library Reference. The feedbacks collected from the teachers participated in the twinning programme was also positive in favour of Library Reference. Later an achievement test was conducted at ten schools, five from the experimental schools and five control schools of the same BRC. The data collected from the research tools were analysed.

Findings of the study were given below.

- All the children commented that though majority of teachers encouraged the students for promoting reading habits, the parent's involvement in this matter was minimal.

- Two of the five schools surveyed found that they did not have enough library books.
- Teachers and students commented that the use of library book in classroom transaction was very less.
- As part of the library referencing various extracurricular activities like quiz competitions, poetry / story/ essay writing were conducted on different textual topics. This helped the learners to search and use reference books from the library.
- The headmasters participated in the study also opined that the teachers and students actively participated in these activities.
- As part of library reference activities teachers started to spent more time in libraries after their regular working hours.
- The reference section of school libraries had inadequate reference books and this was compensated by adding new books.
- Students had started to identify the close connection between the textual topics and the extra reference/reading materials they read from the library.
- Students of the fifth grade had scored better than the students of higher classes in various competitions conducted like quiz, essay/creative writing etc. conducted in schools. This indicated the effectiveness of library referencing strategy
- Teachers participated in the study had remarked that due to this initiative there was a considerable increase in the number of books in the library and school libraries were improved much. PTA, MPTA, various clubs, alumni associations extended great support for re-equipping libraries with new books. Lots of library books were received in the school library as part of the birthday present of the children.
- The teachers in charge of library had reported that they had started to catalogue books as per class and subject category.
- All the teachers in charge of library and the headmasters remarked that the library usage of teachers had increased immensely after the implementation library referencing project. The reading habits of teachers had also increased greatly due to this initiative.
- All the teachers participated in the study reported that students had started to use library seriously. Even the students who used library for casual reading had learnt to select reference books related to textual topics and began to use them for extra reading purpose. Moreover, teachers had found that students had started to prepare notes based on the books they referred.
- A great majority 90 percentage of teachers opined that after the use of referencing package remarkable changes had occurred in students in their performances and the product made by them. This finding revealed that the effectiveness of Library Reference Package.
- It was also found that the reading interest of students had increased considerably and more clarity in writing and communication was noticed with less mistakes in writing.

- Parents extended amazing support in retaining the reading interest of their children. They bought them new books, read the notes prepared by learners as part of library referencing activity and some parents even took library membership for their children as a supportive gesture.
- Before the implementation of this project only 20 percentage of learners attempted note making. As a result of this project almost all the students had started to prepare notes of the books they read. This indicated the effectiveness of the project.
- As a result of library referencing package 60 percentage of students took membership in their respective neighbourhood libraries.
- The effectiveness of the package was reflected in the better performance exhibited by learners in various co-curricular and extracurricular activities like story writing, recitation, essay writing etc.. They were also able to read and frame complicated sentences without mistakes.
- Non availability of adequate library books, non-cooperation of parents etc were the main difficulties faced by the teachers while implementing the package at school level.
- Through ‘Arivultsavam’ programme conducted in school, the representatives of people, parents, LSG’s and educational officers recognized and witnessed the academic achievement of children
- It was also found that the learners participated in the study exhibited better academic performance in various subjects like Malayalam, Basic sciences and social sciences. This finding proved the effectiveness of the Library Referencing Project in improving the academic performance of learners.

The study conducted by DIET Thrissur on Library Reference revealed that school libraries could be used effectively as an instructional tool to improve academic excellence of students. As library referencing is found to be an effective strategy to improve the academic performance of learners, the project could be extended to other schools.

Reference

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