

# Exploring Effective Strategies to Enhance Students' Reading Habits of Dechencholing Higher Secondary School

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study aimed to explore effective strategies to enhance students' reading habits at Dechencholing Higher Secondary School. Quantitative data were collected from 54 participants, while qualitative data were gathered from 12 interviewees, including students from Classes X A and E. Descriptive statistical analysis was used for the quantitative data, while the qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Following the baseline data analysis, two intervention strategies were implemented: Our Time To Enjoy Reading (OTTER) and Self-Indulgence. These strategies were applied to both classes over nine weeks. The findings indicate that these strategies significantly strengthened and elevated the students' reading habits. Furthermore, the study revealed that students could spend more than one hour reading with proper interventions. However, the study recommends allocating specific time during class hours and formulating a strong policy to promote reading before students can consistently develop the habit.*

**KEYWORDS:** Strategies, reading habits, interventions, self-indulgence, social media.

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## 1. Introduction

With the implementation of the First Five Year Plan in 1961, the education system began to move at a faster pace to meet students' educational needs. Since then, writing and reading in the education system have been necessary to refine intellectual and competent students. The English curriculum in the Bhutanese Education system comprises four different strands such as reading and literature, writing, listening and speaking, and language and grammar (Royal Educational Council [REC], 2008). Reading is given due importance as it is the key to unlocking the cellar of knowledge to the world. Students are expected to read a wide range of texts independently and they are expected to inculcate an interest in books (Curriculum Assessment and Professional Standards Division [CAPSD], 2015). It is through reading that students can study and reflect on the cultural values of s and consider reading as a recreational and learning activity Bhutan and the world, fundamental values, skills, and wisdom.

According to REC (2019) suggested that students should read at least 40 pieces of fiction and non-fiction to cultivate reading habits. Further,

it is noteworthy that educational institutions across Bhutan have introduced dedicated periods of a reading week and month, aimed at fostering a heightened interest in literary engagement. These initiatives are crucial as social media's rapid growth often shifts attention to technology, reducing interest in reading. Concurrently, Bhutan has launched the National Reading Year in 2015, alongside the Bhutan Children's Book initiative initiated in 2014, both of which are designed to nurture and cultivate the practice of reading among students. The inception of the Reading Year is particularly opportune, aligning with a period dominated by the pervasive influence of social media, which tends to encroach upon our temporal and cognitive resources. However, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that shifts in reading habits are underway, attributed to the advent of diverse technological tools (Chettri & Rout, 2013).

Despite instituting Dear moments in the school, still students lack reading habits in higher secondary schools, and this contributes to their academic low performance. Further, the Bhutan Council for School Educational Assessment

(BCSEA, 2019) report indicated that the PISA-D evaluation disclosed an average literacy rate of 45.34% within the Bhutanese population. While this statistic represented 4.08% enhancement compared to the mean solution rates (41.26%) of other participating countries in the PISA-D, it still remained below the average performance of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Moreover, it is also observed that most high school students spend time surfing Facebook rather than reading. Similarly, another study showed that most high school students never finish reading a fiction book from cover to cover after leaving school (Brydolf & Carol, 2007). Thus, the primary purpose of the study is to explore the students' reading habits of Dechencholing Higher Secondary School.

### 1.1. Reconnaissance

Before defining the specific action research question, Maxwell (2003) suggested conducting a detailed reconnaissance. The term "reconnaissance" comes from the French word *reconnaitre*, meaning "to look at." He outlined three components of reconnaissance: situational analysis (examining the situation in terms of factors like resources and practices); competences (considering the researcher's profile and skills); and relevant literature (connecting with previous research in the area). Dillon (2008) argues that "reconnaissance allows investigators to be more aware of where they are at, what they hope to achieve, and how they are going to get there" (p.15).

#### 1.1.1. Situational Analysis

The current state of students' reading habits in the school is concerning, as approximately 64.5% of students lack regular reading habits. Moreover, I found that students often utilize Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) moments for academic tasks such as homework, reading texts, and preparing presentations. In addition, statistical data from Grade X A and E (see Fig 1) indicates that students also lack oral communication, possibly attributed to inadequate reading habits. Moreover, survey data show the overall mean (M; 3.82; SD; 0.89) (see Table 2)

indicating students still need to cultivate and enhance reading habits. Further, an individual reading record of the students revealed that they have read an average of 4 to 5 books in 2023. Additionally, the library book issued record showed that the students read 1 book or no book in the month, which is too minimal as per the mandate of the Department of curriculum and professional development. Additionally, more than 63.2 % of students spend substantial time in social media which affects students reading habits. Nevertheless, more than 60.5 % of students dedicate less than an hour in reading books in a day, which indicates students lack reading habits. More than 42.1 % of students express that they read for pleasure outside of school hours. This situation calls for an academic exploration to devise effective interventions and foster a comprehensive reading culture among students. Therefore, this study examines the students' reading habits of Dechencholing higher secondary school, and implement effective strategies to enhance the students' reading habits.



Fig. 1. Speaking Skill of Students

#### 1.1.2. Researcher Competence

The primary author has carried out research on impact of Facebook on students' reading habits, impacts of students' reading habits on academic performance and impacts of teachers' use of language on students' emotion. Both of us possess a strong background in conducting diverse needs assessments within schools. Our commitment to advancing academic practices is evident through active participation in numerous seminars and workshops on action research. In 2022, principle author took on the role of a facilitator, conducting a workshop for

principals of Punakha schools and entire staff of Dechencholing higher secondary school.

Functioning as a literary coordinator, we monitor reading programme in the school. This role allows us to actively monitor and shape students' perceptions of reading. Further, we involve students in various surveys and interviews, providing valuable insights into their comprehension of reading and its significance. Thus, this competence would guide us to explore effective strategies to enhance students' reading habits in the school. While, my critical friend exhibits a pronounced enthusiasm for academic research, having authored over 6 research papers. His avid reading spans a diverse range of articles, showcasing a commitment to expanding intellectual horizons. Additionally, his analytical and discerning approach significantly contributes to the robustness and value of our study.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Students' Reading Habits

"Reading habits" encompass the diverse behaviors reflecting individuals' preferences for various types of reading materials and genres. Recent research by Diwan (2020) identified that students engage with notebooks, textbooks, and electronic resources. The Royal Educational Council (REC) in 2019 recommended that students need to read a minimum of 40 pieces of fiction and non-fiction to foster strong reading habits. Bhutan, recognizing the impact of technological advancements and social media, initiated a National Reading Year in 2015 and the Bhutan Children's Book initiative in 2014. Despite the pervasive influence of the Internet and television, Bhutanese students continue to express interest in reading books. However, PISA-D reports (BCSEA, 2019) indicate a concerning average score of 43.34 in reading literacy, attributing this to poor reading habits. A significant portion of students devotes substantial time to Facebook, impacting both their reading habits and academic performance (Wang *et al.*, 2011).

The reading environment emerges as a crucial factor in shaping reading habits. A positive atmosphere, equipped with sufficient reading

materials, significantly influences students' reading preferences (Morni & Sahari, 2013). Libraries prove to be favored reading spaces, and formal features of a book impact students' reading choices (Baron, 2017). Home environments also play a crucial role, with poor conditions at home affecting students' reading habits (Morni & Sahari, 2013).

### 2.2. Factors Affecting Reading Habits of Students

The development of students' reading habits is intricately linked to their environment, as highlighted by Morni and Sahari (2013). Storch and Whitehurst (2002) state that reading at home builds a good foundation of reading habits. Similarly, school library is a place where many students enjoy reading books, which sows the seeds of reading (Baron, 2017). However, household duties and continued homework are the barriers in their reading.

Parents and teachers need to show example which is crucial in instilling a lifelong reading habit (Dorji, 2020). Students also read in the presence of teachers in the school. However, social media, online games, chat and so on distract students from reading books (The Spring of Hope, 2019; Sharma & Shukla, 2016; Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). Further, having students' positive attitudes towards reading is the most driving force in building reading habits (Wangchuk & Zangmo, 2021). Further, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation both play significant roles in influencing students' reading engagement and comprehension (Wang & Guthrie, 2004). So, to enhance students' reading habits, the combined efforts of parents, teachers, motivation, attitudes, resources, and conducive environments play pivotal roles.

### 2.3. Manifold Benefits of Reading

Reading is an indispensable tool for learning and acquisition of varied skills and experience needed by students to develop knowledge. In addition, reading also helps students understand and appreciate their own cultural heritage as well as other values (Zangmo, 2007). A recent study shows that through reading, students gain extensive knowledge and experience that they can

use in their daily lives (Pradani, 2021). Reading, therefore, is an essential tool for knowledge transfer and the culture of reading is an academic activity that increases skills in reading strategies.

Reading shapes the mind, gives broader and enriched vocabulary, helps in character creation, widens mental horizons and provides other benefits (Skenderi & Ejupi, 2017). Further, His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo has always exhibited concern over reading as is evident when he stated, “You must read about everything around you, not just subjects that interest you. You must learn about current events, history, science, culture, and people around the world. The pursuit of knowledge must be lifelong” (The Bhutanese, 2014, para. 4). It is important that students develop positive habits towards reading books and gain a wide range of knowledge and skills. Thus, reading helps in the all-round development of a person from birth to death (Loan, 2009).

#### **2.4. Strategies to Enhance Reading Habits of Students**

Research suggests various effective strategies to encourage students’ reading habits. School library plays a crucial role by creating inviting spaces, hosting literary extravaganzas, and offering popular reading materials (Dewan, 2010). However, at Dechencholing Higher Secondary School, lack a spacious library room, lack of accessibility of reference books and insufficient relaxing spaces hinder reading habits of the students. So, parents, teachers and other stakeholders need to create enabling conditions for students to read and enhance their reading habits.

Teachers and parents should allocate time for independent daily reading, organize reading-related events, monitor students reading in the school, and strategize in maintaining reading portfolios (Stinchcomb, 2017). Sharing reading experiences, inviting authors, and teaching reading strategies are also beneficial (Aguilar, 2013). More so, positive attitudes of students have a huge impact on reading (Wangchuk & Zangmo, 2021). Additionally, there ought to be a school policy that rewards students who are better readers, and institute Our Time To Enjoy Reading

(OTTER) and prove effective in inculcating students’ reading habits (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Tyson, 2013). Moreover, Yangdon *et al.* (2021) stated that OTTER and self-indulgence strategies had effectively promoted students’ pleasure reading. These strategies aim to foster a love for reading among students.

#### **2.5. Research Question**

How can I enhance students’ reading habits of class X A and E of Dechencholing Higher Secondary School students through OTTER and self-indulgence?

### **3. Methodology**

A pragmatic paradigm guided the proposed study. This paradigm allows exploration of complex phenomena and is the philosophical framework for mixed methods (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). An action research which involved a total of 54 students in this study. A random sampling technique was used since it is difficult to get the list of the whole population that is a prerequisite for applying any probability-based sampling technique. The sample ensured equal gender representation. Therefore, the study collected questionnaire data from 54 students of class X A and E. Out of 54 students, 20 were male and 34 were female.

One-on-one interviews were conducted as a data collection technique with the aim to acquire an in-depth understanding of students’ perceptions of their reading habits at Dechencholing Higher Secondary School. In total, 12 students participated in the interview, of whom 5 were female and 7 were male. Random sampling was used to select the participants. The interviews were conducted before and at the end of the interventions.

The survey items were expressed on a six-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (6), Agree (5), Somewhat Agree (4), Disagree (3), Somewhat Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Further, the scale on the level of the opinion was adapted from Tshering, Tamang and Rinchen, 2021, guide to interpret the mean score (see Table 1). Survey items were adapted from Yangden *et al.* (2021).

Table 1. Scale on Level of Opinion

Scale	Level of Opinion
1-1.50	Strongly disagree
1.51-2.50	Disagree
2.51-3.50	Neutral
3.51-4.50	Agree
4.51-5.00	Strongly agree

(Scale adapted from Tshering, Tamang and Rinchen, 2021)

### 3.1. Document Analysis

Data was also gathered using a variety of documents. Documents such as student participants’ reading records, book review records, library records, and any other relevant documents were analysed before and at the end of the interventions.

### 3.2. Action Plan

The action plan adapted from the Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).

The study implemented OS to cultivate and enhance reading habits of Dechencholing Higher Secondary School students.

OTTER - “Our Time to Enjoy Reading” is a reading strategy where the teacher allocates 20–25 minutes for independent reading before beginning the lesson. The teacher participates by reading alongside the students, modeling good

reading habits. This activity takes place twice in a week. During this time, the teacher also guides students—clarifying difficult words or passages as they arise. At the end of the session, the teacher engages students with questions about their reading to reinforce comprehension and reflection.

Students’ Indulgence- This strategy is another way to monitor the students reading at home or outside the school hours. Teacher can create social media platforms such as whatapps and telegram where students can upload their reading progress and interesting lines on the platform. Teacher can go through their lines and reinforces them to read more by acknowledging them instantly. This can happen anytime, anywhere.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

The survey questionnaire was analyzed using the statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) 23. The data were analyzed through features such as frequencies, mean and standard deviation, which were represented in the forms of tables. Interview data were analyzed thematically following procedures of Braun and Clarke (2018). Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using descriptive and In Vivo coding.

## 4. Results

Table 2 shows a comparison between the

Table 2. Action Plan

Activity	Timeframe	Details
Proposal	February 2024	Develop the action research proposal.
Baseline data (pre-data)	2nd week of March	Conduct survey (n = 54) and interviews (n = 12) with students of classes X A & X E; analyze baseline data.
Intervention 1	1st week of April – 1st week of June	OTTER –within the School Premises
Intervention 2	1st week of April – 1st week of June	Self-Indulgence – Outside the school hours
Post-data collection	3rd week of June	Collect post-intervention data.
Post-intervention data analysis	Last week of June	Triangulate and analyze the data.
Final report	July – August	Prepare and finalize the action research report.

Table 2. Comparison between Baseline Data and Post Data

Item	Participants	Baseline		Post Data	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I read more than one hour in a day.		3.34	0.91	3.5	0.85
I read for pleasure outside of school hours.		3.42	1.06	3.1	0.81
I read books in the school library.		3.13	1.21	4.1	0.57
I read during Dear moments.		3.84	0.92	3.7	0.95
Reading develops my multiple reasoning.		4.13	0.74	4.1	0.72
Reading enhance my speaking skills.		4.29	0.69	4.4	0.74
Reading develops my multiple reasoning.		4.0	0.84	4.5	0.73
Reading enables me to express my feelings.		3.82	1.01	3.9	0.82
Reading positively affects my academic performance.		3.76	0.97	3.86	1.09
My teachers motivate me to read.		4.37	0.71	4.3	0.82
My parents motivate me to read.		4.13	0.78	4.2	0.78
My teachers guide me to read.		3.92	0.94	4.2	0.74
I have access to reading materials.		3.82	0.80	3.9	0.96
I spend more time on social media than I do on reading.		3.47	0.92	3.7	0.77
Overall Mean	54	3.82	0.89	3.9	0.81

Table 2.1. Paired t-test (Pre and Post Data)

N	Pre-data (M)	Post-data(M)	Mean -D	t-value	P-value
54	3.82	3.96	0.14	-1.759	0.102

pre-data and post-intervention data, revealing a slight overall improvement (M: 3.8 to M: 3.9). For instance, the item “My teachers guide me to read” scores increased from 3.92 to 4.2, while the item “I read books in the school library” mean score increased from 3.13 to 4.1. Similarly, the item “I read more than one hour in a day” score increased from 3.34 to 3.5. However, the item “I spend more time on social media than I do on reading” scores increased from 3.47 to 3.7. This shows that students spend time on reading articles on social media. Similarly, S1 said, “ I used to read e-books since it is easy to highlight, take-note, and dictionary lookup are built-in features in e-books, making them ideal for academic purposes. Moreover, Table 2.1 shows that the p-value (0.102) is greater than 0.05, indicating that the difference between the baseline and post-

intervention means is not statistically significant. In other words, although there is a slight overall improvement in the mean reading scores (from 3.82 to 3.90), the change is not significant at the 5% level. This suggests that students did not spend a substantial amount of time on reading.

The post-intervention data show that students have developed a passion for reading books. The data also illustrate a notable shift in reading habits among the participants. Before the interventions, students shared that they did not read even a single book. Over time, however, they began reading more than two books a month. Furthermore, they now dedicate more time to reading rather than social media and online gaming. Initially, student participants were least bothered about reading books. Further, the library book issued record showed that the students read more than 1 or 2

books within the intervention phase. However, they have since increased both their reading time and their interest in reading.

Interview data show that student participants derived immense benefits from reading, particularly during OTTER time of reading. Moreover, participants stated that without proper interventions, they found it difficult to manage time for reading. The dedicated time (more than two months) allowed them to focus on reading, which ultimately enhanced their reading habits. These findings align with a study by Yangdon *et al.* (2021), which states that OTTER and self-indulgence strategies effectively promoted students' reading. Further, descriptive analysis shows a statistically significant improvement from pre-data (M: 3.8; SD: 0.89) to post-data (M: 3.9; SD: 0.81), suggesting that the interventions successfully promoted students' reading habits. Student participants expressed that they could comprehend and analyze stories and other genres, which had significant benefits for their understanding and expression. Moreover, most students pointed out that reading made it easier to understand exam questions, allowing them to write responses with greater interest and relevance. Similarly, the item "Reading enables me to express my feelings" showed an overall mean increased from 3.8 to 3.9, indicating that student participants recognized various advantages associated with reading. Quantitative data also reveal that students developed multiple reasoning skills through reading, as they faced fewer struggles in expressing thoughts and speaking. These findings corroborate a recent study by Pradani (2021) which shows that through reading, students gain extensive knowledge and experience that they can apply in their daily lives.

## 5. Discussion

Moreover, participants posit that reading has enhanced their academic performance and communication skills. For instance, the survey item "Reading enhances my speaking skills" scores increased from 4.29 to 4.4. Similarly, the item "Reading positively affects my academic performance" mean scores increased from 3.76 to 3.86. Additionally, interview data indicate

that reading enhances vocabulary and sentence structure. For example, S1 stated, "It has improved my spelling, language, and vocabularies. Further, this view is exemplified in the quote by S2: "Previously, my English was raw and informal; now, I have seen a drastic improvement in my choice of diction and organization of language." This finding aligns with a previous study on reading habits by Kumara & Kumar (2019) and Krashen (2004), which concluded that reading regularly enhances one's vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills, resulting in improved written English proficiency.

Students' reading is influenced by parents, teachers, choice of books, and friends. Interview data revealed that more than 70% of participants picked up reading because of their teachers and parents. However, a few students are inspired to read due to the right choice of books and authors. For example, the item "My teachers motivate me to read" mean scores increased from 4.37 to 4.5, and similarly, the item "My parents motivate me to read" mean scores increased from 3.92 to 4.2. This demonstrates that parents and teachers play a pivotal role in fostering reading habits. For instance, S4 expressed that his mother inspires him to read, and the more he reads, the more he understands the world around him. Similarly, Storch and Whitehurst (2002) found that the first environment in which children develop reading skills is the home, with the initial interaction being established with parents and siblings. These findings suggest that creating a conducive reading environment necessitates a multifaceted approach. Students' attitudes toward reading strengthen their reading habits and preferences for reading materials. While the intervention strategies employed in this study to improve students' reading habits have significantly impacted them, without these interventions, participants focused merely on the number of books read, without understanding the purpose of reading. However, post-intervention data reveal that participants improved in interest, attitude, attention, aptitude, and choice of books.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendation

The study aims to examine students' reading

habits by employing two reading strategies and to evaluate the post-intervention outcomes. Comparing baseline and post-intervention data, it can be concluded that students demonstrated increased interest in reading (M: 3.8 to M: 3.9). Interview data show a positive shift in reading habits, with participants reading a greater number of books per month and dedicating more than one hour to reading daily. Moreover, students were exposed to a variety of books and genres, which they could utilize in their writing and speaking. Participants recognized a range of benefits associated with reading, such as improved critical thinking, communication, comprehension, creativity, and other social skills. Additionally, the OTTER programme has been highlighted in several studies, with results demonstrating its effectiveness in fostering a love of reading and improving reading skills (Yangdon *et al.*, 2021). While participants recommend instituting additional periods for reading and enforcing stricter policies to promote reading, the study highlights the importance of structured interventions in cultivating reading habits.

This study suggests that social media does not enhance reading habits; instead, it negatively affects students' reading. Therefore, one should avoid using social media while reading (M: 3.47 to M: 3.7). Moreover, there is a need to educate students on the appropriate use of social media. However, students should choose the right websites and authentic materials for reading on social media would enhance their reading. Moreover, as to improve the students reading habits, one can still continue with OTTER and Self-Indulgence, and create a conducive reading space. Further, school needs to organize more literary activities related to reading so that students get motivate to read book. Students may instill reading habits by implementing strategies. Moreover, the findings of this study cannot be generalized or applied to all contexts. Future research could adopt a conventional sequential research design, which would allow for systematic data collection over multiple phases and a larger sample size. This approach could provide more generalizable and robust findings on the effectiveness of reading strategies.

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