Talking Point: Should reading books in school library be made mandatory

Recently, the Punjab Education Department mandated reading at least two books from the school library. Does such move ensure that children realise the importance of reading

Need gradual interest building

While the mandatory rule is ideal for students who do not have the habit of reading at all, in the long run, for the move to be successful, schools must look at instilling an interest for reading among students. Those who love to read do not need to be forced. It is the reluctant lot who need attention. Small steps such as introducing comic books in library classes will easily capture students' attention. Since comic books consist of colourful images and graphics and less text, they will engage students. Following this, schools can gradually encourage students to explore other genres of stories. This would ensure that even the ones who do not like to read, start reading. What officials need to look at is that while compulsion is good, it will not necessarily inculcate reading habits among students unless the latter are inspired to read.

— Sanyam Bhardwaj, controller of examinations, CBSE

Motivation is essential

Compelling any individual, let alone children, to do something that they might not be interested in, never helps. Instead, the focus should be on motivating students to understand the significance of reading. Schools can take several initiatives such as have book reading clubs, storytelling clubs, arrange reading programmes, to name a few, which will inspire students to read and exchange opinion. The mantra here is to 'encourage' and not 'compel'. Reading books not only enhances a child's cognitive skills, but also their retaining power, and that can only be achieved when he or she reads out of interest. In addition to this, schools must ensure that their library is rich with diverse books so that students from different backgrounds and varied interests can develop an interest to read books.

— Susan Sridhar, associate professor, School of Communication and Media Studies, MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai

Libraries must be livelier

It is a good approach, but it is also quite dogmatic. Children often struggle with concentration thus even if they sit in a library with a book, their mind can wander somewhere else. We need to break the perception of reading in silence and engage students in more activities such as reading programmes, storytelling sessions, drawing the cover of a book, among more, inside the library. Such activities encourage students to read more and eventually inculcate reading habits among them. Also, parents need to read to their children on a daily basis because such a routine helps to boost the latter's imagination thereby motivating them to read more often.

— Ruchi Sethi, Principal, Lotus Valley International School, Noida

Must cater to all kinds of students

The initiative is undoubtedly good but may not guarantee reading habits among students. Reading is one of the fundamental skills a child needs to learn in order to succeed in life because it helps in developing different genres of vocabulary of the language, increases attention span of an individual, encourages a thirst for knowledge and leads to lifelong love for books as well. Efficient reading increases learners vocabulary size and also subconsciously develops structural and fundamental linguistic properties of a language. What educational institutions need to create is a library that is upgraded with technological innovations. Libraries must have proper infrastructure so that books can be kept in better condition. It must also contain books that meet the standards of varied students such as those who understand a different language, are differently abled or come from the marginalised sections of the society. It is only when schools can create such an inclusive atmosphere that students will develop an interest in reading.

— Hari Madhab Ray, assistant professor, School of Languages, Literature & Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi