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**Understanding Reading and Writing Culture: A Study of School Teachers in Khyber  
Pakhtunkhwa**

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**Abstract**



*This study explores reading and culture among school teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The study specifically investigates whether teachers in KP province practice reading and writing and how this practice impacts their students. Using an interview guide, data were collected from 21 school teachers through in-depth interviews. These participants were recruited from 10 middle schools and 11 high schools. Data were analyzed using qualitative methods. It was the core theme that without developing a reading and writing culture among teachers, students would not become good readers and writers. The study suggests that the teachers' reading and writing habits did not meet the standards required of school teachers. This scenario is found to be weak, as it does not promote a reading and writing culture among middle and high school students.*

**Keywords:** Reading, Writing Culture, Middle and High School Teachers, Middle and High School Students

**Introduction**

The reading pleasure of Pakistani teachers' impact on developing reading culture in Pakistan, taking into consideration the impact of the digital era (Atta, 2016; Aqil, 2020). Pakistan is an oral tradition; reading is vastly overvalued, and over the years, it has shown an annual decline. There are boundaries in academic studies on the roles of teachers and reading in Pakistan. The study examines how reading and writing practices among school teachers impact their students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. According to Suleiman and Crossman (2012), reading is an 'interactive and sense-making process'. Engaging in reading and comprehension exercises plays a pervasively important role in an individual's psychological, sociological, and even economic well-being and in shared civic engagement (Paulson, 2006). A rewarding attitude toward reading provides advantages across a number of disciplines, in stark contrast to those who do not engage in reading practices.

Reading is generally categorized into Reading for Survival, Reading for Learning, or Academic Reading, and Pleasure Reading. The current research is related to Pleasure Reading, which, according to Nell (1988), "allows us to experience other worlds and roles in our imagination." Reading does not usually begin spontaneously and has to be initiated by a kind of guide or a mentor, and after that, it carries on autonomously, due to the reader's own eagerness. The reason for this is that, unlike the other kinds of reading, the reader is creating a mental involvement with the book and is really enjoying the reading cycle. (Clark and Rumbold, 2006; KwaZulu-Ntal Education Department, 2005). To a large extent Krashen (1993) supports the idea of Reading for Pleasure and is in favor of this kind of reading; and he explains the advantages in this way – for these children reading by choice means that, ex. of the different "language skills" that most people are concerned about, many of them, – children become able to as well as good reading people with possession of extensive vocabulary, good grammatical and structural invention, writing, and good spelling.

Beyond this, all these terms (including Leisure Reading, Reading for Pleasure, and Reading for Fun) are about reading for fun; enjoying reading anything one wants, be it story books, magazines, or even newspapers. Reading has social divisions, namely, the elite 'Reading Class' (Griswold et al., 2005), which is comprised of people who can liberate some of their resources to buy books or other reading materials. The other divisions are the people without the means to buy reading materials. Access to reading materials is provided to those groups through industrialization (Levine, 2002).

The term "Reading Culture" is used in the study to describe the community-engagement approach to reading. National and local governments support reading in their administrative areas; a functioning publishing industry, which provides people with affordable reading materials; a well-organized library system; an education system that encourages reading beyond academic materials; reading mentors, parents, and teachers who are themselves reading to raise pleasure reading engagement. Magara (2005) considers reading culture to exist in a situation 'where people – the old and the young – value and appreciate reading not just for academic reasons but because it is a way of life' and is 'practiced in all aspects of life'. Dorian (2009) summarizes the importance of sociocultural practices in a reading community through an adaptation of the famous African proverb, 'a child is raised by an entire community'. Heath (1983) considers these types of practices that help readers develop as the scaffolding of reading.

Although reading cannot decrease cognitive function, it is important to note that reading is a social and cultural activity, reliant on societal practices to proliferate. (Morrow and Young, 1997). Parents, Teachers, Schools, and Publishing are the key players in reading promotion and not only hold positive or negative attitudes in reading, or a preference for a particular reading genre, but are also informed by cultural practices.

### **Literature Review**

A 2019 survey by Gallup and Gilani Foundation found that nearly 75% of Pakistanis do not read for pleasure. This indicates that a large portion of the state's population remains illiterate. The survey found that only 16% of people read books for 1 hour a day.

Laster et al. (2009) examined certain behaviors in kindergarten teachers related to the early development of literacy skills. Teachers have been found to positively frame a child's participation in reading by providing reading support. In classrooms where a positive teacher-child relationship is situated, children have been found to develop better reading skills (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Teale and Sulzby (1989) maintain that teachers should read to children and involve them in discussing the book's content prior to reading. Teaching reading has been described as a Herculean task (Moates, 1999) due to the scarcity of reading teaching resources. It is a fallacy that a teacher can be solely responsible for eliminating reading failure among their students (Coyne et al., 2004), because what is needed are teachers who read and readers who teach (Cremin et al., 2009; KwaZulu-Natal Education Department, 2005). Beattie Gambrell (2007) argues that, for teachers to "serve as active, rather than passive, reading models for their students" (p. 16), they need to be members of the reading community. She also argues that teachers' membership in the reading community empowers them to better influence their students to join it.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study was conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to understand school teachers' reading and writing practices and their effects on students. Data were collected from 21 school teachers (10 middle school and 11 high school teachers). In-depth interviews were conducted with the mentioned school teachers. After collecting the data, it was transcribed into text and repeatedly confirmed against the voice recordings. The transcripts of a few interviews were returned to the field for member checking. After this, data coding was done, and the possible themes were generated in line with the empirical review. The extracted themes were further analyzed and discussed in line with the empirical and theoretical review to examine reading and writing culture among school teachers and their students in KP. The following analysis is the result of this process.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of this study includes different themes generated from the data. These themes revealed different reading and writing habits of the school teachers and their students.

### **The Importance of Reading and Writing**

The participating teachers agreed on the importance of reading. One of the teachers at a high school used a flight analogy to describe pleasure reading. He expanded on the idea, describing reading as a skill that enables readers to explore diverse ideas, experiences, and historical periods. For pleasure reading, however, about 60% of the teachers held a narrower view and supported it only if the reading had a positive effect on learners' academic performance. For instance, a 9th-grade teacher in Category Two argued that science learners needed to read in the science subjects of their particular disciplines to achieve a "better understanding of their topics". Further, in Category Three, a 7th-grade teacher argued for the value of pleasure reading for middle-level students, as this grade is expanded and non-

regulated in terms of the syllabus. The reading in this case will ultimately help students with the examinations.

As for the significance of reading and writing, everyone present supported reading for enjoyment. At Category One, the headmaster had a dismissive view of reading. He remarked that reading takes up time that could be saved for other critical reading. He asserted that reading for enjoyment has a positive effect, such as on expressive reading, access to information and news, and vocabulary. On this, he argued, he saw no good that reading for leisure could do to students.

It is evident that reading and writing for enjoyment directly impact students, promoting a reading and writing culture among them.

### **Personal Reading Habits**

Many teachers reported that they do not read because they are unable to manage time for reading and writing. Some other participants reported reading informational books. In this context, the participants were required to focus on curriculum-related books for reading. One of the high school teachers indicated that after seeing the first book, I read the second one, and by the time I was on the seventh, I was compelled to return what I could recall of the first.”

A female teacher in grade 9 was talking about what she loved to do, and as she spoke, she left no doubt that her love of reading was limited to the course books prescribed by the KP Text Book Board. Many other participants admitted to reading what little was available of nice books, including novels, magazines, and daily fortnights. The data revealed that the older teachers were more focused on reading. In fact, they could see no worth in reading books, except for those prescribed by the Text Books Board. The results further show that many of the teachers were non-readers. They were also not interested in inspiring their teaching staff to read for pleasure. One even said, “It will be unfair to force the teachers to do extra reading as they already have a lot of workloads.” Additionally, a few high school teachers were technologically incompetent. The following quote captures that not many of them were able to make the connection between reading and the internet.

### **School Support in Promoting Reading and Writing Culture**

Many of the participants were of the opinion that there is minimal support from the school administration for promoting reading and writing culture among the school teachers. Teachers from the middle school reported a positive approach by the school administration towards reading and writing. One of the interview questions was what activities does your school typically do to encourage reading for pleasure? Book fairs were among the activities named for two of the Category Three schools, whereas no activities of this nature were reported by Categories One and Two schools. The teachers also seemed to appreciate the monetary support the schools gave and didn't mention any changes they would make to the system if given the power. This particularly noted discrepancy can be explained by the category's restricted scope and its intense focus on the academic curriculum and results.

Many participants from high and middle schools expressed that teachers may engage in private reading during their free time. However, there was no strategy to promote reading for pleasure among teachers and students, with budget limitations cited as a primary obstacle. Some high school teachers advocated a spoken English program, considering it of greater value than an activity to promote reading.

### **Conclusion**

The study concluded that the reading and writing culture among school teachers directly influenced students' reading and writing habits, but this culture was weak. Teachers' role in advocating recreational reading and writing can be instrumental in students' learning and writing. It was suggested that reading culture in KP schools can only be described and promoted if academic reading and writing are supported by the government. The pleasure of reading only makes sense when it is used to explain the concepts outlined in textbooks, which have no intrinsic value. In addition, teachers believed that reading should be controlled to prevent students from engaging in anything that would distract them from their studies. This is especially for senior classes, such as 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> classes. Reading and writing habits among the school teachers and students are declining because the government does not invest in the primary education system. It was also concluded from the study that students had no access to reading materials, and, as such, teachers and principals were not in a position to make the necessary arrangements. The value of academic learning depends on the practice

of reading, but it was not of that standard. Reading and writing should not be limited to a 40-minute class or to library time at school.

The study further concluded that the majority of school teachers and principals are non-readers, and they had their own stories. This reveals that the reading culture among the respondents is declining and that this segment of the respondents can be considered one of the primary factors contributing to the decline in reading culture among students and teachers in KP. It is a prerequisite for teachers to be passionate readers in order to be successful reading role models and to instill the value of leisure reading to students (Searle, 1985). For teachers who are readers, their favored genres are nonfiction, particularly religious books. This study further highlights that students should be provided with reading guides and a constructive reading context through the joint efforts of schools, teachers, and parents. The findings presented in the study show that schools' commitment to developing a reading culture that is inclusive of diverse reading activities is critical. The findings of this study are an initial step toward helping teachers, schools, and policymakers develop strategies to enhance the reading and writing culture among teachers and students in KP.

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