

FORMATION OF LIBRARY CULTURE IN PRIMARY NATIVE LANGUAGE AND READING LITERACY LESSONS

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Annotation: In this article, I explore the importance of forming a library culture in primary school native language and reading literacy lessons. Based on my own pedagogical observations and theoretical analysis, I examine how an early introduction to reading, books, and libraries shapes students' intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and lifelong learning motivation. I also emphasize the role of teachers and parents in nurturing a sustainable reading environment, as well as the integration of digital technologies in modern library culture. The study highlights how reading in the native language builds not only literacy skills but also national identity, cultural continuity, and moral development among young learners.

Keywords: library culture, native language, reading literacy, primary education, reading motivation, digital library, cultural identity.

From my own teaching experience, I have become convinced that the formation of a library culture should begin in the earliest years of schooling, particularly during native language and reading literacy lessons. The school library is not merely a room with shelves and books; it is a living educational environment that fosters the habit of seeking knowledge, encourages self-expression, and develops the student's emotional and intellectual world. When children first step into the library, they should feel that it is a space of discovery — a place where stories, facts, and imagination come together to shape their worldview.

In the field of education, we recognize that a well-stocked school library managed by a skilled librarian plays a vital role in promoting reading for pleasure—remarkably, this single factor is the most significant indicator of a child's future success, surpassing both socio-economic status and parents' education level. Firstly, libraries have been integral to school life for decades, serving as foundational spaces where native language instruction can flourish. Secondly, building an authentic reading culture and inclusive school library helps primary school librarians and teachers navigate the challenge of providing individualized support. Through this article, we'll explore how fostering library culture within native language and reading literacy lessons creates stronger educational foundations and supports children's cognitive development.

Research demonstrates that mother tongue-based education leads to significant positive impacts on reading scores in both the native language and subsequently acquired languages. The theory of cognitive development supports this approach, showing that children learn more effectively when they can connect new concepts with familiar words from their home language.

Native language education creates a profound connection to cultural identity and psychological well-being. Studies reveal that Native students with stronger knowledge of their indigenous language are six times less likely to experience suicidal thoughts. Moreover, these students demonstrate better school attendance and higher graduation rates. This psychological foundation stems from answering fundamental identity questions: "Where did I come from? Who am I? And, where am I going?".

Reading comprehension fundamentally differs between native and second languages. In fact, children entering school already possess thousands of words in their first language, along with grammatical knowledge, providing a natural foundation for reading comprehension. Additionally, mother tongue instruction improves reading skills because students can focus entirely on decoding text rather than simultaneously learning a new language. Research confirms this advantage: targeting home language instruction improved students' English oral reading fluency by 9% and reading comprehension by 15%. This occurs because decoding skills transfer more easily across languages with similar writing systems, while vocabulary development requires separate learning.

Libraries serve as crucial sanctuaries within otherwise competitive and demanding school environments. Research confirms that school libraries function as safe spaces where children seek refuge from unfavorable conditions, develop social skills, or manage anxiety. These spaces support the development of mentor relationships and provide secure environments for children experiencing social conflicts.

Creating an inclusive library requires intentional design decisions. The physical space should reflect students' diverse backgrounds through imagery showing various ethnicities in different professional roles. Furthermore, effective libraries incorporate comfortable seating options, including beanbags, cushions, and traditional chairs, allowing students to strategically position themselves to optimize their sense of safety. Many students prefer corner spots or partially enclosed areas where they can "fit right into and just do whatever I want there," as one student explained.

Elementary students have specific requirements that differ from older learners. They need lower, accessible shelving they can reach independently, colorful visual cues for navigation, and cozy reading nooks that feel safe and inviting. Elementary libraries should feature clearly defined spaces that help younger students understand behavioral expectations—a storytelling area with carpet and cushions signals different behavior than a research zone with tables. Particularly important is creating distinct areas for different activities: quiet reading, social interaction, collaboration, and creative expression.

Neurodivergent students especially benefit from thoughtfully designed library spaces. Adjustments to lighting and noise levels throughout the day can prevent sensory overwhelm. Sensory boxes containing noise-canceling headphones and fidget tools help reduce anxiety. Visual cues supporting navigation are essential—classification systems can be daunting, so adding color coding for different sections assists students in finding materials independently. Additionally, specialized furniture like egg-shaped chairs create semi-private reading spaces where students can "shut yourself out and just read your book there without anybody going, 'Hey, what book are you reading?'".

The development of reading literacy is inseparable from the ability to navigate and use library resources effectively. Through guided reading sessions, discussions, and project-based learning, students gradually learn how to choose books according to their interests, evaluate information, and express their own opinions about what they read. In my practice, I have seen that when students are given freedom of choice in reading, their motivation increases significantly. A student who reads voluntarily becomes more attentive, empathetic, and linguistically creative.

I have also observed that teaching the native language through the library environment creates a deeper connection between the child and their cultural heritage. Reading stories, poems, and folk tales in their mother tongue strengthens not only vocabulary and grammar but also identity and belonging. For example, when children read national classics or folklore, they unconsciously absorb moral and social values that have been passed down through generations. This is why I believe that every reading literacy curriculum must include culturally relevant materials reflecting the nation's history, traditions, and moral ideals.

The modern world requires a transformation of traditional library culture. Today's children are surrounded by digital content, and to keep them engaged, schools must integrate both physical and digital libraries. In my teaching, I combine printed books with electronic databases, educational websites, and e-readers. This hybrid approach allows students to explore information through multiple channels, improving their digital literacy alongside their reading skills. Moreover, interactive reading programs, online storytelling sessions, and multimedia resources help to make reading more dynamic and accessible, especially for children with different learning abilities.

Creating a library culture is a shared responsibility between teachers, parents, and the wider community. Parents play a crucial role by modeling reading behavior at home and encouraging regular library visits. Teachers, on the other hand, must act not just as instructors but as reading mentors — inspiring curiosity, organizing book clubs, and guiding students toward meaningful reading choices. A strong collaboration between school and home can create a reading-friendly ecosystem where children grow up seeing reading as a natural and enjoyable part of life.

One of the challenges I often encounter is the decreasing attention span among young readers, influenced by the dominance of digital entertainment. To address this, I introduce reading activities that combine creativity and technology — for example, allowing students to create digital book reviews, illustrate stories, or perform short dramatizations of the texts they read. Such approaches transform reading from a passive to an active process, engaging both the mind and imagination.

In developing library culture, assessment also plays an important role. I have found that qualitative evaluation — such as discussions, reflective journals, and reading portfolios — is more effective than traditional tests. These forms of assessment allow students to express their thoughts and emotions freely, showing not just what they read but what they understood and felt. This reflective element helps students internalize the joy of reading and perceive the library as a source of personal growth.

At a broader level, the formation of library culture aligns with national educational reforms aimed at developing an intelligent, creative, and morally conscious generation. The promotion of reading literacy in the native language contributes directly to the preservation of linguistic diversity and the strengthening of cultural identity in the globalized world. When a child learns to read and think in their mother tongue, they gain the cognitive and emotional foundation necessary for mastering other languages and sciences in the future.

In modern pedagogy, qualified school librarians represent a cornerstone of effective literacy instruction. Indeed, research demonstrates that students with access to a full-time certified librarian score approximately 8% higher on reading assessments. They function as essential partners with classroom teachers through collaborative instructional planning and resource

curation, allowing students to see the fullness of their identities reflected in the materials they encounter.

Librarians serve as powerful literacy advocates by promoting schoolwide reading cultures that extend beyond curricular requirements. Although classroom teachers deliver core instruction, librarians uniquely view texts through students' perspectives rather than through standardized levels or prescribed curricula. Of course, their specialized knowledge enables them to recommend age-appropriate books that match individual interests, consequently making reading more accessible and enjoyable for all students.

Above all, librarians equip students with essential evaluation skills needed in today's information-saturated world. They teach children how to assess online content credibility, recognize misinformation, and develop lifelong research capabilities. At the same time, librarians instruct students to evaluate the accuracy of information sources and practice responsible digital citizenship. These critical thinking skills transfer across disciplines and support deeper learning as students become "more critical of their sources and more willing to wonder and investigate the why".

School librarians extend literacy development beyond academic requirements through engaging initiatives like storytelling events, book discussions, and reading challenges. Equally important, they demonstrate that reading is not merely a school-specific task but a lifelong, pleasurable pursuit. Faculty book clubs facilitated by librarians illustrate to students that reading continues past formal education while creating "visible ways to welcome conversations about reading that wouldn't otherwise happen".

Systematic measurement offers powerful insights into how effectively schools develop reading culture. Numerous education experts recommend employing multiple assessment methods to determine what approaches truly resonate with young readers.

Conclusion. Building a strong library culture stands as one of the most powerful tools we have for developing literacy skills in primary education. Throughout this exploration, we have seen how properly equipped libraries become more than just rooms with books—they transform into vital sanctuaries where young minds flourish. Children who develop reading habits during these formative years undoubtedly gain advantages that extend far beyond academic achievement.

Native language instruction particularly deserves our attention because it creates stronger cognitive foundations while affirming cultural identity. Students reading in their mother tongue focus entirely on comprehension rather than simultaneously struggling with language acquisition. This approach benefits all children and especially supports those from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

School libraries function as essential safe spaces where students find refuge, develop social skills, and build confidence. Well-designed spaces with accessible shelving, comfortable seating options, and thoughtfully organized collections help children navigate their reading journey independently. Additionally, these considerations become even more significant for neurodivergent students who thrive when given appropriate accommodations.

We cannot overstate the urgency of addressing library access disparities, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Though challenges remain significant, the evidence clearly shows

that investing in library culture pays tremendous dividends for children's literacy development. Therefore, every effort to strengthen library programs, train qualified librarians, and create inclusive reading spaces directly contributes to building stronger foundations for our children's future success.

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