

## **Building better habits in school: Why newspaper reading matters**

### **Abstract**

*Phone addiction cases among children have become an alarming rise that has slowly added to the advent of the recent Covid-19 pandemic and has led to declining attention span, reading habits, and analysis capabilities among children. Technology has engulfed itself deeply into the routine of teenagers, but its misuse has gradually led to diminishing returns on thoughtful and analytic exposure and interaction with information and news. This article proposes that teaching and developing reading habits and making it a habituated task is not about teaching and training and disciplining but about habituating it at home and schools and emphasizes reading newspapers as an easy and effective mode of habituating and teaching concentration, analysis, and awareness to and among individuals and society as a whole. It emphasizes and writes about programs like reading newspapers daily in Uttar Pradesh and other states of countries like Maharashtra and other nations and proves the effectiveness and efficiency of cheap and easy reading programs at school to make thoughtful and analytic and careful and alert learners even during this technological era and age.*

### **Introduction**

Phone addiction among children has increased significantly since the COVID-19 period, affecting their cognitive and analytical skills and contributing to a reduced attention span. With online classes, limited outdoor activity, and greater reliance on digital devices, screen time became a regular part of children's daily routines. While technology played an important role during this period, its continued overuse has raised concerns about reduced attention spans, difficulty in focusing, and declining reading habits among students. While this might look like a discipline issue, it's rather a habit issue. Children tend to adopt routines based on their surroundings, availability of devices and how time is structured at home and school. When smartphones become the easiest source of entertainment or engagement, their use gradually turns into a habit.

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### **Why newspaper reading still matters in the digital age**

Today, information is largely consumed through short videos, notifications, and endless scrolling; the way children engage with content has changed significantly. Digital platforms often encourage quick consumption rather than deep understanding, often leading to short attention span among children. Newspapers, on the other hand, require readers to slow down, focus, and engage with information in a structured manner. This difference is important, especially for children whose reading habits and attention skills are still developing.

Addressing this issue therefore requires building healthier alternatives that encourage focus, curiosity and active engagement rather than relying only on rules or punishment. For students and children, newspaper reading reduces screen time, nurtures curiosity and helps develop lifelong reading; it also helps with:

- **Language skills:** The activity strengthens reading and boosts general knowledge by keeping individuals informed about local, national, and global events, including politics, science, economics, and culture.
- **Enhanced vocabulary:** Newspapers are a good source of building vocabulary and it's relatively easier to recall words that we see often when we read.
- **Analytical and Critical Thinking skills:** Newspapers contain editorials, opinion pages, data driven articles along with news. Reading boosts concentration and memory, with physical newspapers offering a focused, distraction-free environment that promotes deep reading.
- **Civic engagement and social responsibility:** This habit encourages civic engagement and social responsibility among readers and they're more likely to be informed about community issues and changes happening around them.

### **From Individual Habits to Public Policy**

Recognizing these educational and cognitive benefits, policymakers have begun introducing structured reading practices within schools. The Uttar Pradesh government's mandate of 10 minutes of daily newspaper reading in government schools is one such initiative aimed at enhancing general knowledge, language skills, and critical thinking among students.

The importance of reading habits also extends beyond individual development to broader societal implications. As noted by the UK's education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, a decline in reading among young people could contribute to an uninformed population that is more vulnerable to misinformation that could pose long-term societal and national challenges.

### **Newspaper Reading Still Matters in the Digital Age**

Despite the widespread availability of digital information, newspaper reading continues to hold relevance, especially for young readers. Unlike digital content, which is often fast-paced and interrupted by notifications, newspapers promote slower and more focused reading. This helps children develop the ability to concentrate for longer periods and understand information in a structured way. Regular exposure to newspapers also helps students stay informed about current events, social issues, and developments beyond their immediate surroundings.

### **Accessibility and Inclusivity in Education**

One of the strengths of newspaper reading as an educational practice is its accessibility. Newspapers are relatively low-cost, available in multiple regional languages, and do not require internet access or digital devices. This makes them suitable for government schools and low-resource settings, where digital infrastructure may be limited. At the same time, reading initiatives need not be limited to newspapers alone. Encouraging exposure to other genres such as fiction, biographies, and non-fiction can further help young readers explore their interests and build a stronger connection with reading.

## **Why this approach deserves wider discussion across India**

The challenge of phone addiction and declining attention spans is not limited to one state. Schools across the country are facing similar concerns. The newspaper reading initiative introduced in Uttar Pradesh offers a practical model that can be adapted and discussed in other regions as well. Its simplicity, low cost, and focus on habit-building make it a potential option for wider consideration in India's education system.

Rather than rejecting technology, this approach promotes a healthier relationship with information where children are not only consuming content but also understanding, questioning, and reflecting on it. Small, consistent practices introduced in classrooms can have a lasting impact, helping shape informed, thoughtful, and responsible citizens for the future.

## **Learning from wider initiatives**

Similar efforts have been taken by Maharashtra government. Recently, a 15-day reading campaign was organized by the government targeted at college and university students. Back in 2023 as well, the government of Maharashtra launched an initiative called 'Read Maharashtra' with the focus of inculcating the habit of reading in students of public schools in the state.

The collective efforts to promote reading habits among students goes beyond domestic borders. Countries like Singapore, China, Japan, etc. are seeking to nurture reading habits among younger generation through home, school and community level initiatives.

As part of the UK's Summer Reading Challenge, the National Literacy Trust will be distributing over 72,000 books to areas with the highest rates of child poverty. Such initiatives demonstrate how simple, well-designed programs can effectively improve literacy, reduce screen dependence, and build lasting attention habits without heavy costs or complexity.

## **Conclusion**

Across the world, educators and communities are seeking to foster strong reading habits among children through simple, inclusive practices. From school-based newspaper reading in India to community literacy initiatives in the UK and Asia, these efforts reflect a shared belief in reading as a foundation for learning, curiosity, and critical thinking. Accessible and low-cost reading interventions help reach children across diverse and low-resource settings. Regular engagement with reading supports language development, awareness of the world, and thoughtful participation in society. Strengthening reading habits today is an investment in informed, empowered, and resilient generations tomorrow.