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The Driven Readers amongst Private Higher Education Institution Students: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The development of reading habits and the detrimental effects of its decline are intriguing issues to the proponents of reading. Findings or related research around the globe have resulted in discomforting outcomes, giving an indication that the habit is now facing a challenging period. However, an interesting phenomenon observable is that despite the unfavourable circumstances, there are individuals who are avid readers. This case study attempts to gather in-depth information on what motivates and influences private higher education institution students to become avid readers. Employing qualitative methods, information from two informants were analysed for essential clues on how motivation to read could be catalysed and sustained. Eleven major themes, namely, *enjoyment, self-development, self-initiative, social support, reading friendly environment, unfriendly reading environment, reading motivates reading, curiosity motivates reading, author attraction, alliteracy awareness* and *spiritually motivated*, surfaced from the analysis and they could prove invaluable towards the development of strategies to inculcate the reading habit.

Keywords: Reading habits, reading motivation, alliteracy

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INTRODUCTION

Inderjit (2014) pointed out that Malaysian adults are poor readers while the children prefer reading for the purpose of examination instead of for entertainment or to acquire knowledge. Fatimah et al. (2005) highlighted that the problem of reading in Malaysia is not due to the lack of skills in reading but arising from the attitude and culture that do not inculcate the reading habit, and thus bring about the looming threats of alliteracy. Hence, motivation and inculcation of reading habit is indeed a point of concern.

Subsequently, Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni (1996) highlighted that motivated readers are driven to generate effort and time for reading out of curiosity, involvement, social interchange and emotional satisfaction. These characteristics reflect strength and commitment in the readers towards their reading activities, as well as resilience towards the advent of alliteracy.

Identifying what motivates a person to read will allow the identification of reasons to a person's interest in reading. Working upon this basis, the study attempts to gather in-depth information on avid readers' motivation in reading that will significantly provide essential clues on how motivation to read could be catalysed and sustained. Findings of the study could be included as part of the repertoire of strategies for developing the reading culture and subsequently curb alliteracy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading and its development has long intrigued researchers. In the context of this study, it would be suited that literature on issues of the importance of literacy, the significance of reading, alliteracy and its threats and motivating reading should be looked into.

The Importance of Literacy

Hedgecock and Ferris (2009) explained that literacy is a part of the "highest human impulse to think and rethink experience in place" and thus, with literacy a person will be able to develop competency and knowledge in specialised areas. Bhola (1994) further expanded that literacy could be understood as a skill of "powerful potential", a tool for freedom allowing individuals to employ their minds in new and different ways, a social process that brings new respect and social status and a vehicle of development.

The Significance of Reading

In discussing reading, one should not avoid from making reference to the most complete reference of all, the Al-Quran. In Surah Al-Alaq 96:1-5, it is proclaimed that the importance of reading is something not to be taken lightly for Allah has promised that man will acquire knowledge from the paper and pen and indeed all the knowledge is bestowed by Allah. Thus, it is part of man's responsibility, as Allah's vicegerents, to look for ways and device methods to strengthen reading for the sake of propagation of knowledge and human development.

Hedgecock and Ferris (2009) describe reading as a complex multifaceted pursuit requiring the continuous deployment and integration of multiple operations such as decoding, fluency, and vocabulary. While Inderjit (2014) suggested that reading is a cultural activity that will enable humans to acquire new ideas and knowledge, obtain needed information, relax the mind and improve command of language and vocabulary. Besides that, Akabuike and Asika (2012) explained that reading involves one's acquisition of the intended meaning of the author, as well as one's contributions in the form of interpretations, evaluations and reflections about these meanings. Subsequently, findings of studies done in Fiji and Singapore, as reviewed by Ratnawati and Ismail (2003), have proven that reading, especially if done extensively, is found to enhance the language use, language knowledge and academic performance of students. Thus, it is imperative that Malaysian students' reading habits be improved.

Alliteracy and its Threats

Olufowobi and Makinde (2011) define alliteracy as the quality or state of being able to read but being uninterested in doing so and they cited physical reasons such as fatigue, nature of environment, tight schedule and lack of motivation as the causes of alliteracy. Ilogho (2011) identified that alliteracy is due to the negative attitude towards reading and an efferent attitude (reading with the intention of seeking and accumulate information to be carried away at the end of reading). Another inevitable cause highlighted by Abdul (2014), Ilogho (2011), and Olufowobi and Makinde (2011) is that the advent of media and ICT is becoming tough competitors to the reading habit

We are aptly warned as Inderjit (2014) pointed that "when adults in today's age, who can read, choose not to read, they are likely to create a generation of non-readers and perpetuate the problem of reading reluctance", and this will result in what Olufowobi and Makinde (2011) highlighted as the loss of simulation for imagination, a reduction of creativity and innovation capabilities and reduction of vocabulary capacity.

Therefore, it is important that the reading habit must be motivated to curb alliteracy and for the habit to be sustained.

Motivating Reading

Proficient reading skills should be developed and enhanced through a societal effort of strengthening the curriculum and effective implementation of appropriate teaching practice, as well as the use of enjoyable and motivating reading materials. These efforts will lead to the generation of a sense of competency and positivity towards reading. (Inderjit, 2014; Abdul, 2014; Malekoglu & Wilkerson, 2013; Akabuike & Asiska, 2012; Hedgecock & Ferris, 2009; Guthrie, Wigfield, & Pencevich, 1997).

Secondly, intrinsic motivation development should be encouraged as it is more generative towards language and reading skills development. Intrinsic motivation could also lead to a positive attitude towards reading. The motivation could be made sustainable through enjoyable extracurricular activities that may involve extensive reading and through group activities (Inderjit, 2014; Malekoglu & Wilkerson, 2013; Akabuike & Asiska, 2012; Hedgecock & Ferris, 2009; Guthrie, Wigfield & Pencevich, 1997).

Sufficient and interesting reading materials, either in the conventional or digital form, should be made available either at home or in libraries. Concurrently, there should be control over the use of digital devices such as the mobile phones, computers, the internet, and other media devices. Inculcation of the reading habit should be done from as young as possible and at the initial stage, and reading activities should be rewarded. (Inderjit, 2014; Abdul, 2014; Akabuike & Asiska, 2012; Nor, 2006).

With all these suggestions in hand, an identification of the source of reading motivation is a good measure of the suggestions' suitability and selection for reading habit development strategy.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically the Instrumental Case Study. Creswell (2012) pointed out that a case study would allow the research to be focused on a programme, event, or activity involving individuals resulting in a description of the informants' activities instead of the shared patterns exhibited by a group.

In the context of this research, the phenomenon was the informants' eagerness and interest in reading to the extent that they could be termed as avid readers. Thus, the research questions were:

- 1. What motivates and influences selected students from a private higher education institution in Kuala Lumpur to become avid readers?
- 2. What are the reasons for their interest in reading?
- 3. What are the factors that influence the informants to read?
- 4. What are the subjects' perceptions on the reading habit?

Data for this study were collected via a oneto-one interview as the interview method allows the researcher to assess and further confirm that the informants are indeed avid readers through an observation of their enthusiasm, passion and language used when talking about reading. The interview also allows the collection of in-depth, detailed and authentic information. Thus, a total of 23 questions investigating on the informants' motivating and influencing factors for interest in reading were constructed to guide the interview.

Extreme case sampling was employed for informant selection as according to Creswell (2012), it is the best tool to study a "particularly troublesome or enlightening or a case that is noticeable for its success or failure". In the context of this research, the informants were students of a private college in Kuala Lumpur, who have shown a strong affinity towards reading. The top three book borrowers from the college's library within the time frame of January 2014 up to March 2015 were targeted. The potential informants were recorded to have borrowed 34 (the highest number of books) and 23 (equal number of books between the 2nd and 3rd highest borrower) books, respectively throughout the period.

Upon communication, two of the targeted informants agreed to be interviewed on the 24th of March 2015, while the other one declined to be interviewed. Both informants were female. For the purpose of anonymity, the informants were identified as Avid Reader 1 (AR1) and Avid Reader 2 (AR2). AR1 was a student of a Professional certification programme, while AR2 was a third-year Diploma programme student. Both were doing well in their studies, academic awards recipients for their achievements, and shortlisted for readership awards by the library.

Informed consent was received from both the respondents prior to the interview. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder with prior agreement from the informant. Upon the request of both informants, the interviews were conducted in English instead of their mother tongue. However, there were incidents where codes were switched for clarity.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim while analysis was done in multiple stages. The first stage involved the analysis of the transcription, where the informants' responses were analysed based on the appropriate interview questions. This involved categorising the responses and identifying the main ideas of the responses, while extracting irrelevant responses. Each unit of interaction was marked as a discourse unit (DU) and numbered according to sequence. This activity reflects Creswell's (2012) preliminary exploratory analysis, allowing the researcher to immerse in the data to get an understanding of the context of the input.

The second stage was a refinement process of the analysis of the first stage. Responses from both the respondents were combined, and patterns in the responses were traced. Colour coding was implemented as what Creswell (2012) defined as the process of segmenting and labelling the data so as to make sense of the data. At this stage, 10 themes surfaced; however, upon further analysis, it was found that the themes were a bit too broad and thus, categorisation was not done satisfactorily inundated with over generalisations.

At the third stage, further refinements were made. The main ideas were recategorised and re-coded and made to be more focused. Specific stand-alone themes were allowed to surface while generalisation is limited. As a result, 26 themes surfaced. The analysis arrived at the point of saturation at this stage and no new themes could be found.

Finally, inter-relating themes were combined into major themes. Defined as layering by Creswell (2012), it adds "rigor and insights" to the study and organises the themes into more sophisticated ones. All in all, 11 major themes were generated after the interrelation had been done through contextualisation.

Two copies of the inter-rater template of the analysis were then submitted to two co-raters. Both raters were English teachers with masters qualifications in English language teaching and 18 years of experience in the field. The first rater gave a 95.4% agreement with the analysis, while the second rater gave a 94% agreement, bringing to an average of 95% agreement. Thus, it could be said that the reliability of the analysis is high.

RESULTS

Upon analysis, eleven major themes were generated from the interviews answering the research questions and leading to an in depth discussion based on the feedback received. The major themes generated were:

Enjoyment

A major reason for the respondents to read was their enjoyment in reading. When asked "*Do you like to read?*", AR1 agreed by saying "*Yes*" (DU4), and when asked to put her liking on a scale of 1 to 10, she identified it as"...*maybe 8*" (DU6). AR2, on the other hand, gave a resounding "*Yes, I love it*" (DU4).

AR1 clarified that, "....we have to read for pleasure because it is also one of the factors for us to continue reading..." (DU140) and explained that she "...read to past the time" (DU8). In agreement, AR2 informed that "...first reading is one of my hobbies, so I read a lots..." (DU6). Thus, it could be said that the informants find reading as enjoyable.

It is also noted that the informants' responses indicated that reading brings a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. This is apparent when, AR1 informed that reading is "...it's just something nice to do..." (DU100). While, AR2 informed that "Ifeel so happy [ehm] because it is not easy actually to complete one book, so if I can complete one book, let's say for one week, it's very-very happy" (DU10).

This information is reflective of Guthrie, Wigfield and Pencevich's (1997) explanation that engaged readers take satisfaction in their reading activity and they will be persistent in exerting continuing effort in reading despite of the difficulties as they find the challenge enjoyable.

Self-development

The informants perceived that reading would help them in self-improvements through knowledge enhancements and language ability development. AR2 informed that "...so I read [ehm] to improve myself, to gain many knowledge outside the class" (DU6), and further explained that reading "...can give impact so much in my academic because it can motivate me [ehm]" (DU28).

AR 1 highlighted the importance of reading for the development of language abilities when she informed that, "*I think I* am able to construct more good sentences, I think, without reading I wouldn't have, I wouldn't have a wide vocabulary, I would say I am better at writing than speaking... so...which is why I like to read a lot, I get to widen all types of...mmm...I mean, I could write at all angles...and betterlah" (DU24).

Ilogho (2011) and Inderjit (2014) highlighted that enhancements of knowledge and language skills are among the benefits of reading. Similarly, both AR1 and AR2 indicated that they were expecting the same impacts from their reading activities.

Self-initiative

Reading was found as a self-initiated activity as informed by AR1 that "...I read because I want to read, ...I don't even feel like I need any encouragement to read..." (DU92), while AR2 stressed that "I study accounting and finance...so I think I should learn something outside the class, so I have to take aaa...action, that I have to be knowledgeable not only in accounting..." (DU16).

The willingness to take action upon their own initiative is an indicator that the informants have developed perceived autonomy towards their reading activity. According to Guthrie, Wigfield and Pencevich (1997), this will lead to a higher intrinsic motivation as the person "perceives" that they have control over their actions instead of being controlled. The information gained is a strong indicator that intrinsic motivation towards reading exists within the informants and plays a role in motivating their reading habits.

Social support

Three sub-themes emerged in the context of social support. They were:

- 1. **Parental support.** In terms of parental support AR1 informed that "I think it's more about the people around me who encourage me to read, becoz, having brought up by parents who also loves books" (DU46), while AR2 informed that "Aaa...she, err...my parents, they are very open when I want to buy book, ha... a signal that my parents actually encourage me..." (DU80).
- Teacher support. AR1 informed that "...teachers who happens to love to borrow (lend) me books when I was young so becoz of that I think what encouraged me to read" (DU46) and she went on to describe her teachers as "...the English teachers are all, they were very passionate about it (reading)" (DU122). AR2 described that her teachers "... will remind us the importance [ehm] of reading...the teacher will always ask us to read a lots" (DU122).
- 3. **Third party support**. The third party would refer to people who do not have any relationship with the informants but are influential and supportive of their reading motivation. This was made apparent by informant AR2 who

informed, "Ahhh...ok...first I love to see successful people...one of the factors why they are success in their field, because of they read a lots than others so when I know about this, I encouraged myself to reads..." (DU82) and subsequently she informed that "...when I meet new people, aaa...and I look at the way they communicate, then I will ask their secret, [ehm] so they will tell one of the secret is reading [ehm]" (DU132).

Interestingly, the information received manifested that the support for reading habit development occurs in a wide space ranging from the family, school and society. This is in tandem with Inderjit's (2014) discussion that reading skill development is not limited to the schools as it could occur not only in the classroom but also within social settings, at home and in the wider community. Thus, the effort of reading habit development could and should be done on a bigger circumference and in the context of the informants; the social support that they received from parents, teachers and the third party has apparently influenced their motivation to read.

Reading friendly environment

A reading friendly environment is hereby defined as a situation that promotes and encourages the interest in reading. There are three relevant sub-themes identified, namely:

- 1. **Reading family.** AR1 when asked "Does your family read?" answered "Yeah, I would say so" (DU60) and the use of pronoun "we" and "us" when she elaborated "we would just read it after school in the evenings mmm...and mmm... usually she is the one who is encouraging us to buy books whenever we go out and...." (DU56), indicating that reading is a family activity.
- 2. Good reading environment. AR2 highlighted that, "...of course we have, must have environment that love to reads...we can consider it easier for me, but for others, which is they really-really hate the books, first we have to create the environment..." (DU168) while physically, the environment should reflect "I love to read at the place that no noise, err... very peaceful, clean haa ... " (DU84) and with a competitive climate "... ok, my school, they will give an award if the student, amm... have the, the, the best numbers err...reading books, so that one also encouraged me, because I want to get that award." (DU106).
- 3. **Readers' character.** The informants gave an outline of their personal perceptions on how readers behave.

The perceptions enable them to identify with and blend in with readers or reading communities. AR1 informed that readers "... are not chatty, because I can't stand chatty people" (DU72) and there is a sense of camaraderie as "Aah... we share books [ehm], ahh...which we like and we recommended each other books and we get excited about books" (DU70). While AR2 informed that "...actually I really love to gather with all these people because they are the knowledgeable person." (DU98), and "usually...I can trace a person that love to read, emm... and then the person, umm... most quiet [ehm] they don't love, aaa...they don't love to talk much because talk is waste of time, better reading something haa...other than that I find out that a person maybe likes to read the way he or she communicates, the way she or he presents her or his self ... " (DU96).

Abdul (2014) highlighted that environment is a major element that shapes desire or attitudes towards reading and a family who is actively involved in books would provide a positive reading environment. Subsequently, Olufowobi and Makinde (2011) suggested that the creation of a reading conducive atmosphere would increase the enjoyment of reading. It is interesting to note that the informants were able to characterise and outline their own perspective of a reading friendly environment, giving the notion that such environment is influential to their reading motivation.

Unfriendly reading environment

The informants were also able to identify environments that could be regressive towards the development of reading habit. The emerging sub-themes were:

- 1. Lack of reading friends. AR1 informed that she lacked reading friends "Oh...ok [ehm], I have one or two friends...just one or two friends who really really love reading."(DU68), while AR2 informed that "...I don't know so far, in my hostel...only me that love to read."(DU92) and "but not in my class, because my class, the majority, not, they don't like to read." (DU100).
- 2. Ineffective reading campaigns. AR1 opined that reading campaigns such as "In school...ahhh...they use to have this "Buku nilam" (name of an extensive reading campaign), but I don't know if there is any point on it..." (DU78) and she further elaborated that the campaign "... was just something that I felt obligated to do because the school said so, the teacher said so" (DU82). AR1 also found that other reading campaigns as "...not so attractive..." (DU84). In support, AR2 suggested that "Err..., we have a to change, umm... the style,

err...more attractive campaign because most of the campaign that I see, the way they write, the way they present, is not suit for the teenagers..." (DU 176).

3. Language barrier. Notably, AR1 highlighted that the lack of language ability is a hindrance towards the building of reading culture when she mentioned, "...most of my peers they can't grasp English sentences very well, and maybe that's the big obstacle" (DU132).

The lack of a reading community around the informants may undermine the informants' motivation to read as it deprives them from having peers of the same interest. Inderjit (2014) highlighted that peers would allow the opportunity for cooperative learning to occur, while Ilogho (2011) suggests that reading could actually be promoted through "Readers club" as group activities could be conducted for the readers whilst promoting the reading habit.

Interestingly, the information from AR1 with regards to Nilam is contrastive to the finding by Fatimah et al. (2005) which suggested that the Nilam reading campaign as relevant to schools as it is accepted by teachers and students and promoted the reading habit. This is a point to ponder as AR1's information may indicate that Nilam might have an undesirable impact upon avid readers.

Hence, the informants' feedback that the lack of reading friends, ineffective reading

campaigns and language barrier should be observed as significant unfriendly reading environment that could be detrimental to reading habit development.

Reading motivates reading

AR2 informed that her reading habit was catalysed once she was able to read as she informed, "I cannot read, until eight years old [ehm] so, when...I knew how to read, so, it's very happy for me, start from that, I read a lot,..." (DU40). Concurrently, AR1 informed that starting reading early may generate a reading habit similar to her own self- experience, "...as soon as you are able to (read)...that it worked for me (to read more)..." (DU114).

In another instance, AR2 indicated that reading would motivate more reading activity as, "...but when I read motivational books, they encourage me to read other books...for me if I want to read a lot, I must read motivational books, because in that book actually they encourage to read other books..." (DU140).

The theme arising from these feedbacks was echoed Abdul's (2014) and Inderjit's (2014) suggestion that the reading habit should be started as early as possible. Subsequently, Ilogho (2011) suggests that libraries expand their activities through promotions that take into consideration the interest of the readers. These suggestions would catalyse reading activities that would result in the motivation for more reading to be done, as reflected by the informants' perceptions.

Curiosity motivates reading

AR1 informed that her curiosity made her read more, even though the topic is not really interesting to her, ".... something related to history, because I have a very... mmm...a very...like a narrow interest mmm... was that Dracula from Brian Stoker, from Fantasy, I searched its real history about the prince..."(DU50).

This theme is reflective of Abdul's (2014) suggestion that parents should intrigue children with continuity and the curiosity of how a story would develop to make them want to read more. The curiosity to know more about what they have read would increase a person's desire to read.

Author's attraction

AR1 in contemplating on her motivation to read related that, "...I think the authors, you have a favourite author, you like the book, you would try, you would definitely find another book with the same author, that works for me..." (DU140). AR2, in retrospective informed that, "...the book is interesting, the sentence, the way the author aaa...write, right? So, their, actually the words, the words is important [ehm], because, when the author writes, ummm... words that can attract people to reads[ehm], ok, we, we as a reader will continue reading the book..." (DU62).

The affinity towards a particular author is quite the norm as a reader may find the way that an author writes and shares his ideas suitably appealing to the reader. In this context, Abdul (2014) reminded that readers must be able to identify and select books that are of quality and not be limited by superficial aspects such as loyalty to an author. Therefore, it could be perceived that *author's attraction* could be seen as influential to the reader's motivation.

Alliteracy awareness

AR2's awareness of her family's reading habit and her intention to change the reading behaviour of her siblings indicates that the effort to curb alliteracy is a motivation for her as a reader.

When asked "Does your family read?", AR2 replied, "Yes, but not so…err…many like I do."(DU68). She explained "… I have so many little siblings, so for the reading is not err… to said like our habit, for right now…so…the level of reading not so good."(DU70). AR2 then described her family reading habit as "…they read but maybe just for their homework aaa…for reference only…" (DU72), and "My parents, because my parents is so busy taking care of us, so they don't have time to read, haa." (DU74).

AR2 then voiced her commitment to change her siblings' reading habit by stating that "I be the model to motivate them, haa...because they are just little, still ahh...young..." (DU70), and when enquired "Would you encourage someone else to read?", AR2 replied "Yes, InsyaAllah, especially my siblings first..." (DU146).

It is interesting that AR2 gave such a feedback because as Goodwin (1996) highlighted that the causes and impacts of alliteracy are complex due to the many variables involved. AR2's response indicated that she might have unknowingly perceived the occurrence of alliteracy at home. Concurrently, AR2 portrayed the thoughts of a reader with strong intrinsic motivation especially by her determination to change the family's reading scenario by making herself as "the model to motivate them". Therefore, it is apparent that her perception on alliteracy has played an influential part in her motivation as a reader.

Spiritually motivated

Being a Muslim, it is not a surprising that AR2's motivation in reading is also influenced by her commitment to the religion. AR2 mentioned that, "...in Al-Quran also, already encouraged us to read, in surah Al-Iqra right, aaa...so this already find factor a muslim or anybody should read." (DU136).

Alizi and Mohamad (2005) stated that extrapolation that a Muslim might perform *ibadah* (obeying and devoting self to Allah) was due of the joy of submitting to Allah (intrinsic motive) or because of the possible consequences (of being rewarded with heaven or punishment in hell; extrinsic motive) could be contextualised to better explain AR2's feedback. As reading is an action stipulated in the Al-Quran, it could be considered as an *ibadah* to Muslims, and therefore, AR2's response indicates that the spiritual perspective is influential to her motivation to read.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Both AR1 and AR2 indicated that they are motivated, passionate and matured readers. Information gained from the interview has shown that they have an awareness of the motivating and influencing factors for their interest in reading. Essentially, the feedbacks given are relevant to and could be substantiated with literature. Hence, the effort of investigating the avid readers has managed to garner in depth information that could be useful towards the promotion of reading habit.

It could be concluded that in the context of the avid readers, the influencing factors that drive their reading habits are: (1) *Enjoyment* in reading, as the primary motivating factor, followed by the interest for (2) Self-Development. Their motivation to read is sustained by strong (3) Self-Initiative and (4) Social Support, whilst the study has also made apparent that avid readers would require a conducive (5) Reading Friendly Environment. On the other hand, the motivation to read could also be affected by an (6) Unfriendly Reading Environment. Subsequently, (7) Reading Motivates Reading, (8) Curiosity Motivates Reading, and (9) Author Attraction would potentially be assistive to motivate reading. (10) Alliteracy Awareness is also a driving factor, especially if readers are made to play a part in curbing its dangers. Finally, all these factors could be complemented by

making reading a (11) *Spiritually Motivated* activity.

The findings of this research could be considered as a glimpse of what is possibly in the minds of the avid readers with regards to the factors that motivate and influence them to read. It is thus recommended that:

- Further attempts are made on students of similar characteristics to investigate and develop the repertoire of motivating and influencing factors.
- 2. A quantitative study is designed and implemented using the factors identified.
- Reading habit development modules could be designed and experimented upon using the themes identified.

To end, it would be apt to keep in mind Ilogho's (2011) quotation of Trelease (1989) that asserted:

"It is time to stop fooling ourselves. Teaching children how to read is not enough; we must teach them to want to read. We have produced a generation of school-time readers, the focus of the school objective should focus on raising lifetime readers."

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