

Inspiring Lifelong Readers: An Individualized Approach to Reading

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Abstract:

The specific purpose of this study was to explore the effects of Individualized Reading Program on students reading levels, library usage, and students' attitude about reading. The study focused on one-eighth-grade classroom at Minaret Model Secondary School, Karachi. The English language teacher of this class has been consistently using Individualized Reading Program beginning with the school year 2004-2005. The study was conducted during a period of three months from May to July 2005 and involves sixteen eighth grade students and two English language teachers of the school. The small sample size was due to the time constraints and the small number of students who were using the Individualized reading program in the school.

The study fully supports the literature regarding the effectiveness of Individualized Reading Program in developing positive attitude and motivation to read, among students (in local context). We find ourselves in a better position to use Individualized reading program not only in Minaret Model Secondary School but to refer the results and finding to other schools and train their teachers to use the program more effectively and to find the increased level of motivation among students to read.

Key words: Individualized reading program, Reading level, Library usage, Attitude

1. Introduction

Background / Cultural and Environmental Scan:

The Minaret Model Secondary School promotes the academic achievement of all students. In addition to academics, students are encouraged to have a strong sense of responsibility and personal worth, while being respectful of themselves and others. Another value is parents as partners in promoting each child's achievement. Individual student needs are met through a range of strategies. Formal and informal assessments are essential ingredients for high quality individual instruction. Students are continually assessed throughout the year, and the data is used to determine student progress towards meeting school standards. Minaret Model Secondary School is located in middle to upper middle class community of Karachi city. In order to continue with this high achievement expectation, new and innovative teaching strategies are always being sought out.

Since last three years I was thinking to use Individualized reading program as part of our language-teaching program. It was not consistently implemented and not all teachers and children had access to it due to the unavailability of suitable reading material. This was due to high cost of reading material and insufficient funds.

At the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year, we (me and my teachers) decided to pilot Individualized reading program in grade eight and use it as part of our reading program. The Green Crescent Trust, some parents and the teachers of the school contributed funding for books and supplementary material. Since I was the Principal of the school, I had a vested interest in how the program affects students reading. Also, if the finding suggests a positive correlation between the use of Individualized reading program and its positive effect on students reading, our goal is to have all students Kindergarten thorough tenth grade use the Individualized Reading Program (IRP).

Individualized Reading Program

Reading is an all-important language skill that is now in more demand than in any time in our history. With the exposure of Internet in a global arena, students need to master reading in order to understand the vast knowledge the world embraces them with. It has been said that the literate adult today is reading more in one week than their great grandfather did in a whole year (Swalm and Kling, 1993). This fact places pressures on the student to perform at a higher level than the student before them. Students are faced with a bombardment of information need to be better prepared for the demands that reading in society places on them.

As educators we are always on the look-out for new and innovative ways to motivate our students to learn. We all share the same concern that some students are not motivated to read and are not developing lifelong reading skills; children learn to read by reading, and they aren't doing enough reading.

A U.S. Department of Education longitudinal study of almost 25,000 eighth graders found that students watched television an average of 21.2 hours a week but spend a mere 1.9 hours a week outside school reading, and that included homework. When literate fifth graders were monitored to determine how they spend their free time, 90 percent of their time watching television (Trelease, 1995)

Motivation is the key to learning lifelong reading skills. Obtaining this objective begins with the task of making reading a pleasurable experience. A successful reading program must develop an enduring love of independent reading among its students. When students are motivated to read, they will read more books and in turn grow as readers. Predictably, poor readers have unfavorable attitudes toward reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wikinson, 1985). Many educators have become dissatisfied with general reading programs in which teacher-directed group instruction mean boredom and delay for quick students and embarrassment and lack of motivation for others.

Students' motivation can be achieved using Individualized Reading Program as it focuses on students having the freedom to select their own literature and other reading material; reads at his own pace and his own rate and sets his own pace of

accomplishment. There has been a great deal of writing in favor of an individualized reading approach which is supposedly a highly motivating method of teaching reading. Barbe (1991) outlines a complete individualized reading program. He explains that the Individualized reading program is a reading program which is organized under the support of school. Children are encouraged to read books, which are suggested in grade level lists, and then answer questions. Schools even give up to an hour per day of silent reading time so that students can read alone and take mastery tests. The data from these tests are compiled. From passing the tests or achieving a certain score, students earn points or prizes in an organized incentive program. Many proponents boast rising scores, increase in interest, and library checkout records.

Many formal and informal studies were also found regarding the Individualized Reading Program. Many of the studies had positive outcomes regarding student achievement, attitude about reading, increased library circulation, and even an increase in school attendance.

In a large-scale study, Paul (1992) analyzed Individualized Reading Program and reading test data from a sample of 4498 students' aged 6 to 16 in 64 schools. The result analysis did indicate a strong positive relationship between the number of points accumulated through Individualized Reading Program and gains in reading test scores, but given the study's methodology, the direction of any causal link is equivocal. However, students with the lowest ability showed the greatest gains.

Teacher plays an important role in the implementation of individualized reading program. They are expected to intervene appropriately with students through interventions. The role of the teacher is to advise, assist, remedy, widen the student's interests and encourage him to analyze his own reading experience by talking about the books he has read (Tricia, 1991). In some classrooms, students select from a predetermined reading list or they select from a bin of books color coded to indicate reading level. But most teachers give students the freedom to choose a book that they think they'll enjoy. Often teachers encourage students to select books that aren't too difficult.

The organization of class reading also requires careful handling. The traditional method is to go through the book in class, with the teacher reading aloud or students reading around the class for one lesson a week. The problem with this method, where everyone is obliged to read at the same pace, is that the quicker or more interested students skip on quickly through the book. A much more successful approach is to set most of the reading for homework or to allow students to read at their own pace during class time. The greater proportion of class time can then be spent on checking reading, working with key passages, class discussion and various follow-up activities.

It is no small goal, then, to give our students long stretches of time each day to read the books they are able to read. Anyone familiar with Pakistani classrooms knows that long stretches of time for reading are quite rare. Only few classrooms have anything resembling Individualized Reading Program. It reminds me of

when my daughter Fatima Naeem was in fifth grade. I found no Independent reading in her language class.

If our goal is to help children compose richly literate lives, then we need to give them each day to do just that. The Individualized reading program needs to be the central to the teaching of reading.

Individualized reading is far from the entire reading curriculum, but what children do during independent reading should affect, and be affected by, the entire curriculum. Too often in the teaching of reading, the separate components of the reading curriculum exist independently of each other. Individualized reading has its basis in concepts of seeking, self-selection, and pacing .Brabe (1976), identified the following characteristics of Individualized reading program:

1. Literature books for children predominate.
2. Each child makes personal choices with regard to his reading materials
3. Each child reads at his own rate and sets his own pace of accomplishment
4. Each child confers with the teacher about what he has read and the progress he has made.
5. Each child carries his reading into some form of summarizing activity
6. The teacher and/or the student keep some kind of record.
7. Children work in groups for an immediate learning purpose and leave group when the purpose is accomplished.
8. Word recognition and related skills are taught and vocabulary is accumulated in a natural way at the point of each child's need.

2. Methods and Materials

Three assessment tools were used to determine if the Individualized reading program effected students reading i.e.

- **Student survey** indicates the students' attitude towards reading.
- **Teacher interview** question determines the effectiveness of Individualized Reading Program on students reading.
- **Library circulation** of the entire Minaret Model Secondary School, grades Kindergarten through Eight, to see if there were any one class checked out more books overall during the school year.

Clearly, the study can at best be described as experimental as it was very imperfectly controlled, though in this action research context, this was beyond the control of researcher.

In regards to library circulation, one might assume that checking out a large number of books would indicate a more positive feeling towards reading. Ms. Samina Rizvi's eighth grade class checked out more books than any other class in the school. This may indicate that Individualized reading program does increase positive attitudes about reading. Ms. Rizvi's class has been using the

Individualized reading program since August 2004; longer than any other classroom in the school. Ms. Rizvi has an extensive collection of books and other reading material in her classroom book corner. Further analysis would be necessary in order to prove this theory.

The students' survey results were very interesting. Ms. Rizvi has 20 students in her class. Out of twenty students, sixteen permission slips from parents were returned on the due date. Students with permission slips were given the survey during English Language Class by Ms. Rizvi.

On questions one through seven, students were asked to circle the face that show how they feel about reading. Their four choices were smiley faces showing great, good, O.K., and unhappy.

On questions eight through fourteen the students were asked to circle the face that shows how they feel about the reading program and activities. Their three choices were again smiley faces showing yes, sometimes, and no.

3. Results and Discussion

Tabel-1:

Questions: One through seven	 Great	Good	 O.K	 Unhappy
1. How do you feel about reading at school?	14	02	0	0
14 out of 16 respondents (87.5%) circled "Great". Two respondents circled "Good". This would indicate that all respondents had a very positive attitude towards reading.				
2. How do you feel about reading during free time?	14	02	0	0
Question two shows the same result as Q 1.				
3. How do you feel about reading at home?	13	03	0	0
5 out of 7 (81.25%) feel great reading at home. The rest two also feel good reading at home. This would indicate that student feel comfortable and motivated to read at their own pace.				
4. How do you feel about the	16	0	0	0

individualized reading program?				
Response to question number four is extremely encouraging. Not one student answered that they do not like the program.				
5. How do you feel about the book selection you have in the library and classroom?	11	04	1	0
6. How do you feel about reading aloud?	02	03	06	05
Response to question 6 and 7 shows that student do need more and careful selection of book s in the library and like to read silent.				
7. How do you feel about yourself as a reader?	14	02	0	0

Table-2:

Questions: eight through fourteen	 Yes	 Sometimes	 No
8. I am a good reader.	14	02	0
In response to question number seven and eight, 14 out of 16 (87.5%) felt they were good readers. One respondent felt that he was a good reader sometimes. Again this reiterates the positive attitude regarding the students' views on reading and themselves as readers.			
9. I like to read.	16	0	0
All seven (100%) respondents show their liking to read. One respondent crossed out the word like in the question and replaced it with the <i>word love</i> .			
10. I like someone read to me.	06	08	02
This was a quite tricky question to see the actual sentiments of			

children about reading. Result shows that students want to read by themselves and feel confident to read independently.			
11. I am a better reader now than I was at the beginning of the year.	16	0	0
12. I like getting book as gifts.	16	0	0
13. I like the individualized reading program.	16	0	0
14. The Individualized Reading Program has helped me to become a better reader.	14	02	0
Response to question number 11 to 14 is again extremely encouraging. Almost all of them showed their love with Individualized reading and getting books as gifts.			

Following are some common verbatim responses to questions fifteen and sixteen

15. The thing I like most about the individualized reading program is...

Nothing

The book reports

I get my name on the banners.

Reading and getting points

It helps me be a better reader

That I can read more books.

I like that we can read books and get points.

You get to read and get your name on the banners is a lot more fun.

Getting points and reading

That it gives an incentive to read, and read a lot!

16. The thing I like the least about the Individualized Reading Program is...

I have to do book reports

Nothing
 When we do the book reports
 Nothing
 I have to have a lot of reading
 Nothing

In looking at the open-ended questions, number fifteen and sixteen, very positive things were said regarding the Individualized reading program and how the student perceived it. Some students wrote directly how it made them a better reader.

Overall we were very pleased with the results of the survey. We felt that the students answered truthfully, and this was reflected throughout the survey. This eighth grade class seems to have an overall positive attitude about reading and the reading program. We would like to follow up on the survey by randomly choosing students who took the survey and interview them further on the above topics.

Teacher Interviews (see annexure for verbatim) were conducted to get their perception on students' attitude towards reading. Overall there was a very positive response. The eighth grade teacher has a reputation for adopting best practices in education and is very knowledgeable on students' assessments. She is well respected by the staff and is considered to be highly regarded educators.

The teacher interviews seem to mimic the students. They seem to like what the Individualized Reading Program has to offer, they are also frustrated by the lack of books and other reading material. That seems to be the only set-back with the program. In order for it to work consistently and effectively, optimal material must be made available.

4. Summary and recommendations:

The study seems to support the literature regarding the effectiveness of Individualized Reading Program on student's achievement and attitudes. Research suggests that students who are motivated to read more, in turn become more successful readers. Students in this study seem to have very positive attitudes about reading and the Individualized Reading Program.

One recommendation for future study is further replication clearly required in a variety of other context and in a better controlled study. The population for this study was small. A larger population over a longer period of time would have shown greater significant results. Studies of the effectiveness of the Individualized Reading Program might focus on experimental variation in the quantity of class reading time and consequent reading achievement. Also, finding a comparison group within the same school would be beneficial.

Another recommendation is to have students take a pre and post test reading survey that would show growth regarding attitudes. In conclusion, despite the small sample size and short time period, with the help of this study, we find ourselves in a better position to use Individualized Reading Program not only in Minaret Model Secondary School but to refer the results and findings to other

schools and train their teachers to use the program more effectively and to find the increased level of motivation among students to read. The study fully supports the literature regarding the effectiveness of Individualized reading program (in local context).

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6. ANNEXURE

The following responses from the teacher interviews are verbatim:

What have you noticed about student attitudes of reading? So you see changes in their habits such as more reading during free time, reading books from different genres, increase in books checked out from library and classroom libraries, etc.?

Ms. Riffat Raza

Kids are reading more-more focused on completing a book. Much better about picking up a book during free time.

Ms. Samina Rizvi

Since the time we have been able to use Individualized Reading Program, I have observed an obvious growth in the amount of time the children read. With this increase of reading has come an increase of comprehension. It is so simple-the more you read at your level; the better your comprehension!

How often do you have silent reading time?

Ms. Riffat Raza

Built in to daily schedule- we rarely have time to all stop and read at one time- one group reads while another is meeting with me.

Ms. Samina Rizvi

We have silent reading daily for 10 minutes. All students are truly reading!

Have you noticed student reading higher-level books?

Ms. Riffat Raza

I have noticed more students reading at their own reading level kids pick up a too difficult book and stare at the pages ...reading level has also progressed during the year.

Ms. Samina Rizvi

The children are continually challenging themselves in reading. I have noticed a big interest in content books. The books were rarely read, just used more as picture books before Individualized Reading Program.

Are student able to work in the Individualized Reading Program independently?

Ms. Riffat Raza

Yes.

Ms. Samina Rizvi

All of my children can function completely independently.

Do students have access to a wide selection of books available in either the classroom or the library?

Ms. Riffat Raza

Yes.

Ms. Samina Rizvi

Since I have used Individualized Reading Program in the past I have a personal library with many books. However, our library has a very limited amount of books, and limited in terms of levels of books, and limited in terms of level of interest.

Do your students have access to a wide selection of Individualized Reading Program quizzes?

Ms. Riffat Raza

Sort of, this is the problem. We need more tests!

Ms. Samina Rizvi

Many students are very frustrated because of their enthusiasm for reading has greatly increased, along with their abilities, but we have very few quizzes.

What do you think are the benefits of the Individualized Reading Program?

Ms. Riffat Raza

Accountability –no more having to make up little checks to make sure kids are really reading and comprehending. Quick and fun a way to Quick Check comprehension and then go back to more reading...this is so easy for the teacher and beneficial for the student!

Ms. Samina Rizvi

It is very simple, just read. The more you read, the better the reader. It is also a great thing for the teacher to follow a child's progress easily.

What do you think are the negatives of the Individualized Reading Program?

Ms. Riffat Raza

None.

Ms. Samina Rizvi

I can't think of any negatives to the program, expect it is difficult to experience the true growth of reading without continuous check and feedback from students. We are very limited.

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your views about the Individualized Reading Program?

Ms. Riffat Raza

It's the best method I have encountered.

Ms. Samina Rizvi

All research tells us as educators; the more a child reads the better the reader will become. Individualized Reading Program, this concept in all areas of the program; the ease of usage, the rewards, certificates, as well as record keeping for teachers. This also provides great information for parents.