INVESTIGATION ON THE CURRENT SITUATION AND COUNTERMEASURES OF EXTRACURRICULAR READING FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF ZHEJIANG, CHINA[i]

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Abstract:

Based on a survey of 697 students in primary schools of Hangzhou, Ningbo, and Jiaxing in Zhejiang Province, this paper found that: (1) 25% of parents support their children to read reference books and regular parent-child reading, but most of the parents are afraid it may negatively influence school curriculum so they limit or against extracurricular reading and do not carry out the parent-child reading; only 27% of teachers often assign extracurricular reading tasks, most rarely or never, parents and schools currently pay little attention to extracurricular reading. (2) Eighty one percent of children spent 2 hours or more on homework or reviewing lessons every day, 88% of them watched about 1 hour of TV every day, and 68% of them played video games for about 1 hour. Except eating, sleeping and commuting, they have an average of 4-5 hours of free time outside school, so more than 50% of primary school students spend less than 0.5 hour reading Chinese books every day. (3) Nearly 80% of children read 2-5 Chinese books every month and spend around ￥500 on books every year; in addition, more than 60% of the respondents read paper books, and the reading of extracurricular English books is close to zero, which caused their limited reading volume, narrow scope of knowledge, restricted international vision, and inadequate reading habits. The situation extracurricular reading is not ideal, which may seriously affect the future academic and career development. To improve the unfavorable situation, this paper put forward the following suggestions: (1) all levels of government should allocate fund to establish and

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improve bookshelves in school classroom and community library, promote "home - school - community cooperation reading plan", let the children at school can have extra 0.5-1 hour of reading at noon, and can approach in the community library for reading on weekends and holidays; (2) distribute free books to low-income families and advocate encouraging parents to spend half an hour reading with their children; (3) the school should attach great importance to the extracurricular reading education, organize pupils to have one-hour of intensive reading and carry out class PK activities such as storytelling and drama performance in English every afternoon after school , which can effectively improve the student's reading interest and amount, and also solved the question that is many parents unable to pick up their kids during work at 3:30 p.m.; (4) promote digital reading, reduce the cost of reading, and correctly understand the impact of digital reading on eyesight.

Keywords: Zhejiang, China; extracurricular reading for primary school students; status survey; countermeasures and suggestions

1. Introduction

Reading is the activity of obtaining information from reading materials, understanding the world and developing thinking. It is a process of understanding, comprehension, absorbing, appreciating, evaluating and exploring reading materials. Reading can develop human intelligence, cultivate people's sentiment and improve their self-cultivation. Reading is the most direct and effective way of learning and the only way to success; all knowledge comes from reading and 80% of human knowledge is acquired through reading (Su, 2017). Therefore, the famous British educator and former minister of education Blunkett believes that reading is the foundation of lifelong learning, and the soul of basic education is the cornerstone of all kinds of learning, *"Every time we open the page, we open a window to the world"* (BBC, 1998). Renowned educator Sukhomlynsky once said, "*Thirty years of educational experience has convinced me that students' intellectual development depends on good reading*" (Yang, 2019).

Reading is the basis of all subjects, and reading ability is highly correlated with associative ability, creativity, sensibility, comprehension and memory. To some extent, reading ability determines children's future destiny. Learn to read and read to learn are key issues in children's education (Liu, 2008).

Primary school is a critical period for the formation of reading habits, with less homework and less academic pressure called golden age (Jiang, 2019). During this period, the cultivation of good reading habits can improve the ability of independent learning. Through extensive reading, the knowledge of various subjects can be improved and interests and expertise can be developed, which is of great significance to the future academic and professional development (Zhan, 2019). However, with mobile games growing freely nowadays, there are fewer and fewer students who can calm down to

read. Many parents also can't put down their mobile phones, or even have no time to help their children with homework, let alone parent-child reading (Xu, 2019).

Reading classics is an effective way to understand, inherit and develop Chinese culture (Ma, 2019). At present, the situation of extracurricular reading of Chinese primary school students is not ideal. Due to the influence of video games and animation films, the reading time and amount of extracurricular books are limited, and the reading materials are basically entertaining books in Chinese (Zhao, 2018). Primary school students are seriously lacking in reading books of Chinese classical culture and historical classics, and English books are even zero (Zhu & Wu, 2018).

In this social background, how to keep the primary school students away from electronic games, like reading, and through reading to improve the bilingual ability of Chinese and English and understand the history and culture of China and foreign countries, cultivate patriotic feelings, set up lofty ideals from an early age, the future social development of useful talent is particularly important.

Zhejiang is a strong economic province in China and its sustainable development and upgrading of the economy require a large number of talents with ideals, knowledge, and skills. "*Youth is strong, China is strong*", educate today's primary school students, is to prepare for tomorrow's qualified construction talent.

Therefore, investigate present situation of pupils' extracurricular reading in Zhejiang Province, analyze the existing problems, illustrate the effectiveness of the solution with the experimental results, keep more students away from the game, and let them love reading, can form a good habit of reading and independent learning, are able to master knowledge in all the subjects, improve their self-cultivation, and become social useful talents, is significant to the economic and social development of Zhejiang and it also has important reference value to children's education and talents cultivation in whole China and the world.

2. Research Instruments and Analysis

2.1 Research Instruments and Subjects
In May 2019, the research group compiled *The Elementary Student Extracurricular Reading Questionnaire* consisting of 39 questions from 10 dimensions including respondents' basic information, hobbies, homework and time for game and entertainment, parents' attitudes, reading time, reading content, the source of their reading material, reading quantity, reading effect, etc. Through the trial and modification of the experts, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the questionnaire is 0.851, which proves that it has high level of validity and reliability.

One primary school in each of Hangzhou City, Ningbo City and Jiaxing City in Zhejiang Province, China was chosen and a class of students in each grade randomly selected as anonymous respondents. A total of 697 copies of questionnaires on extracurricular reading were put out of which 653 copies were valid. The effective recovery rate was 93.69%.

2.2 Research Result and the Analysis

Research content and results are as follows:

Table 1: Survey Results of Extracurricular Reading of
Zhejiang Primary School Students (N=653 people)

No	Survey item	Survey results	
		Population (people)	Proportion (%)
1	**Sex**		
	Male	347	53.14
	Female	306	46.86
2	**Grade**		
	1	83	12.71
	2	81	12.40
	3	126	19.30
	4	121	18.53
	5	123	18.84
	6	119	18.22
3	**The degree of the interest in extracurricular reading**		
	Very like	124	18.99
	Like	352	53.91
	Neutral	93	14.24
	Dislike	84	12.86
4	**Parents' attitude towards extracurricular reading frequently**		
	Supportive and read with their children	163	24.96
	Partially supportive but limit time and do not read with children	248	53.29
	Don't support for avoiding influencing children's study	46	7.04
	Don't support at all	96	14.71
5	**Does the school arrange extracurricular reading tasks?**		
	Always	176	26.95
	Often	333	50.99
	Sometimes	78	11.94
	Never	66	10.18
6	**Time to do homework and review lessons every day**		
	< 0.5 h	13	1.99
	0.5-1h	33	5.05
	1-1.5h	72	11.03
	1.5-2h	202	30.93
	>2h	333	51.00
7	**Time to do extracurricular reading every day**		
	< 0.5 h	331	50.69
	0.5-1h	228	34.92
	1-1.5h	67	10.26
	1.5-2h	26	3.98
	>2h	1	0.15

8	**Time to watch TV every day**		
	< 0.5 h	129	19.75
	0.5-1h	326	49.92
	1-1.5h	117	17.92
	1.5-2h	49	7.50
	>2h	32	4.90
9	**Time to play video games**		
	< 0.5 h	189	28.94
	0.5-1h	372	26.97
	1-1.5h	73	11.18
	1.5-2h	12	1.84
	>2h	7	1.07
10	**Off-school time except for meals, sleeping and commuting**		
	About 3h	83	12.71
	About 4h	507	77.64
	About 5h	63	9.65
11	**Selection of extracurricular activities**		
	Watch TV	189	28.94
	Play electronic game	228	34.92
	Read extracurricular books	137	20.98
	Do outdoor sports	99	15.16
12	**Selection of reading materials**		
	Picture books	129	19.75
	Comic strips	22	3.37
	Anime	215	32.93
	Pure textbooks	287	43.95
13	**Selection of reading content**		
	Literature	137	20.98
	Fiction	176	26.95
	Science	73	11.18
	History and biography	116	17.76
	Auxiliary learning books	95	14.55
	Others	56	8.58
14	**Overall situation of English book reading**		
	Every day	0	0
	Always	37	5.67
	Sometimes	142	21.74
	Never	474	72.59
15	**Reading schedule**		
	Before sleeping every night	189	28.94
	Every noon	72	11.03
	During the class break	46	7.04
	On weekends or in holiday	346	52.99
16	**Situation of electronic reading**		
	Mainly read printed books	391	59.88

	Mainly read electronic books	39	5.98
	Both	223	34.15
17	**Average number of books read per month**		
	1-3	336	56.05
	4-6	149	22.82
	7-10	97	14.85
	11-15	31	4.75
	>15	10	1.53
18	**Sources of books**		
	Bought by yourself	242	37.06
	Bought by parents	235	35.99
	Borrowed from library	104	15.93
	Borrowed from classmates	72	11.02
19	**The annual cost of extracurricular books**		
	< 100¥	46	7.04
	400-500¥	332	50.84
	500-1000¥	215	32.92
	>1000¥	60	9.19
20	**The biggest obstacle to extracurricular reading**		
	Too much homework	413	63.25
	High prices of books	98	15.01
	Not supported parents	37	5.67
	Others	105	16.07
21	**The main difficulty in reading**		
	Read slowly and dislike reading	241	36.91
	Few interested books	124	18.99
	It's more interesting to watch TV and play electronic game than reading	263	40.28
	Others	25	3.82
22	**Whether having extracurricular reading plans**		
	Always	137	20.98
	Sometimes	203	31.09
	Never	313	47.93
23	**Other issues**		
	Difficult to borrow books for library is far from home.	516	79.02
	School pays no attention on extracurricular reading and there is no extracurricular reading room in school.	533	81.62
	There are only a few and outdated extracurricular books in school library and they are updated slowly and difficult to be borrowed.	479	73.35
	Can't read extracurricular books at noon for there is no book corner in classroom.	565	86.52
	There are a few extracurricular books at home for parents are unwilling to buy and don't allow children to buy or borrow books.	448	68.61
	Parents are more willing to play mobile phone than read extracurricular books with children.	412	63.10

According to the research data from Table 1, the analysis is as follows:

(1) Sex

There are 653 valid research subjects including male 53% and female 47%.

(2) Grade

In Grade1 and Grade2, there are 2 classes respectively which includes about 40 people. The total is 184 people which accounts for 25% of the whole. There are 3 classes respectively in Grade3 and Grade 6 and the total accounts for 75%.

(3) The degree of the interest in extracurricular reading

About 19% of the students like reading extracurricular books very much and 54% of them like reading them, 14% of them feel neutral to reading them and 13% dislike them.

(4) Parents' attitude towards extracurricular reading

Twenty-five percent of parents are very supportive of their children to read extracurricular books and often read with their children, 53% of parents support a limited reading time with no more than one hour per day, and they do not accompany their children when reading. Due to the fear of affecting school curriculum, 7% of parents are not very supportive of their children's extracurricular books reading , and 15% do not support their children to read extracurricular books.

(5) Does the school arrange extracurricular reading tasks

Twenty-seven percent of teachers often arrange extracurricular reading tasks, 51% of them sometimes arrange extracurricular reading tasks, 12% of them rarely arrange extracurricular reading tasks, and 10% of teachers never arrange extracurricular reading tasks. It can be seen that the school attaches little importance to extracurricular reading.

(6) Time to do homework and review lessons every day

Two percent of the students spend less than half an hour on homework and review lessons everyday, 5% of students spend 0.5-1 hour on homework and review lessons everyday, 11% of the students spend1-1.5 hours on homework and review lessons everyday, 31% of the students spend 1.5-2 hours on homework and review lessons everyday, 51% of the students spend more than 2 hours on homework and review lessons everyday.

(7) Time to do extracurricular reading every day

Fifty-one percent of students spend less than half an hour on extracurricular reading everyday, 35% spend 0.5-1 hour on extracurricular reading everyday, 10% spend 1-1.5 hours on extracurricular reading everyday, and 4% spend 1.5-2 hours on extracurricular reading everyday. More than 70% of students spend less than one hour on reading extracurricular books everyday.

(8) Time to watch TV every day

Nearly 20% of students spend less than 0.5 hour on watching TV everyday, about 50% of them spend 0.5-1 hour on watching TV everyday, 18% of them spend 1-1.5 hours on watching TV everyday, 7.5% of them spend 1.5-2 hours on watching TV everyday, and 5% of them spend more than 2 hours on watching TV everyday. Only 12.5% of them spend more than 1.5 hours on watching TV everyday.

(9) Time to play video games every day

Twenty-nine percent of students spend less than 0.5 hour on playing video games everyday, 57% of them spend 0.5-1 hour on playing video games everyday, 11% of them

spend 1-1.5 hours on playing video games everyday, nearly 2% of them spend 1.5-2 hours on playing video games everyday, 1% of them spend more than 2 hours on playing video games everyday, and 86% of students spend less than one hour on playing video games everyday.

(10) Off-school time except for meals, sleeping and commuting

Except for meals, sleeping and commute, 13% of interviewees have about 3 hours of free time outside school, 78% of them have about 4 hours, and 9% of them have about 5 hours. Interviewees have about 4 hours of free time on average.

(11) Selection of extracurricular activities

Twenty-nine percent of students like watching TV, 35% like playing video games, 21% like reading extracurricular books, and 15% like outdoor sports. It can be seen that the proportion of students who like reading and sports is much lower than those who like watching TV and playing video games.

(12) Selection of reading materials

Forty-four percent of students like reading books without illustration, 20% of them like picture books, 33% of them like anime, and only 3% of them like comic books.

(13) Selection of reading content

Twenty-one percent of students like reading literature, 27% of them like science fiction and fantasy works, 18% of them like history and biography, 11% of them like popular science books, 15% of them like exercise books, and 8% of them like other books such as military, brain teasers and so on.

(14) Overall English book reading situation

There is no respondent who read English books everyday because they think there are too many new words to understand, about 5% of the respondents often read some English picture books, 21% rarely read English books, 73% never read English books. The current situation of English reading for primary school students is not optimistic. In the critical period of second language acquisition (Hartshorne,2018), they almost have no input of English reading and English culture, let alone output. According to the input hypothesis (Krashen,2018), if this critical period is missed, children need to spend more time and energy in learning English when they step into middle school and university (Sun, 2016).

(15) Reading schedule

As for the time schedule of reading, 29% of the students like reading extracurricular books every night before bed, 53% of them like reading on weekends and during holidays, 11% of them like reading during the noon break, and 7% of them like reading during break between class. In a word, more than 80% of the students reading extracurricular books on weekends, during holidays and before bed.

(16) Electronic reading situation

Sixty percent of the respondents prefer printed books, 6% of the respondents often read e-books, 34% of them think it doesn't matter whether the book is printed or electronic. This indicates that the extracurricular reading of pupils still focuses on printed books,

which is related to the traditional cognition that electronic reading is easier to cause visual impairment than paper reading.

(17) Average number of books read per month

Fifty-six percent of the students read 1-3 books a month, 23% of the students read 4-6 books a month, 15% of them read 7-10 books a month, near 5% of them read 11-15 books a month, and 1.5% of them read more than 15 books a month. It can be seen that 80% of the students do not read much after class.

(18) Sources of books

Thirty-seven percent of the respondents buy extracurricular books themselves, 36% of respondents' extracurricular books are from parents, 16% of the respondents borrow books from libraries and reading rooms, 11% of the respondents borrow books from their classmates. Therefore, it can be seen that students' interests and parents' encouragement are important factors influencing extracurricular reading.

(19) The annual cost of extracurricular books

Fifty-one percent of the respondents spend no more than 500 yuan on extracurricular books every year, 33% of them spend 500-1,000 yuan a year, 9% of them spend more than 1,000 yuan and 7% of them spend less than 100 yuan. Therefore, it can be seen that over 80% of them spend no more than 1,000 yuan on books every year.

(20) The biggest obstacle to extracurricular reading

Sixty-three percent of the respondents believe the biggest obstacle is too much homework, 15% of them think the price of books is too high, around 6% think the biggest obstacle is parents' disapproval. The remaining 16% consider that there were other obstacles. If the amount of homework can be reduced appropriately, the current situation of extracurricular reading of primary school students will be greatly improved.

(21) The main difficulty in reading

Thirty-seven percent of the respondents take slow reading as a common difficulty, 19% of them believe few good books as a main difficulty, 40% of the respondents think those texts are boring and less enjoyable than watching TV or playing video games, and 4% of them choose other reasons.

(22) Extracurricular reading plan

Only 21% of respondents make extracurricular reading plan, 31% of them sometimes make short-term reading plan, 48% of the respondents have no reading plan. Meanwhile, only 26.5% of the respondents would read seriously, 29% of them often talk about the books they have read with their classmates. Most of the respondents do not have systematic reading plans and do not talk about what they have read with classmates. They just quickly swallow the knowledge when they are reading so they won't absorb the knowledge very well.

(23) Other issues

Seventy-nine percent of the respondents live far from libraries, making it difficult to borrow books, 82% of them think that the school does not pay enough attention to extracurricular reading and they don't have reading rooms, 73% of students think the the books in their school libraries are outdated and slow to update and many books are hard

to borrow, 87% of them think their classes do not have a book corner, which is very bad for extracurricular reading. If class has enough extracurricular books, they can read 0.5-1 hour at noon break every day; 69% of the students are not satisfied with their parents because they seldom buy extracurricular books for themselves for fear of affecting their schoolwork. They also don't allow students themselves to buy and borrow extracurricular books. Meanwhile, 63% of parents would rather play on their cellphones than engage in extracurricular parent-child reading.

3. Conclusions and Suggestions

3.1 Research Summary

A. Through a questionnaire survey of 653 valid respondents of grade 1-6 (53% are boys and 47% are girls), the paper has found that 25% of parents completely support their children to read extracurricular books and always read with their children. Due to the fear of affecting school academic curriculum, 53% of parents support a limited reading time with no more than 1 hour per day, and they do not accompany their children while reading; 23% of parents are less supportive or opposed to their children's extracurricular books reading. Meanwhile, only 27% of teachers often arrange extracurricular reading tasks, 51% of them sometimes arrange extracurricular reading tasks, and 22% rarely or never arrange extracurricular reading tasks. Up to now, parents and schools are not paying much attention to extracurricular reading.

B. Among the selection of extracurricular activities, 29% of students like watching TV, 35% like playing video games, 21% like reading extracurricular books, and 15% like outdoor sports. It can be seen that the proportion of students who like reading and sports is much lower than those who like watching TV and playing video games. At the same time, 19% of primary school students like reading extracurricular books very much.

C. Except eating, sleeping and commuting, children have about 4 hours of free time on average each day; 81% of children spend 1.5 hours or more on homework and review lessons everyday, and 88% of children spend 1 hour on average for watching TV everyday, 68% of them spend about 1 hour on playing video games everyday. As a result, 51% of primary students spend less than 0.5 hour on extracurricular reading everyday, and 35% of them spend less than 1 hour. To a conclusion, 86% of students spend less time on extracurricular reading time everyday.

D. Forty-four percent of students like reading Chinese books without illustrations, 20% of them like picture books, 33% of them like manga books, and only 3% of them like comic strips. In terms of book content of Chinese books, 21% of students like reading literature, 27% of them like science fiction and fantasy works, 18% of them like history and biography, 11% of them like popular science books, 15% of them like exercise books, and 8% like other books such as military, brain teasers and so on.

E. No student read English books everyday; only 5% of students read some English picture books with few words, 21% of them rarely read English books, 73% of them never read English books. The current situation of English reading is extremely pessimistic,

which is bad to the second language acquisition of primary school students in the critical period.

F.   The current situation of reading Chinese books is not optimistic. Nearly 80% of children read 2 to 5 Chinese books every month, and they spend around ￥500 on books every year. However, 81% of the children do not have a systematic reading plan, and more than 70% of them do not read carefully and discuss with classmates. For this reading problem, 63% of students think that there is too much homework, 19% of them think the lack of good books as a main difficulty, in the meantime, 37% of them think slow reading as a common difficulty, and 40% of them think those texts are too boring and less enjoyable than watching TV or playing video games. The extracurricular reading of pupils still focuses on printed books, 60% of children prefer printed books, 6% of the respondents often read e-books, and 34% of them think it doesn't matter whether the book is printed or electronic. This is related to the traditional cognition that electronic reading is easier to cause visual impairment than paper reading.

G.   Many students live far from libraries, making it difficult to borrow books; schools do not pay enough attention to extracurricular reading, thus result in the scarcity and obsolescence of books and the difficulty of borrowing books; classes do not have reading shelves and reading corner; 82% of the respondents think that the school does not pay enough attention to extracurricular reading and they don't have reading rooms, which is not conducive to the popularity of extracurricular reading; 73% of students think the the books in their school libraries are old and slow to update even many books are hard to borrow, and school libraries is short of attractive good books; 87% of the students think the lack of a book corner in the classrooms prevented they reading after lunch. At the same time, parents do not pay enough attention to parent-child reading and extracurricular reading, and families also lack extracurricular books, 69% of students are not satisfied with their parents because parents seldom buy extracurricular books for them for fear of affecting their schoolwork. Many parents also do not allow students to buy and borrow extracurricular books, 63% of parents would rather play on their cellphones than engage in extracurricular parent-child reading. These may will lead to the problem that primary school students do not develop good reading habits, the extracurricular reading situation come to a serious situation and the students' future academic and professional development will be seriously affected.

3.2 Countermeasures and Suggestions

A.   At present, there are few public libraries in cities and many students live far away from them, so it is difficult to borrow and read books. Therefore, it is suggested that local governments at all levels allocate special funds to establish and improve school and class reading bookshelves and community libraries, and regularly allocate all kinds of books which is suitable for students. Thus, establish a "*home-school-community cooperative reading mode*", which is a significant action to establish a country of book lovers and train reserve talents for national construction. With enough class bookshelves and plenty of extracurricular books, students can have 0.5-1 hour for reading in school at noon every

day. On weekends and holidays, students can also read in the community libraries nearby, so that parents can encourage students to watch less animation, play less video games, read more and exercise more.

B. Schools should organize primary school students to read in the class for about 1 hour every afternoon after school, and carry out class PK activities such as storytelling and English drama, which can not only effectively cultivate primary school students' interest in reading, improve their bilingual and reading ability, but also solve the problem that many parents can't pick up their children without leaving work at 3:30.

C. It is suggested that the Ministry of Education, the Women's Federation, Labor Union and Young Pioneers distribute some free books to low-income families, advocate and encourage parents to set up a family book corner, put down their mobile phones and read with their children for half an hour everyday. All schools can popularize the home-school cooperative reading plan.

D. Promote digital reading, reduce the cost of reading, correctly understand the impact of digital reading on eyesight (watching TV and playing video games too much will also damage eyesight), encourage primary school students to increase the time and amount of reading outside the classroom, develop good reading habits at an early age, so that they can promote the development of school work and professional career.

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