

Beyond the Classroom: Extracurricular Reading Habits of Fifth Graders in Primary Schools

Gao Chenchen^{1,a,*}, Rhoda C. Tique^{1,b}

¹Graduate School, University of Baguio, Baguio, Philippines

^a20240101@s.ubaguio.edu, ^brhodatique@e.ubaguio.edu

*Corresponding author

Abstract: In today's competitive educational landscape, extracurricular reading is crucial for enhancing students' literacy, nurturing the soul, and shaping character. This study investigates the extracurricular reading habits of fifth-grade students in an urban primary school in Beijing and proposes evidence-based strategies to encourage balanced, sustained, and diverse reading behaviors. A quantitative descriptive survey using a researcher-designed questionnaire was administered to a simple random sample of 150 students at Shijicheng School, Haidian District. The tool measured reading frequency, duration, and material preferences, with a Cronbach's α of 0.883. Results showed 52.7% read 3–5 times weekly, 18% daily, while 5.3% rarely read. Though 73% read at least 30 minutes daily, nearly 40% had fragmented sessions. Educational and storybooks were most preferred, while nonfiction and school library use were low. Home bookshelves were the main resource (54.7%). Thematic analysis of open-ended responses highlighted effective strategies such as family reading routines, reward systems, gamified activities, and interest-driven materials. Limitations include the single urban school setting and self-reported data. Future research should broaden the scope and apply mixed methods for deeper insights.

Keywords: Extracurricular reading habits, Fifth-grade students, Reading strategies, Family participation

1. Introduction

Extracurricular reading is crucial for fifth-grade students' literacy and character development, yet significant disparities exist due to varying motivation and home support. This imbalance hinders academic progress and widens learning gaps. Despite educational guidelines, implementation constraints persist. Thus, investigating these reading habits and their underlying obstacles is vital for developing targeted strategies to improve educational outcomes.

Recent research highlights that fifth-grade students' extracurricular reading habits are strongly influenced by intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Those with a higher reading self-concept spend more time reading daily [15]. Multidimensional tools measuring reading motivation more accurately predict behavior than single-item instruments [19]. Fostering internal motivation and interest in reading is essential for developing sustained reading habits [5].

The family environment also plays a vital role. Parents who model and engage in reading with their children positively impact reading motivation and comprehension [7]. A Wisconsin study found children whose parents discussed books with them read independently at least three times a week [20]. The "home library effect," where access to books increases reading frequency, benefits students across income levels [11], though disparities persist—especially among low-income families and boys [13].

Structured programs significantly support reading development. Self-selected reading (SSR) improves reading stamina and interest [10], while book clubs with peer discussion boost weekly reading by 20% [12]. Interactive e-books enhance vocabulary and comprehension [8], and after-school programs improve reading performance [2]. Despite these efforts, equity remains a concern. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds read 30% fewer pages than their wealthier peers [11]. Without targeted interventions, this gap may widen, resulting in a "reading Matthew effect" [5]. Programs tailored to disadvantaged students have shown promise in narrowing this divide [4].

This study examines the extracurricular reading habits of fifth-grade students in urban Chinese elementary schools to propose practical strategies that foster motivation, equity, and reading literacy.

The research is grounded in two key educational frameworks: constructivism and behaviorism. Constructivism posits that students actively construct meaning through environmental interaction [3]. In this context, it emphasizes student initiative [9] and how learners use prior knowledge to interpret texts [14], which ultimately supports personalized reading recommendations based on diverse interests [1]. Conversely, behaviorism focuses on observable stimulus-response behaviors [18], enabling the identification of measurable patterns such as reading frequency, duration, and material selection [16]. Analyzing these observable behaviors allows researchers to determine how external factors influence reading habits, thereby guiding evidence-based interventions.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the reading habits of fifth-grade pupils and propose evidence-based strategies for improvement. Specifically, the study aims to determine the reading habits of Grade 5 pupils along frequency, duration, and reading materials, and to craft an action plan to promote these habits.

2. Research Methods

This study uses a quantitative descriptive design to examine fifth-grade students' extracurricular reading habits. Data were collected through multiple-choice questionnaires to quantify reading behavior and its influencing factors. Statistical analysis of the responses provides insights into students' habits and offers a foundation for developing effective strategies to improve extracurricular reading engagement and literacy development.

2.1 Participants of the Study

This study was conducted in a Beijing elementary school with six fifth-grade classes totaling 220 students. Using simple random sampling, 150 students were selected based on a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. All fifth-grade students were eligible, but exclusions occurred if parental consent was not given or if a student was absent during questionnaire distribution.

2.2 Instruments

Data were collected using questionnaires designed by the researcher to measure extracurricular reading habits, including frequency, duration, and material preferences. The questionnaires were both used to address specific problem one and in addressing specific problem two. The following are the results of the reliability test of the questionnaire, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Cronbach Reliability Test Results

number of terms	Sample size	Cronbach α coefficient
15	30	0.883

The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.883 indicates very high reliability, as values above 0.8 reflect excellent internal consistency. This suggests the study data are highly reliable.

2.3 Data Collection

The study, approved by the University of Baguio Research Ethics Committee, strictly adhered to ethical research protocols. Researchers coordinated with school management and teachers to administer a 20-minute questionnaire during school hours. Participation was entirely voluntary, with informed consent obtained, ensuring students' rights to withdraw or skip questions without penalty. Participant anonymity and data confidentiality were strictly maintained; no names were recorded, tracking numbers were used for data management, and results were presented solely in aggregate form without revealing individual identities. After data collection, the researchers provided all participants and the school with a summary of findings, ensuring transparency and inclusivity.

2.4 Data Analysis

The gathered data, specifically the responses from the four-level Likert scale regarding the frequency, duration, and preferences of students' reading materials, were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean.

3. Findings

This section presents the results and analysis of a survey of fifth-grade students' extracurricular reading habits based on the results of a questionnaire. The discussion focused on the two main objectives of the study.

3.1 The reading habits of the grade 5 pupils in Shijicheng School

In this section, researchers used graphs to show the statistical results of the study on the reading habits of the grade 5 pupils in Shijicheng School according to Frequency, Duration and type of Reading Materials

3.1.1 The reading habits of the grade 5 pupils in Shijicheng School according to Frequency

As illustrated in Figure 1, the following shows the statistical results of the fifth-grade students' reading frequency.

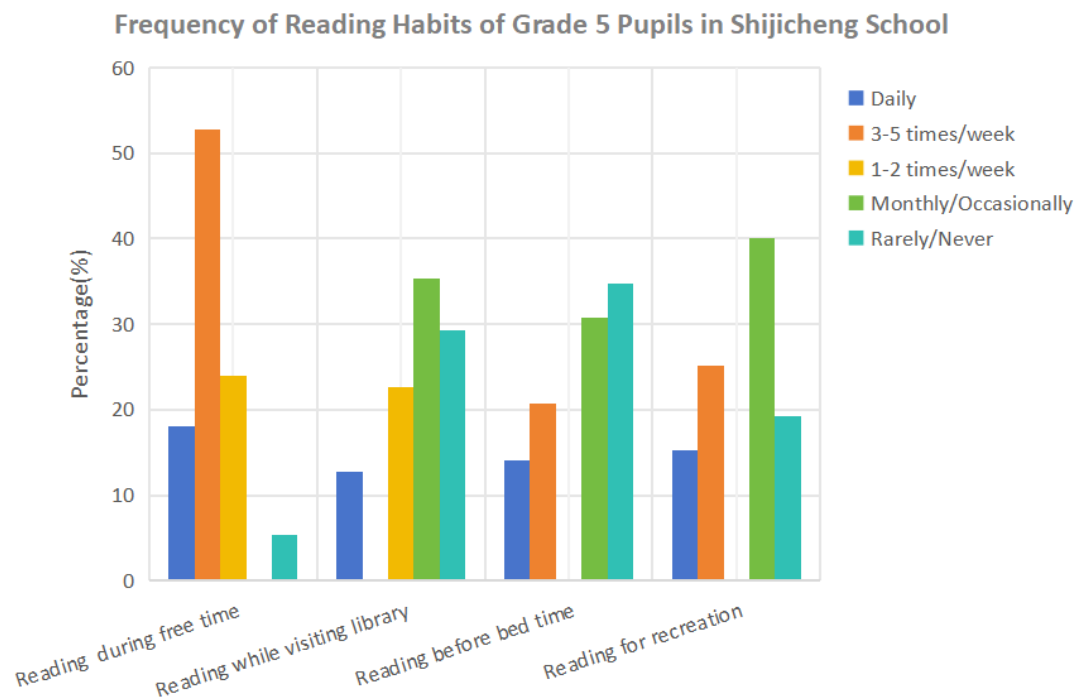


Figure 1 The frequency of fifth-grade pupils in Shijicheng School reading habits according to Frequency

From the result of the survey, it was categorized according to the frequency of their reading such as Daily; 3-5 times a week; 1 – 2 times a week; and rarely or never.

The result on the frequency of reading books or other materials during free time revealed that 52.7% read 3–5 times per week; while 24.0% read 1–2 times per week; and 18.0% read daily; 5.3% rarely or never read. These results are presented from the highest to the lowest frequency. The frequency that shows the highest is 3-5 times a week while the lowest is rarely or never. This shows that there are grade five pupils who are reading daily however not all of them are the same as it shows that 18% of the respondents read daily.

Another indicator on the frequency of reading among the grade five pupils is reading while visiting the library. Considering the options provided such as every day, once or twice a week, once a month and do not visit the library the following transpired as a result: 35.3% visit monthly; 29.3% never visit the library; 22.7% visit once or twice per week; and 12.7% visit daily. The results show that most of the grade five pupils visit the library monthly although there are also pupils who visit daily and they spend their time reading in the library.

From Figure 1, another indicator is the frequency reading before bed time. It shows how often fifth-grade students read before bedtime. This is an inquiry concerning the frequency of their reading habits before sleeping. The results show that the frequency of reading before bed: the highest is 34.7% never

read before bed, 20.7% read several times per week and 14.0% read every night.

It also explores how often fifth-grade students read for entertainment—reading materials not tied to school assignments. This focuses on their voluntary reading habits, offering insights into how much time students dedicate to reading purely for enjoyment. Frequency of recreational (non-homework) reading: 40.0% occasionally; 25.3% several times per week; 19.3% never read for entertainment; and 15.3% daily. The results show that most of the pupils read for recreation occasionally and there are few of them reading for recreation in a daily basis.

Overall, the frequency of reading among Grade five pupils considering the indicators such as reading during free time, during library visit, reading before bedtime and reading for recreation shows not so frequent however they still spend time reading. Few read frequently or not at all. Bedtime and recreational reading habits are weak and inconsistent.

3.1.2 The reading habits of the grade 5 pupils in Shijicheng School according to Duration

As presented in Figure 2, the following details the duration of extracurricular reading among fifth-grade students, encompassing daily average time, single-session length, and weekend reading habits.

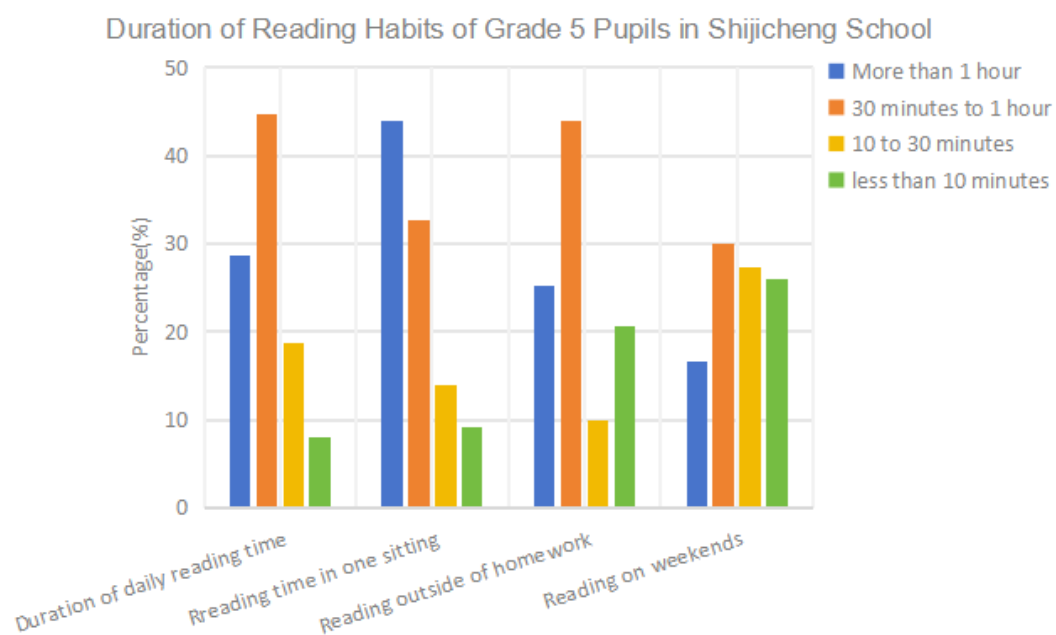


Figure 2 Reading habits of the grade 5 pupils in Shijicheng School according to Duration

The average daily reading time: 73.4% read 30 minutes to 1 hour or longer per day; 26.7% read less than 30 minutes per day, of which 8.0% read less than 10 minutes. From this result it conveys that most grade five pupils spend time reading for a duration of 30 minutes to one hour per day although there are few of them who read less than 10 minutes per day.

Typical duration of a single reading session or one sitting are the following: 44.0% read more than 1 hour per sitting; 32.7% read 30 minutes to 1 hour; 14.0% read 10–30 minutes; 9.3% read less than 10 minutes. This shows that many of the grade five respondents read for a duration of one hour or more while just a few of them report reading for less than 10 minutes in a single sitting.

Figure 2 also shows that aside from spending time reading for homework, they also read materials not related to the latter. The daily extracurricular reading time excluding homework results show: 44.0% read 30 minutes to 1 hour daily; 25.3% read more than 1 hour daily; 10.0% read just a few minutes daily; 20.7% rarely read. Figure 2 also indicates the typical duration before fifth-grade students take a break while reading a storybook. Time to take a break when reading storybooks: 32.7% take a break after more than 1 hour; 25.3% after 30 minutes to 1 hour; 30.7% after 10–30 minutes; 11.3% under 10 minutes.

It was also part of the tool the duration of reading of fifth grade students during weekend and results show that the weekend daily reading time says, 30.0% read 1–2 hours per day; 27.3% read 30 minutes to 1 hour per day; 26.0% read less than 30 minutes per day; 16.7% read more than 2 hours per day.

Overall, while most students show regular reading habits, a significant representation of grade five pupils do not spend much time in terms of reading. They are spending time reading but not necessarily spending much time on it.

3.1.3 The reading habits of the grade 5 pupils in Shijicheng School according to Reading materials

As shown in Figure 3, the following presents the students' preferences regarding the types and formats of extracurricular reading materials.

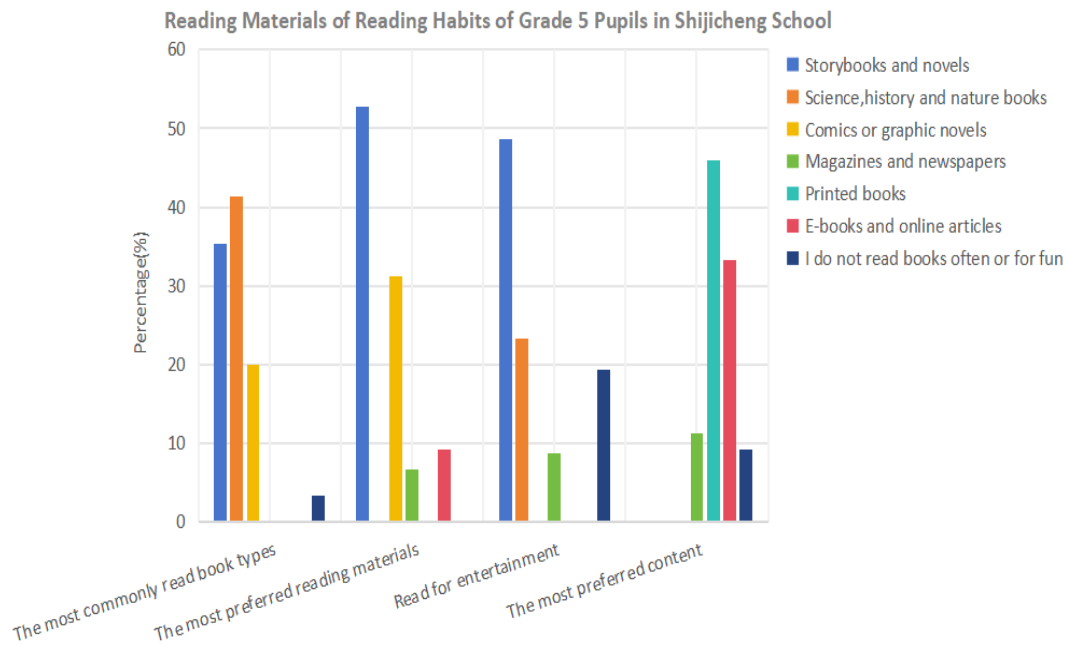


Figure 3 Reading habits of the grade 5 pupils in Shijicheng School according to Reading materials

Most frequently read book types: 41.3% most often read informational/educational books (e.g., science, history); 35.3% most often read storybooks/fiction; 20.0% most often read comics/graphic novels; 3.3% report reading very little. Overall, the data suggests a balance between practical and enjoyable reading preferences. However, over reliance on academic texts may limit literary exposure.

Figure 3 also shows the most preferred reading materials among fifth-grade students. The following are their preferred reading materials: 52.7% prefer storybooks and novels; 31.3% prefer comics/illustrated books; 6.7% prefer magazines or newspapers; 9.3% prefer online articles/blogs. Types of materials for recreational reading: 48.7% prefer fairy tales and adventure stories; 23.3% prefer science and nature books; 8.7% prefer magazines and newspapers; 19.3% report rarely reading for entertainment. Preferred reading formats: 46.0% prefer printed books; 33.3% prefer e-books/online articles; 11.3% prefer magazines/newspapers; 9.3% read rarely.

In summary, most fifth-grade students read 3–5 times per week, with 70% reading 30 minutes to 1 hour daily. However, 40% exhibit fragmented reading habits, and one-quarter read for less than 30 minutes. Educational materials and storybooks dominate reading content, while school libraries remain underused. Family-provided resources are essential, and digital access is increasing. Still, a small group faces limited access and low reading motivation.

3.2 Thematic Analysis of Factors and Strategies for Improving Reading Habits

Through thematic analysis of open-ended questions in questionnaires completed by 150 student participants, this study identified several key factors influencing extracurricular reading habits, as well as improvement strategies widely endorsed by students. The findings were primarily summarized under the following five themes. Family Involvement and Routines: Students emphasized the importance of parents serving as reading role models and believed that establishing a consistent family reading time is central to habit formation. Incentives and Rewards: External incentives such as point systems, small prizes, or certificates of achievement were viewed as effective means of sparking initial interest in reading. Interactive and Gamified Activities: Students showed strong interest in role-playing, reading sharing sessions, and reading-related games. Interest-Driven Diverse Materials: Allowing students to exercise autonomy in selecting materials that align with their personal interests (such as adventure,

science, or comics) significantly enhances reading motivation. Environmental Optimization: Creating a comfortable, pressure-free reading space (such as a reading corner at home or school) is considered an essential external condition for sustaining reading persistence.

The findings from these thematic analyses provide an empirical foundation for the Action Plan proposed later in this paper.

4. Discussion

In this section, researchers analyzed the extracurricular reading experiences of fifth-grade students from three aspects: frequency, duration, and reading materials.

4.1 Analysis of Current Extracurricular Reading Behaviors

4.1.1 Reading habits of the grade 5 pupils according to Frequency

The descriptive pattern of reading frequency shows a clustered distribution in which most students fall into a moderate activity band (3–5 times per week) while a relatively small proportion read every day and a still smaller minority rarely read. This uneven distribution suggests that habitual daily reading has not been fully institutionalized across the cohort; such a pattern is consistent with the literature linking regular reading practice to proximal environmental supports and modeling. The dominant role of home bookshelves supports the “family library effect” [11], where access to books at home significantly enhances reading engagement; parents’ active provision and mediation of books further help shape a supportive reading environment [7]. Low library usage and limited bedtime reading suggest that institutional routines and bedtime rituals are underleveraged as opportunities for sustained reading; interventions that create stable, predictable reading occasions. For example, scheduled in-school independent reading time or structured family reading routines—can reduce the transactional costs of choosing to read and promote habit formation. At the same time, the observed gap between recreational and homework-related reading underscores the need to make reading a pleasurable, intrinsically motivated activity rather than a merely instrumental task, a shift that aligns with self-determination perspectives emphasizing autonomy and interest as drivers of sustained engagement. Practically, these results imply that any program aiming to raise daily reading rates should address both access (books at home or through school/community distribution) and routine (fixed reading moments that lower the friction of initiation), and that family-focused components will likely reach a larger share of students than school-only strategies.

4.1.2 Reading habits of the grade 5 pupils according to duration

Although a strong majority reported reading 30 minutes or more per day, there remains a nontrivial subgroup whose reading is highly fragmented or minimal, indicating heterogeneity in sustained attention and reading stamina across the cohort. The coexistence of a “core” of longer-session readers and a periphery of short-session readers suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach will underperform; interventions should therefore scaffold gradual increases in session length through incremental goals and reinforcement. From a behavioral perspective, reinforcing slightly longer reading episodes with contingent, immediate rewards (for very early stages) can increase the probability of extended sessions, while pedagogies that build reading self-efficacy and strategy use (e.g., guided reading prompts, interest-matched leveled texts) are necessary to convert externally sustained behaviors into internalized habits. Weekend patterns—with a larger share of students reading one to two hours—reveal temporal windows where extracurricular programming or family activities could amplify already existing tendencies; weekend family reading events or community reading clubs can leverage those natural opportunities. For practice, the key implication is to design tiered programs: short-term, high-frequency nudges to initiate reading in low-engagement students, paired with medium-term curricular supports that build stamina and comprehension, and long-term cultural shifts that normalize sustained leisure reading as an ordinary part of childhood life.

4.1.3 Reading habits of the grade 5 pupils according to reading materials

The material preferences and sourcing data indicate that students gravitate toward narrative and visually engaging texts—storybooks, fairy tales, adventure stories, and comics and that family bookshelves are the primary distribution channel for reading materials. This combination suggests that content characteristics (narrative, vivid imagery, episodic structure) strongly mediate children’s reading choices and that access inequalities are likely mediated through household resources. The “home

bookshelf” predominance both highlights the power of family access and raises equity concerns: children without a rich home collection are less likely to encounter a variety of texts and therefore less likely to develop broad reading repertoires. The substantial proportion preferring digital formats (e-books/online articles) also points to the importance of multimodal provision; digital access can supplement print inventories and create flexible reading opportunities, but it also requires attention to device availability and digital literacy. For practitioners and policy makers, the implications are threefold: first, curate and distribute narrative and interest-aligned collections to maximize uptake among reluctant readers; second, prioritize equity interventions that supply books to households or extend school library hours and outreach; third, adopt a blended provision model (print + digital + audio) that matches contemporary preferences while ensuring that digital expansion does not exacerbate existing gaps in access or attention. A well-rounded reading environment is essential to foster deeper interest and long-term engagement [19]. Furthermore, research indicates that the type of extracurricular reading material has a varying impact on skill development; traditional narrative books are more effective than online social media reading in enhancing students’ vocabulary and comprehension [17].

4.2 Action plan for promoting the reading habits

Researchers have found that implementing book clubs through extracurricular programs can effectively leverage students’ autonomy in choice and targeted resources to enhance their motivation to read and foster a positive attitude toward reading [6]. Plus, based on the thematic findings in Section 3.2, the action plan’s proposed short/medium/long timelines therefore map sensibly onto these mechanisms: immediate measures can focus on access and nudges (book giveaways, family reading prompts, simple reward charts), medium-term measures can institutionalize routines and teacher training (regular independent reading blocks, librarian outreach), and long-term measures should aim at cultural shifts (community reading festivals, sustainable home-school book pipelines).

Research implications include testing which combinations of family engagement, material provision, and incentive phasing are most effective for different subgroups, and evaluating whether digital supplements accelerate or dilute sustained reading growth. Policy implications highlight the need for cross-sector collaboration— education, library services, and community organizations—to address access inequities and to embed reading promotion within daily family and school life. Taken together, the findings and the discussion point to several broader implications. For practice, programs that pair material access with routine formation and family engagement are most likely to be effective; interventions should be sensitive to children’s genre and format preferences, and should include a scaffolded pathway from external reinforcement to intrinsic motivation. For policy, addressing disparities in material access (the home bookshelf effect) is essential: school and municipal budgets should prioritize library outreach, mobile book distribution, and partnerships with community organizations to reach children with fewer home resources. For research, future studies should use experimental or quasi-experimental designs to test the causal impact of combined interventions (access + routine + motivation) and to disaggregate effects by baseline engagement levels, socio-economic status, and digital access. Limitations of the present study include its reliance on self-report questionnaire data from a single school context and the cross-sectional design, which together constrain causal inference and generalizability; subsequent research could incorporate observational measures of reading time, teacher logs, and longitudinal follow-up to examine habit persistence. Finally, translating short-term increases in frequency and duration into long-term literacy gains will require attention to comprehension, vocabulary growth, and reading strategies, not merely time-on-task; thus, any reading promotion scheme should be complemented by instructional supports that foster deeper literacy development.

5. Conclusions

Fifth-grade students’ extracurricular reading habits are shaped by family involvement, parental reading behaviors, and intrinsic motivation. Most students read moderately (3–5 times a week), while a few engage minimally. Reading durations vary, with many reading for 30 minutes to an hour, but some show fragmented patterns with shorter sessions. Educational and story-based books are most preferred, while interest in non-fiction materials like magazines and newspapers remains low. Visual materials such as comics are popular for their accessibility. To foster better reading habits, key strategies include strengthening family participation, using rewards and gamified activities, improving reading environments, and offering diverse, interest-based content. These approaches aim to reduce disparities

in access and motivation by promoting sustained and independent reading, supported collaboratively by families, schools, and communities.

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