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It can be challenging to encourage reading among children not already immersed in a strong culture of literacy. An external evaluation showed that Room to Read’s libraries led to an increase in the number of children reading (www.roomtoread.org/library_evaluation). The current study took place with students from Grades 3 and 5 and teachers in 106 schools in Cambodia, Nepal and South Africa and looked in more detail at children’s reading behaviors and what teachers do to encourage children to read.

The study found that new measures of a habit of reading are valid and show that children are reading frequently, with 90 percent reporting that they read in the last week. Children are more likely to read when they frequent library periods and when they have a teacher or librarian trained by Room to Read who conducts reading activities in the library.

We will use these findings to strengthen our Literacy Program by building on effective librarian training, introducing new methods to assess habit of reading and working with schools to make more time for reading.
Introduction
It can be challenging to encourage reading among children not already immersed in a strong culture of literacy. Room to Read aims to promote the habit of reading among primary school children through its Literacy Program, a key component of which is the provision of a library with high quality books, run by a trained librarian.

An external evaluation showed that Room to Read’s libraries led to an increase in the number of children reading for leisure at home and at school (www.roomtoread.org/library_evaluation). The Reading Promotion Study aimed to investigate children’s reading behavior in more detail.

The key questions the study aimed to address were:

• How can habit of reading be measured?

• What do these and other measures tell us about children’s reading behaviors?

• What do effective teachers and librarians do that successfully encourage children to read?

• Does Room to Read training lead to teachers and librarians being more effective at encouraging children to read?

In these respects, the study helps to bring Room to Read’s work on libraries in line with its work on reading and writing instruction. For Room to Read’s instruction work there is an established method of assessing children’s reading skills (the Early Grade Reading Assessment) and consequently the reading skills of children are well described. There is also a strong body of evidence that points to effective ways for teachers to improve reading skills. Similarly this study aims to improve the assessment and description of children’s habit of reading and our understanding of how teachers can promote it.

In addition to the key research questions, the study also aimed to describe more generally behaviors and attitudes of children, teachers and principals related to reading and to understand in more detail the functioning of key aspects of Room to Read’s Literacy Program that aim to promote a habit of reading.
Study Design
2 Study Design

The study took place from July 2013 to December 2014 and included 2,110 students from Grades 3 to 5 in 106 schools in Cambodia (30 schools), Nepal (40 schools), and South Africa (36 schools) – one country from each of the sub-regions (i.e. Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Southern Africa) in which Room to Read implements School Libraries.

Table 1: Study Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>Nepal</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOLS</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENTS</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>2,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBRARIAN/TEACHERS</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPALS</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We used qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a snapshot of children’s habit of reading and the reading activities taking place in a representative sample of our schools. For the qualitative study, we conducted interviews and focus groups with students, teachers and librarians in each country. Findings from the qualitative study, along with findings from pilot studies, informed the design of our quantitative instruments, which included:

- Questionnaires with students, teachers, librarians, principals, administrators and program staff.
- A reliable library period observation protocol that we developed and validated for the study.
- A tool for collecting six months of book checkout records.
- Room to Read’s Library Rating System tool for assessing library quality.
Findings
Findings

Findings at a Glance

New Measures of Habit of Reading Are Valid and Show Children Are Reading Frequently

The study developed new tools which will be used in routine monitoring. This includes new measures of habit of reading, which show that 90 percent of children read independently at least once a week. Around 60 percent of children spontaneously mentioned ‘reading a storybook’ when asked what they like to do in their spare time.

Well-Trained Teachers and Librarians Play a Critical Role in Encouraging Students to Read

An analysis of students’ reading behavior provides the strongest evidence yet that Room to Read’s reading activities, which are based in part on research findings from high-income countries, can also be effective in the resource-poor contexts in which we operate. Overall, students read more frequently and with greater motivation when:

- Teachers at the school are trained by Room to Read and are supported by the principal.
- Teachers at the school conduct a combination of reading activities such as reading aloud, shared reading, paired reading and independent reading.
- The school has frequent library periods with a library that houses books that are favorable to children.
- The language teacher uses library books to reinforce learning.

Room to Read Training on Reading Activities Is Effective

In 2013, Room to Read established global guidelines for training teachers to conduct reading activities with children. Observations conducted during library periods as part of this study showed that this training is effective: The majority of teachers are carrying out most of the key steps of core reading activities according to their training.
Teaching Reading Skills in the Library Period Can Actually Discourage Children from Reading

In some cases, children who said they were ‘learning to read through reading lessons’ in library periods were less motivated to read books. This supports Room to Read’s focus on developing both reading skills and reading habits and suggests that the library period should be reserved specifically for promoting a habit of reading with reading skills being taught in the classroom.

Improving Our Literacy Program

The study also pointed to ways in which we can improve our program. For example, teachers requested more hands-on and participatory methods during training, so as to increase their confidence in carrying out reading activities. With this feedback, we have already started to incorporate these methods into our training programs. Around one-third of teachers found it challenging to find time to prepare and conduct reading activities. More than 75 percent of students in all study countries reported that they were required to pay a fine or the cost of replacement for lost books. Although this did not appear to affect children’s reading motivation, we will do more to monitor and address this in future.
Findings in Depth

Measuring a Habit of Reading

New measures of student habit of reading show children are reading frequently

Currently, Room to Read monitors book checkout as a proxy for habit of reading. This measure could under- or over-report habit of reading. On the one hand, some books are read without being checked out. Researchers questioned the students in our sample and assessed that between 30 and 45 percent of children ‘probably did not read’ the book they had checked out. On the other hand, children may read books without checking them out. Book checkout also does not capture reading motivation, which our findings confirm as an important component of the habit of reading.

We assessed student “habit of reading” with three new measures and also with the existing book checkout measure:

- **Independent reading**: Children’s self-report of how often they read in the last week.

- **Library book titles read**: A test where real and fake book titles are read to children and they indicate whether or not they have read them.

- **Book checkout**: The average number of books checked out per month.

- **Motivation**: Children’s self-report of extrinsic motivation (reading to please others) and intrinsic motivation (reading to achieve one’s own goals).

Based on these measures and other data from the study we have a more accurate picture of children’s reading habit. Around 60 percent of children in all three countries spontaneously mentioned ‘reading a storybook’ when asked what they like to do in their spare time. Figure 1 shows that over 90 percent of students in all three countries said they had read independently at least once in the last week.

When given a list of 20 titles taken from the library, the number that had been read by students varied from 17 percent in Grade 3 in South Africa to 53 percent in Grade 5 in Cambodia. Scores were high for both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (both around 3.4 out of 4 in all three countries).
Most librarians/teachers are conducting Room to Read’s primary reading activities. These include reading aloud, shared reading, paired reading and independent reading. Figure 2 shows the percentage of librarians and teachers who conducted key components of these primary reading activities.
Principal support played a role in teachers conducting reading activities

Teachers’ confidence in their own ability to perform reading activities was highest in South Africa and lowest in Nepal. Teachers in Cambodia who said they felt supported by their principal were more likely to conduct primary reading activities. In general, perceived principal support for the library was lowest in Nepal compared to Cambodia and South Africa. When interviewing principals, 74 percent in South Africa expressed agreement with the statement: “It is important for children to read books purely for fun or enjoyment,” compared to 7 percent in Cambodia and 3 percent in Nepal.

In all three countries, teachers who reported fewer time constraints were more likely to have conducted Room to Read’s primary reading activities during their most recent library period

These activities include reading aloud, shared reading, paired reading, and independent reading. This was either due to teachers genuinely being constrained for time to prepare or conduct reading activities, or they used this to justify their failure to conduct them. Teachers were most challenged for time in Nepal, where only 45 percent of teachers and librarians reported that they had enough time in their schedules for reading activities (compared with 81 percent in Cambodia and 76 percent in South Africa).

Promoting Children’s Reading

Table 2: Factors Promoting or Discouraging Children’s Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors Encouraging Students' Habit of Reading</th>
<th>Factors Discouraging Students' Habit of Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extension reading activities (e.g. drama)</td>
<td>Learning to read / doing class work during library periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher support</td>
<td>Competitions / puzzles during library periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed teacher praise and student engagement during library periods</td>
<td>Lack of new books in the library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students liking the books in the library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language teacher using books in class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers reading aloud and conducting shared reading during library periods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent reading during library periods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers being trained by Room to Read*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More frequent library periods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Typically the comparison is between teachers who received Room to Read training compared with those who received no training, although in Cambodia and South Africa around one-third of teachers and principals had taken part in library training that was not planned by Room to Read.
Table 2 on the previous page summarizes the school-level factors that were most commonly found to encourage or discourage a student’s habit of reading, based on four measures of habit of reading. All variables listed had a statistically significant (p< .05) relationship with students’ reading outcomes in regression analyses. Variables are listed in order of importance based on (i) the strength of the relationship with habit of reading; (ii) the number of measures of habit of reading (out of 4) for which the relationship was found; and (iii) the number of countries (out of 3) in which the relationship was found. See Section 17 of the main report (available upon request) for details.

**More children read when their teachers or librarians were trained**

At the time of the study, training was given to two teachers per school. Students in Cambodia were more likely to read independently when their teachers were trained by Room to Read, and reported having read a higher number of library book titles. Room to Read training was positively associated with both student motivation and book checkout in South Africa.

According to our qualitative and descriptive quantitative findings, librarians and teachers were extremely positive about the training they had received, reporting it to be very useful. In each of the three countries, there were teachers who requested more hands-on and participatory methods during training, so as to increase their confidence in carrying out reading activities. Teachers also expressed a desire for more ongoing support from the partner organizations, whom some felt had little time to support them with technical assistance.

**Primary reading activities led to more children reading**

Student reports of both primary and extension reading activities were positively related to all of the different habit of reading outcomes to varying degrees. Students who did primary reading activities during library periods (including teachers reading aloud, shared reading, paired reading and independent reading) were more motivated to read in Nepal and South Africa, read more books in Cambodia, and read by themselves more in Cambodia and Nepal. Students who did extension reading activities during library periods (including drama and art activities) were more motivated in Cambodia and Nepal, read more books in Nepal and South Africa, and read by themselves more often in all three countries.

![Students’ Observed Reading Activities during Library Periods](image)
In general, children were less motivated to read when library periods were used to teach reading skills

While only between 4 and 7 percent of librarians and teachers in all countries reported that their most recent library periods included reading instruction, there was a great discrepancy between student and teacher reports. Between 80 and 90 percent of students in Cambodia and South Africa reported ‘learning to read through reading lessons’ during library periods (lower at 25 percent in Nepal). In general, children who reported ‘learning to read’ in library periods were less likely to read books voluntarily. This was evidenced in students’ habit of reading independently in Cambodia and South Africa and in their reading motivation in Cambodia. However, in Nepal, children who reported ‘learning to read’ during library periods had read more of the books in the library. Mixed results were also found for the relationships between student reading and student reports of other non-recommended library activities, such as playing with games and puzzles during library periods.

Quizzes and competitions are also not encouraged by Room to Read’s guidelines, but they were among the more common activities reported by students during library periods. They were more common in Cambodia (49 percent of libraries) and South Africa (60 percent) than Nepal (6 percent). In Cambodia, competitions in the library were associated with students being less likely to read independently.

The school library climate matters

Students and teachers in South Africa told us that children appreciated the school library as a clean, peaceful place where students can become absorbed in books and escape the stresses of their lives outside of school: “I feel safe, I feel better, I feel happy.” Likewise, a Nepali student said, “We like to stay in the library/classroom because it is neat and clean, and we can read nice stories sitting there.”

Students like the books in the library and want more new books

Most students (73 percent in Cambodia, 79 percent in Nepal, and 85 percent in South Africa) reported that they liked the books in the library “a lot.” Some students and staff, particularly in Cambodia, expressed a desire for more new books in the library. South Africa had the highest number of students who reported having read most or all of the books in the library, as shown in Figure 4 on the following page.
Despite South African students’ high self-reports of having read most library books, they had the lowest book checkout rate (see Figure 5, below).
More than 75 percent of students in all countries reported that they were required to pay a fine or the cost of replacement for lost books

These are practices which are discouraged by Room to Read. In Nepal, only 19 percent of students were told they could not checkout more books until returning late books, while this number was much higher in Cambodia (75 percent) and South Africa (62 percent). However, our analysis shows that none of these practices actually discouraged children from checking out books.

Students read with their families more than teachers realize

While most principals, librarians and teachers said that students did not read books at home with their family members, many students reported doing so. Regardless of whether or not family members were literate, students reported reading together with them and deriving pleasure and motivation from doing so:

“We read books at home with our siblings... my sister reads for me and my brother teaches me when I don’t know words.” (Student in Nepal).

“I love to read with granny because when I do not know a word, she helps me.” (Student in South Africa).

“I borrowed books to read for my parents, because they cannot read.” (Student in Cambodia).

Children with more advanced reading skills read more

We administered a validated grade-level appropriate reading assessment to each student. Our quantitative analysis showed that children with better reading skills (fluency and comprehension) were more likely to read independently, had read more library books and were more motivated to read in all three countries. Figures 6 and 7 describe the reading skills of children in the study.

![Figure 6: Students Reading at Least 45 Words per Minute](image-url)
Students were motivated to read more when their teachers used books in class

This included reading independently more in Cambodia and Nepal, checking out more books in South Africa, and being more motivated to read in Nepal. Language teachers used books in class less frequently in Nepal, where 70 percent of students said that they were never asked to read books in language class, compared to 30 percent in Cambodia and 18 percent in South Africa. Students who said their language teachers used books in class were more motivated to read and more likely to read independently.

Children who felt more supported and encouraged by teachers were more likely to read and were more motivated to read

In South Africa, children who were observed being engaged with and praised more in library periods were those who had the most developed habit of reading (as measured by the number of library book titles read, book checkout and motivation). Reports of teacher support were generally high, with students in South Africa reporting the highest levels of support and students in Cambodia reporting the lowest. In the qualitative study, students in South Africa said, “I love to read with my teachers,” and “We love to come with our teacher to read for us and to ask us questions.” Our findings suggest that the training program may benefit from an emphasis on encouraging teachers and librarians in the areas of general support, praise, appreciation and availability to students.

Nearly all schools involve parents and communities in the library

Most schools in our sample (94 percent in South Africa, and 100 percent in Cambodia and Nepal) reported holding parent meetings and community events within the past term, with the highest number of events reported in Nepal. Participants spoke and asked the most questions at community events in South Africa, but 67 percent in South Africa had the lowest percentage of librarians reporting that parents sometimes visited the school library compared to 95 percent in Nepal and 100 percent in Cambodia.
Support from Communities and Room to Read Staff

Schools experience high levels of support from Room to Read and want more guidance on library sustainability

In addition to the teacher and principal reports in Figures 8 and 9, Room to Read’s field staff reported both confidence in their ability to perform their duties and a high quality of relationship with schools.

Principals and librarians in our sample took great pride in the libraries at their school, and expressed concerns about the sustainability of libraries after support from Room to Read ends, particularly in Cambodia. In our findings, 50-70 percent of librarians had never trained another teacher, and around one-third stated their belief that other teachers were not interested in reading or in the library. In the words of a Cambodian principal: “We need to take measures so that the library will not be closed [otherwise] students will not access the library. And the consequence is that knowledge of children is limited only within the classroom. They cannot have additional knowledge from the library. When they read more, they will know more.”

Figure 8

Principal Report of Support from Room to Read in the Past Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>Nepal</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped build your skills in observing and providing feedback to librarians and teachers</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped you with ideas for managing and supporting the library</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped you with ideas or tools for involving families and community</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9

Librarian/Teacher Report of Support from Room to Read in the Past School Term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>Nepal</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observed you doing reading activities during library period and recommended improvements</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checked library set up and management and recommended improvements</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated reading activities to you, and provided instruction</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped you with ideas or tools for families and the community</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions and Next Steps
Based on the findings in this study, the Literacy Program will explore the following program improvements:

**Building on effective librarian training**

The study found that training librarians to conduct reading activities was effective. Data showed that core reading activities were key and that future training should focus on these. Teachers should be discouraged from teaching reading skills or doing other classwork during library periods. Training can also be improved to give teachers opportunities for practice. In each of the three countries there were teachers who requested more hands-on and participatory methods during training, so as to increase their confidence in carrying out reading activities.

It is also clear that teachers in the school who did not attend Room to Read training were less effective in promoting children’s reading. However, those teachers who did attend Room to Read training were not effectively passing on the knowledge to other teachers. We will look at ways to reach more teachers from each school either by inviting more teachers to training sessions outside the school or by introducing school-based training.

The study also showed that teachers promoted reading by praising and encouraging students. This element could also be emphasized in training.

**Introducing new methods to monitor habit of reading**

The study showed that there were limitations in using book checkout as a measure of habit of reading. Book checkout should continue to be part of methods for monitoring a habit of reading, but should also be supplemented with children’s self-report and the book title recognition test.

**Working with schools to make time for reading**

The results showed that frequent library periods promoted reading. Lack of time was a key barrier to teachers’ preparing and performing reading activities in these periods. Our Global Indicators results showed that Room to Read schools have an average of 61 minutes of library periods every week for each class. Therefore, we should work with teachers and schools to help ensure this time is available in every school and to help teachers make more time to prepare and conduct reading activities.

**Ensuring children are not discouraged from checking out books by fines**

Around 75 percent of children reported that they were fined for losing library books against Room to Read policy. Although evidence from this study suggests that fines do not reduce children’s motivation to read, we will investigate this issue further and work to ensure children are not discouraged from checking out books by such policies.