



The Role of Alif Laila Book Bus Society (ALBBS) in Promotion of the Literacy Culture and Healthy Activities among Underprivileged Children

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the contribution of the Alif Laila Book Bus Society (ALBBS) in fostering literacy and promoting healthy activities among disadvantaged children in Lahore, Pakistan. ALBBS was founded in 1978 and has been in the forefront of mobile library efforts, including buses and camel libraries, to make educational materials more accessible in both urban and rural areas. The organization's endeavors, encompassing the dissemination of books, the creation of interactive learning spaces, and the formation of hobby clubs, are designed to cultivate a supportive learning environment that promotes both educational and personal development. The abstract outlines the society's strategy for promoting reading and fostering creative expression among children who lack sufficient access to these resources. Furthermore, it examines the influence of these initiatives on the advancement of literacy and emphasizes the crucial importance of community and international collaborations in expanding the scope and efficacy of literacy programs. This study highlights the substantial impact of ALBBS on educational development and its continuous endeavors to improve the lives of young people in Pakistan through literacy and education, based on a qualitative examination of program outcomes.



Introduction

According to the position statement of the National Council of Teachers of English Commission on Reading, reading is a complex and purposeful process that involves both social and cognitive aspects. It is when readers use their knowledge of the text's topic and their understanding of their culture to create meaning. According to Coutant and Perchemlides (2005, p. 42), reading is not a skill that is learned once and for all during the early years of education, but rather a process that develops throughout time.

Reading habits refer to the regular and enjoyable engagement in reading, in any form, for leisure purposes, which brings both pleasure and a sense of addiction. This addiction typically emerges during early childhood. Reading is widely acknowledged as an artistic endeavor with the power to profoundly change an individual's life and the community in which they live. However, in this day of advancing technology, reading is diminishing due to various technologies. Currently, children have discovered novel methods of entertainment, making it exceedingly difficult to cultivate a love for reading in them. Literacy is essential for self-education and continuous learning. Engaging in the practice of "reading to learn" is a crucial strategy for developing the skills necessary to become a lifelong learner. Facilitating the development of a widespread reading culture among children is a fundamental responsibility of a school teacher. Encouraging children and young people to read books from a young age can perhaps deter them from participating in terrorism. Compassion and empathy will be scarce until we equip our youngsters with books. Mark Twain, the American author, famously expressed the idea that being in a well-stocked library gives one a sense of absorbing the knowledge from all the books, even without reading them, as if it were seeping through their skin. The citation for this information is (Haslam, 2012, p. 12). 'Reading for the sake of acquiring knowledge' is a fundamental instrument for continuous learning throughout one's life. One of the main objectives of the curriculum reform is to enhance students' learning capacities by fostering a culture of reading among them.

Review of the Related Literature

Onwubiko (1985) categorised the purposes of reading into four primary groups. The following categories of reading can be identified: 1) Reading for recreational purposes, such as enjoyment and relaxation; 2) Reading for the acquisition of information; 3) Reading for the purpose of gaining knowledge through study; and 4) Reading that encompasses any combination of the aforementioned categories. The final two objectives need the most effort in terms of the entirety of activities encompassed in children's reading habits within a community and the reading culture of that society. According to a study conducted by McKool and Gespass (2009), there is a significant correlation between the extent of a student's extracurricular reading and their academic achievement (p. 111). Research has also demonstrated that kids' academic proficiency does not remain stagnant, but rather declines if they do not engage in leisure reading (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006). Engaging in leisure reading also serves to expand readers' experiences and enhance their overall understanding (Smith, 2020). Engaging in leisure reading enhances readers' attitudes and motivation towards reading. Engaging in this form of reading can bolster a reader's self-assurance, as individuals tend to opt for less challenging material, such as magazines and comics, for their recreational reading, rather than the required texts in school. Engaging in leisure reading has been proven to enhance children's scholastic achievement as it leads to an expansion of their vocabulary (McKool, 2007; Nippold et al., 2005). One possible reason for this is that low-income families have a limited number of reading materials at home. As a result, children rely heavily on their teachers and school libraries for reading materials, which often do not have the resources that children find interesting for leisure reading (McKool, 2007). In addition, children from low-income households generally attend schools that lack sufficient financing, materials, and resources, resulting in impoverished educational environments (Bailey, 2006).

Problem Statement

This study aims to investigate the impact of the Alif Laila Book Bus Society (ALBBS) on promoting children's reading habits and cultivating a lifetime love for learning. It also examines the various tactics, programmes, and activities used by society to promote leisure reading and healthy activities among youngsters. This study aims to offer valuable insights to policy makers and education ministers regarding the often overlooked domain of children's reading habits in the digital age, with the goal of safeguarding the future of the nation. This study primarily examines the role of ALBBS and its various initiatives and programmes that administrators might implement on a broad scale.

Limitation of The Study

The author endeavors to comprehensively examine the various functions and accomplishments of the Alif Laila Book Bus Society (ALBBS). However, due to the organization's extensive involvement in numerous projects and programs across Pakistan and internationally, it is conceivable that certain significant events or programs may have been inadvertently overlooked or that the author was unable to obtain data pertaining to certain endeavors.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive research that aims to investigate an organization's roles and accomplishments in promoting a reading culture and healthy activities among children. The author employed many methods to gather data, including personal observation, examination of organizational documents, analysis of the organization's website, review of blogs discussing the organization, and direct discussion with relevant staff members.

Definition of Terms

Leisure Reading is defined for the purpose of this study from Mellon, as cited by Hughes-Hassell & Lutz (2006): as "the reading children do by choice as opposed to the reading children are assigned by teachers" (39).

Analysis and Discussion

Alif Laila Book Bus Society

Since its founding in 1978, the Alif Laila Book Bus Society has worked to improve literacy and educational possibilities for Pakistan's poor children in Lahore. The goal of this organization is to modernize education and reach 100% literacy rate within Pakistan's socioeconomic limitations. Their focus is on using cutting-edge techniques, including camel libraries and mobile libraries that resemble buses, to engage young readers with books and educational resources. The goal of these programs is to reach kids in isolated rural and urban locations.

History and Background

At The American School in Lahore, Ms. Nita Baker took the initiative to establish a library so that kids might reach their full reading ability. She had the brilliant idea to use a double-decker bus that the Punjab Road Transport Corporation had provided to house a library in order to draw in kids. There were stacks of English and Urdu literature on both decks of the bus. The community convinced the Lahore Development Authority to create a children's park around the Stationed Bus Library after realising how important it was for government school pupils to have access to this library and to be safe while doing so.

Three cutting-edge libraries are available to draw in kids of all ages.

Children under the age of eight are the only ones allowed to use the Book Bus or stationed bus library. The bus has two decks: a lower level filled with books and an upper deck where youngsters listen to stories told by a female instructor.

The second library, known as "Daastangou" or "The Story Teller," is housed in a mobile bus and serves kids who are unable to visit the reference library or stationed bus. The other is a reference library with five thousand volumes on different subjects. Boys under 15 are not eligible to utilize this facility, however girls of all ages are. A total of 1,495 students from public and private schools signed up as members in 2007. These libraries welcome visitors from other schools that

send kids there on field trips in addition to regular patrons. ALBBS began offering project-based learning and skill centers in the 1980s. These are educational partnerships between the public and private sectors that provide girls from various government schools with instruction in computers, electronics, arts, and crafts.

Mission and Objectives

It central mission to;

Improving the skills and knowledge of all girls and young women in order to instill in them a sense of wonder and an inclination to investigate, try new things, learn, comprehend, and innovate in order to make their mental processes autonomous and to give them the self-assurance they need to stand up for what's right and promote change. We provide them practical instruction in a range of subjects to improve their abilities and creative thinking.

The society has many objectives including;

The main goal of Alif Laila is to develop solutions for the educational issues facing Pakistan and the Third World. Within the constraints of socioeconomic conditions, the organization seeks to identify strategically effective routes towards universal literacy and educational modernization that will yield the best results in terms of time and cost-benefit ratio.

According to ALBBS President Basarat Kazim, "it is a passion, straight from the heart, that started 35 years ago." "We aimed to ignite children's imaginations, regardless of their financial status." Our goal was to broaden their perspectives and encourage them to begin posing inquiries about the world in which they live.

The Alif Laila mobile library was created as a consequence of this concept. It is a bus that has been modified to hold books and offer a pleasant and safe reading environment for kids. Depending on their financial situation, children must pay between 50 and 500 rupees a year to utilize the bus library. Young readers might lose themselves in their imaginations and forget about the outer world when they are inside the bus.

In Pakistan, there are barely 2,000 public and private libraries total, and only 4 of them serve young readers. ALBBS brings books directly to young readers in an effort to address this issue. According to Kazim, "you don't need a huge library with thousands of books." "A small shelf in a mechanic's shop will do."

In addition to introducing kids to the joys of reading, Alif Laila Book Bus Society runs a number of hobby groups that promote technical proficiency as well as interactive learning tools for early childhood education. These groups are specifically designed to empower young girls and point them in the direction of possible jobs in these areas.

More than 7000 libraries have been established, more than 1000 master trainers have been trained, and more than 1.5 million books have been donated by the organization. Their creative mobile libraries—like the camel libraries—are renowned for reaching out to kids in Pakistan's remote and hilly regions, which are sometimes difficult to access. These libraries are a part of larger projects that involve partnerships with foreign organizations in order to increase their efficacy and reach.

Additionally, the organization plays a crucial role in Pakistan's International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), which promotes children's reading and literature across the country. Alif Laila has broadened its reach by collaborating with organizations such as WaterBridge Outreach. This has allowed it to supply schools and communities that don't have access to these resources with libraries in a box that are filled with books and educational tools.

Membership Criteria:

Students attending private schools pay an annual membership fee of Rs. 500, while those attending government schools pay Rs. 50. For 500 rupees a year, other youngsters can also become members without facing any prejudice based on their race, religion, or ethnicity. The ALBBS authority may waive the entire membership fee or a portion of it, depending on the circumstances, if a student is unable to pay it.

The ALBBS is serving six Govt. schools free of cost. These schools are;

1. Govt. Girls High School, Bashir memorial, Lahore
2. C. D. Govt. Girls High School, Shadman, Lahore.
3. Govt. Girls High School, B-block, Lahore.
4. Govt. Girls High School, Walton, Lahore.
5. Al-Mishal School, Lahore.
6. C. D. Govt. Girls High School, Barkat Market, Lahore.

Prominent Initiatives taken by the ALBBS

For instance, the Alif Laila Book Bus Society has put in place a number of initiatives to raise literacy rates and encourage youngsters to embrace reading. In several of their programmes, books are distributed to communities and schools using creative techniques like camel libraries and mobile bus libraries. These initiatives include kids in learning- and creativity-promoting activities in addition to providing instructional materials. The organization has significantly improved children's literacy in Pakistan by effectively establishing thousands of libraries and distributing millions of books.

Apart from book distribution, the organization has started initiatives such as the "Library in a Box" program, which offers mobile libraries to schools that do not have adequate space. Through the expansion of literacy access to rural areas, this project has made sure that children living in these areas have equal access to educational materials as their counterparts in more metropolitan areas.

These initiatives are well-known and backed by global alliances, which increases their influence. Through partnerships with groups like WaterBridge Outreach and IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People), the society has been able to reach a larger audience and obtain the funding required to continue and grow its projects.

You may wish to examine official reports and updates from sources like the Alif Laila Book Bus Society website or associated organizations like Books for Pakistan and WaterBridge Outreach for a more thorough grasp of the effects of these programs and more information on their particular projects and results. These platforms offer in-depth perspectives on the society's continuous endeavors and accomplishments in advancing literacy and education in Pakistan.

Through this special concept, Alif Laila prepares young schoolgirls for a future that values skill, innovation, and creativity by offering them free, hands-on, practical instruction. There are four groups, specifically:

- Computer Club
- Electronic Club
- Crafts Club
- Art and Design Club

Free transportation is another service they offer to and from the resource centres. The resource centres are advantageous to the community as well. In order to provide women in the community access to crucial skills that they would not otherwise have, special computer lessons are offered in the afternoon.

These groups are available to Reference and Stationed Bus Library members. There is no extra cost imposed on the pupils. Every club offers a one-year course taught by certified teachers. Students get certificates upon completion of the course.

Additionally, the Society has been working on creating educational resources for young children.

This content consists of:

1. Children storybooks
2. Resource books
3. Quarterly magazines
4. Subject kits
5. Interactive learning aids

6. Audio visual productions
7. Educational rugs & posters.

The goal of creating instructional materials is to guarantee meaningful learning by making it enjoyable and engaging. Additionally, these children get the chance to go to the Stationed Bus library once a week. There weren't enough government primary schools in Basti Saidan Shah to handle the influx of students seeking enrollment. ALBBS started offering activity-based learning at a middle school and began sessions for students in Nursery through Grade III at the request of the local community. Additionally, PCE's Punjab chapter is hosted by Alif Laila. The Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE) is an alliance of people and civil society partners who have come together to advocate for and voice concerns about the country's educational system.

The organization provides free services to these schools. A pick-up and drop-off service is also offered. One school is served on the designated day of the week according to the set timetable. For a total of two years, starting in the sixth grade, the ALBBS provided orientation until the conclusion of the seventh grade. Students at these schools receive free instruction in electronics, computers, art, and crafts. The prominent functions of the organization are:

1.STORY TELLER

In 1998, the Alif Laila Mobile Library Program was launched. Known as the "Story Teller" in English and "Dastangou" in Urdu, the Alif Laila Mobile Library makes weekly trips to partnering schools that educate impoverished children. Schoolchildren are permitted to check out a sizable assortment of reference books and storybooks in both English and Urdu. Every day at the conclusion of the school day, the Story Teller's shelves are restocked with fresh books so that the following day, when it arrives at a new school, its shelves are once again full. As of late, the Story Teller has visited several public and private schools, making people happy everywhere it goes. Children are fascinated by the unusual concept of really seeing a bus full of books, which draws them in closer to books and the fantastical worlds they hold. After observing the Story Teller's success in Lahore, we launched an initiative to bring it to Sheikhpura, which is close by, with the assistance of Save The Children UK. Each month, the Story Teller makes 40 trips to government schools, helping 4000–4500 kids.

2.BOOK BUS

1998 saw the launch of the Alif Laila Mobile Library Program. The Alif Laila Mobile Library, also known as the "Story Teller" in English and "Dastangou" in Urdu, makes weekly trips to partnering schools that educate impoverished children. There are plenty of reference books and picture books available in both English and Urdu for schoolchildren to check out. The Story Teller's book shelves are restocked at the conclusion of each school day so that the following day, when it arrives at a new school, the shelves are once again full.

Since its inception, the Story Teller has delighted students at both public and private institutions by making people smile. Children are drawn to books and the fantastical worlds they hold when they witness the unique concept of really seeing a bus full of books. With the assistance of Save The Children UK, we launched an initiative to bring the Story Teller to the neighboring city of Sheikhpura after observing its success in Lahore. Here, the Storyteller visits 40 government schools every month, helping between 4000 and 4500 kids.

3.REFERENCE LIBRARY

In the park next to the lending library, construction on a reference library started in 1985 and was successfully finished in 1987. Only books that can be read inside the library's walls cover a wide range of subjects, from the natural sciences to arts and crafts. Additionally, this library has access to audio-visual technology, which allows kids to watch engaging videos on a variety of topics, including science, travel, cartoons, and children's stories. Thousands of volumes on physics, chemistry, biology, sciences, mathematics, geography, economics, Islam, natural studies, English language, English literature, and Urdu are available at the Reference Library. Furthermore, the majority of children's magazines and numerous encyclopaedias are published in Urdu.

Please visit the Alif Laila Reference Library in Main Market Lahore or to become a member.

Malala Library

Malala's school now has a library thanks to Alif Laila/IBBY Pakistan, friends, and well-wishers from the United States, as well as students from Lahore Grammar School 55, Main Gulberg, Lahore. We have currently sent 60 plush toys and 1648 books to the young girls enrolled in the school. This year, we intend to establish tiny libraries at several girls' schools in Swat and donate additional books to the school.

4. HOBBY CLUB

With the assistance of students from Lahore Grammar School 55, Main Gulberg, Lahore, as well as friends and well-wishers from the United States, Alif Laila/IBBY Pakistan has established a library in Malala's school. We have given 60 plush toys and 1648 books to the school's young ladies thus far. This year, we intend to build little libraries in several of Swat's girls' schools in addition to sending additional books to the school.

1. Computer Club 2. Electronic Club 3. Art Club 4. Craft Club

Projects and Programs

The organization has completed a lot of projects including Read, Lead, Succeed, Digital Means, Living Libraries, Book Build Bridges, Model Early Childhood Centres, and Schehrezade Ka Khazana, etc.

In the same way they are running a lot of programs and completed a list of programs including School Improvement Program, Consultancies Services, Advocacy Campaign, and Women Empowerment Program.

PARTNERS

The organization has a many known and famous brands as its partners including UNICEF, TOYOTA, Punjab Library Foundation, UNESCO, Tetra Pak. ICI, Inter Cooperation, Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Lahore American Society, etc.

Activities in Sheikhupura

Sheikhupura Reading Festival

Launched in November 2011, the Sheikhupura reading campaign, Living Libraries, saw the establishment of a cluster-based model school library in a district government school. At the moment, the same library serves four schools. Additionally, a mobile library service has been started to connect with schools located in remote parts of the district. In a month, the bus service serves sixty schools. Approximately 10,500 youngsters are reached by the programme.

On February 21 and 22, 2012, the Government Girls High School Housing Colony in Sheikhupura hosted a reading festival organised by the Alif Laila Book Bus Society. Children from various government schools attended the festival, which was organised at the district level, and participated in a variety of events. There were more than two thousand kids present at the event.

With creatively and thoughtfully planned events and initiatives, the inaugural Sheikhupura Reading Festival sought to effectively engage and involve all pertinent stakeholders in the promotion of children's literature and the joy of reading. Numerous activities, including storytelling sessions, interactive workshops, writing and reading competitions, puppet shows, and a variety of art and craft projects, kept the students and participants interested. To guarantee the highest possible level of participation from the youngsters, the programmes were specifically created for each age group. During the festival, Alif Laila's mobile library service was unveiled.

There was also a competition for kids to write stories. Kids in grades 5 through 10 took part in the competition. There was also a competition for poetry recital.

Advocacy & Media Campaign to Promote Reading and Literacy

In the Sheikhupura area, a wide-ranging lobbying and media campaign has been initiated with the specific goal of raising awareness of the value of reading and fostering a vibrant, strong reading culture. The campaign tagline is straightforward but effective:

**Parhe ga Sheikhupura, Barhe ga Sheikhupura
Sheikhupura will Read, Sheikhupura will Prosper**

Through the campaign, the District Government Department, elected officials, the media, educators, parents, students, the business community, civil society organizations, and young people have all been engaged as pertinent stakeholders. Posters have been placed in all Tehsil Sheikhpura government schools, government education departments, and the District Coordinator's Office as part of the reading incentive initiative.

Achievements: -

The article highlights honors granted to organizations that support the promotion of reading among children and youth, such as Alif Laila Book Bus Society in Lahore, Pakistan; Proyeto Bibliothecas, or PROBIGUA, from Guatemala; and Mala de leitura from the Amazon region of Brazil.

Conclusion

In summary, the Alif Laila Book Bus Society (ALBBS) in Lahore, Pakistan, has significantly improved literacy and encouraged healthful activities among impoverished kids. Since its founding in 1978, ALBBS has successfully made use of cutting-edge strategies to provide children in both urban and rural locations with access to educational resources, such as camel and mobile libraries. Through a variety of programmes, such as hobby clubs, interactive learning aids, and Library in a Box programmes, ALBBS has not only helped to significantly raise literacy rates but also created an atmosphere that supports young learners' creative and intellectual potential. The organization's persistent outreach to underserved neighbourhoods has made sure that these kids have access to educational options that foster critical thinking and creative expression in addition to literacy. ALBBS is a prime example of a committed effort to foster a culture of reading and continual education, which is essential for Pakistan's socioeconomic growth, through its ongoing partnerships with both local and foreign partners. This approach, which aims to uplift children via education and creative involvement, not only draws attention to the significant work done by ALBBS but also establishes a standard for efforts of a similar nature around the world.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

In order to bolster the impact of the Alif Laila Book Bus Society (ALBBS) in fostering literacy and promoting wholesome activities among disadvantaged youngsters, a number of suggestions could be taken into account:

ALBBS aims to enhance the mobile library network by expanding the fleet of buses and camel libraries, thereby extending their access to distant and underserved regions. This extension will facilitate wider availability of books and educational resources, thereby narrowing the disparity in literacy rates between urban and rural areas.

The integration of digital resources involves the inclusion of digital learning tools and resources into mobile libraries. This would update the educational offerings and meet the various learning needs of students. Enhancing learning outcomes could be considerably improved by offering access to e-books, educational apps, and online learning platforms, since digital literacy is becoming increasingly crucial.

Community Engagement Programs: By implementing seminars, reading clubs, and parent education programs, the effectiveness of literacy initiatives can be enhanced through the reinforcement of community engagement. Involving parents and community leaders in recognizing the significance of education could cultivate a more encouraging atmosphere for children's academic development.

Engaging in partnerships with educational institutions, such as schools, universities, and other educational establishments, can offer further resources and specialized knowledge. These relationships may encompass student volunteer programs aimed at aiding libraries, contributing to educational efforts, or participating in community outreach initiatives.

Regular impact assessment involves the implementation of a system to regularly evaluate the efficacy of different programs, allowing for a better understanding of their influence and identifying areas that require improvement. This may entail gathering data on literacy rates, rates of school attendance, and other educational indicators prior to and during the implementation of ALBBS programs.

Securing financing through grants, sponsorships, and contributions is crucial for ensuring the long-term viability of current programs and the creation of new projects. Promoting successful outcomes and the concrete advantages of the organization's initiatives can entice further private and corporate donors.

Expanding the range of books and resources to encompass not just educational content, but also narratives from many cultures and languages, helps foster inclusivity and expand children's perspectives.

By implementing these suggestions, ALBBS may continue to strengthen its already successful base, advancing its goal of improving literacy and fostering healthy growth among poor children in Pakistan.

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