

THE ROLE OF READING IN MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract:

Reading can be done in different languages. Reading in one's mother tongue is easier to read and understand. Reading makes a person knowledgeable and he gets a new friend in the form of a book. Reading is an art. Reading makes a person human, gives a new direction to life, teaches him to think, makes him introverted, and also makes him aware of what is right and wrong in life. There is a saying in our society that 'If you read, you will become wise'. Now a days school going children must to read to improve their focus. That's why in schools are continuously improving the libraries in the school which are rich filled with various books like adventure, fantasy, morals etc. They also focus on how to engage the child understanding their thoughts while reading. Reading increases connectivity in the brain, reduces stress, promotes relaxation. Because of reading Improves mental health, such as reducing stress, increasing concentration, improving memory, and reducing the risk of diseases like Alzheimer's. Reading stimulates the imagination and helps improve social skills. Reading helps reduce stress, as it allows you to disconnect from your surroundings and relax. Just six minutes of reading can reduce muscles tension. Since reading requires focus, it helps improve your concentration and memory. Reading increases connectivity in the brain and helps it function more effectively, which improves memory. Boosts imagination: Reading fiction increases your imagination and helps you understand the emotions and mental states of others, which improves social relationships. The habit of reading can improve the quality of sleep, as it promotes relaxation.

Keywords: Children, Reading, Mental Health, Well Being, School Library Role.

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Introduction:

Reading has long been regarded as a gateway to knowledge, imagination, and emotional development. Beyond its academic importance, research increasingly highlights reading as a vital contributor to mental and even physical well-being, especially for children. For school-going children—who face academic pressures, social challenges, and rapid cognitive development—reading offers a safe, powerful tool for emotional regulation, personal growth, and overall wellness. The school library, often considered the heartbeat of a learning environment, plays a critical role in shaping these positive outcomes by providing access, structure, and a peaceful space for literacy engagement.

This article explores how reading supports children's mental and physical health, enhances focus, nurtures psychological resilience, and how school libraries

contribute to the holistic well-being of young learners.

Reading as a Foundation for Mental Well-Being:

For many children, reading provides a calming escape from the pressures of daily life. Engaging with a story lowers the heart rate, reduces muscle tension, and creates a meditative state similar to mindfulness. When children immerse themselves in a book, they temporarily detach from stressors like exams, peer conflicts, or overstimulation from technology.

Stories also help children understand and manage their emotions. Characters often face challenges similar to the reader's own experiences—fear, anger, anxiety, friendship issues, or family changes. By witnessing how characters navigate these situations, children learn coping skills indirectly.

Benefits included Lower stress and anxiety, Increased emotional vocabulary, Greater empathy and self-

awareness, Improved mood and mental stability. Reading fiction, especially, is shown to increase emotional intelligence. Children understand diverse viewpoints through characters' thoughts and feelings, making them more emotionally adaptable. Reading strengthens neural pathways involved in comprehension, memory, and critical thinking. When children read, they decode words, visualize scenes, make predictions, and connect ideas. This active mental engagement stimulates the brain more thoroughly than passive activities like watching videos. Cognitively, reading supports: Improved memory retention, Enhanced concentration, Stronger problem-solving skills, better comprehension and reasoning abilities. Additionally, repeated exposure to language improves vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills—key factors in academic confidence and reduced stress in school environments.

In an era dominated by fast-paced media and constant screen notifications, children struggle with fragmented attention. Reading, especially for extended periods, trains the mind to focus on a single task. This deep reading process strengthens sustained attention and reduces impulsivity.

Children who read regularly often demonstrate: longer attention spans, better impulse control, Higher academic performance, Improved patience and mindfulness. This focused attention translates to improved classroom engagement and greater ability to complete challenging tasks without distraction.

Reading and Children's Psychology:

Children's psychology is deeply intertwined with imagination. Reading stimulates creative thinking by encouraging children to form mental images, create interpretations, and imagine alternate outcomes. This imaginative capacity strengthens cognitive flexibility—an essential trait for problem-solving and emotional adaptability. Books also encourage children to think beyond their immediate surroundings, fostering

curiosity and intrinsic motivation to explore ideas.

Books give children opportunities to see themselves reflected in characters or to explore identities vastly different from their own. This dual exposure builds both personal confidence and open-mindedness. When children read, they discover interests, values, and aspirations. They feel understood when reading stories that mirror their lives. They gain insight into cultures and experiences different from theirs, fostering tolerance and empathy. This contributes significantly to healthy psychological development.

Reading, particularly fictional narratives, introduces children to complex social situations—friendships, conflicts, moral dilemmas, and family relationships. By observing characters' interactions, children learn about consequences, communication, and empathy.

This helps them navigate Peer pressure, Bullying, Competition, Social misunderstandings. Overall, reading provides a safe psychological space for children to explore and understand real-life social dynamics.

Reading and Physical Well-Being:

At first glance, reading might appear to benefit only mental and academic aspects of life, but it also contributes indirectly and directly to physical well-being. Lower stress levels have measurable physical benefits. When children read, especially enjoyable or calming stories, their bodies produce fewer stress hormones like cortisol. This leads to Lower blood pressure, Improved sleep quality, Better immune response, Reduced physical tension. Reading before bedtime is especially beneficial—it calms the nervous system and helps establish a healthy sleep routine, crucial for growing children.

Reading promotes neural growth and strengthens the brain's connectivity, which is essential during childhood—a peak period for brain plasticity. Stronger neural networks help children regulate movement, coordination, and sensory processing more effectively.

When guided properly, reading can help children practice good posture and relaxation habits. Schools and libraries often incorporate reading corners, cushions, and ergonomically designed seating to encourage healthy physical habits while reading. Reading time can also provide a quiet physical break from intense activities, giving children a chance to relax their bodies.

Children today are exposed to high levels of digital stimuli—bright screens, fast content, interactive games. While technology has benefits, excessive exposure leads to Decreased focus, High stress and irritability, Sleep disturbances, Impulsive behaviour.

Reading counterbalances this by providing a slower, more structured form of mental engagement. It teaches the brain to slow down, process information deeply, and remain present. Reading routines, such as reading after lunch or before bedtime, create stability in a child's day. Predictable routines help regulate emotions and behaviour. This sense of stability contributes to Reduced anxiety, Improved self- discipline, Higher emotional security. Children feel more grounded when they know they have a designated time and space to relax with a book.

Academic stress is a major cause of anxiety among school-aged children. Reading strengthens comprehension, vocabulary, and language skills, which directly boosts academic performance. When children feel competent in reading, other subjects become easier. This confidence reduces stress and builds a healthier, more positive attitude toward school. Reading requires stillness and quiet attention, which mirrors mindfulness practices. When children deeply engage in a story, they enter a focused, peaceful mental state that helps reduce intrusive thoughts and emotional distress.

The Vital Role of School Libraries in Children's Well-Being:

School libraries are more than just resource center, they are safe havens of learning, exploration, and wellness.

A well-organized library provides a peaceful space away from noise and overstimulation. Soft lighting, quiet corners, and comfortable seating create an atmosphere of calm that promotes both mental and physical relaxation. Children often visit libraries not just to read, but to feel safe, centered, and grounded. Librarians play a crucial role by Recommending age-appropriate books, Guiding reluctant readers, Encouraging reading diversity, Organizing storytelling sessions and book clubs. These activities make reading enjoyable and accessible for all kinds of learners.

Modern school libraries incorporate features that support physical health Ergonomic seating, Proper lighting to reduce eye strain, Reading corners with natural materials and Calm zones for sensory- sensitive children. These design choices help reduce fatigue, encourage good posture, and provide a soothing environment for neurodiverse learners.

To Promote Social Well-Being School libraries often serve as social hubs where children share books, participate in group activities, and interact in a low-pressure environment. This helps Build friendships, Strengthen communication skills, Develop teamwork habits, Support introverted or anxious students. Libraries nurture a sense of belonging, which is essential for psychological development.

Libraries provide resources that help students prepare for exams, complete projects, or seek extra help. Access to reliable information reduces academic anxiety and encourages independent learning. Children feel empowered when they can solve problems on their own with the help of library resources.

Parents play a vital role in nurturing reading habits. When children see adults reading, they imitate the behavior. Parents can support reading by Providing books at home, Reading with children daily, Creating a screen-free reading time and Visiting libraries together. A supportive home environment amplifies the mental and physical benefits of reading.

Conclusion: Reading as a Path to Holistic Well-Being

Reading is a powerful tool that supports mental, emotional, and physical well-being in school-going children. It nurtures focus, calms the mind, enriches imagination, and builds psychological resilience. In a fast-paced, digitally saturated world, reading offers a much-needed pause—a grounding activity that restores balance.

School libraries play a vital role in this journey. They provide access to quality books, safe spaces for relaxation, and structured programs that promote reading habits. By supporting both mental and physical well-being, libraries help shape healthier, happier, and more successful learners.

Ultimately, reading is not just an academic skill—it is a lifelong companion that shapes children's minds, strengthens their hearts, and supports their overall wellness. When schools, families, and communities

work together to promote reading, children gain far more than knowledge; they gain the tools to navigate life with confidence, calmness, and creativity.

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