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Emerging Trends in Children's Literature: Editor's Perspective

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Abstract

The literature or reading material available for one's consumption as a bibliophile is the most important resource of a community/nation. The progress in technology has enhanced its quality and quantity towards getting a broader appeal and wider reach respectively. This growth in terms of variety and ease of availability has enriched our community and its children, the future citizens. The knowledge, now is not only restricted to the prescribed syllabus for children but also goes beyond the textbooks and to the realm of their inquisitiveness and interest. Literature aspiring for reach not only fly clasping the wings of books but also spread their span of flight flowing along with the newest media of digital world. This amalgamated medium of dissemination is the golden path to the readers, overcoming various barriers. We will understand the gradual progress of publishing in the last three decades.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an expression of ideas and experiences which the author intends to disseminate as a communication to specific audience or reader. Literature from age old days was writing and preserving them on various medium to be read by the targeted audience. Once upon a time literature was transmitted through oral medium and subsequently later on published through various concrete non-corrupting media. These media of transmission transformed depending on its durability and ease of dissemination. One can observe the ancient kind of Children's literature as evidence are the carvings on the walls of temples, introducing children to various flora and fauna, stories,

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legends and epics. The sculptures carved purely for children, on the outer wall of temple create a narration to impart them with information pertinent to learning. These early forms of children's literature comprise of the syllabus quite similar to the one prescribed today. They also focused on all-round enrichment of pedagogy. With the advent of language and evolution of alphabets it rolled to written forms, literature became more wider form of communication. It travelled from folktales, fairy tales, epics, riddles, puzzles and rhymes exercised orally often imparting moral lessons, life skills and cultural values to books and manuscripts distributed. If we discuss the publishing of literature in the form of books, we

Kobo, Boox, Nook, etc., became an alternative to replace the printed form of book. There were speculation that books will be extinct in near future like the flopy disk, CD, DVD became obsolete and replaced by removable storage. But in due course, it became evident that a printed book and its scent of papers is one of the key media to kindle the fire of knowledge.

India had a surfeit of children's literature available, as source of learning and knowledge. There is a sluggish development to children's literature in the middle ages when we were being governed by outside forces. If we talk about the ancient literature available in India for children, we can see a collection which is ever relevant and appealing. These
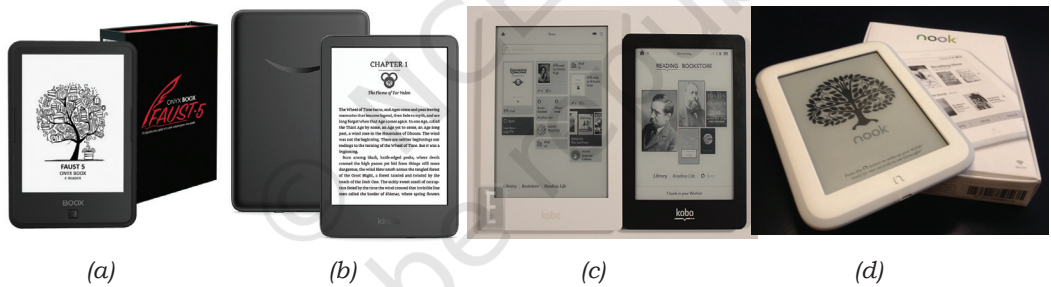

(a)   *(b)*   *(c)*   *(d)*

Figure 1 (a, b, c and d): Boox Device, Kindle, Kobo Device and Nook Device

can see the evident progression in printing technology and its direct impact on Children's Literature. The need for attractive indulgent format for children is complementary to the emergent technology in printing and the integration of digital world into it.

The introduction of digital content to publishing created a new avenue for literature. Devices like Kindle,

literature fulfilled all the need and vacuum never happened. Dark ages or illiteracy in children's literature is a myth for Indians. I would like to mention some of these:

Panchatantra

Written in third century by Vishnu Sharma is the oldest form of stories

which is a collection of fables with animals as central characters. Pedagogically the nascent psychology of children become indulgent, they relate the whole world as their ecological extension. Children even now-a-days love these fables depicted in picture books and otherwise. A collection of five volumes graded perfectly towards imparting moral stories and life sustaining skills.

Figure 2: Panchatrantra

Jataka Tales

In progression to pedagogical grading these stories have animals as well as human as their central character. These tales create emotional bonding between them narrating moral and ethical philosophies. The stories are weaved on the past life of Gautam Buddha. As those days Buddhism was the predominant philosophy of life in and around the Indian sub-continent.

Hitopadesha

Meaning "Good Advice," is a collection of moral stories composed by Narayana Pandit in the twelfth century and contains animal fables to impart wisdom to young readers.

Epics

Apart from these two, stalwart epics of India were also the source of various stories and narrations for Indian children. Ramayan and Mahabharata are source of knowledge not only for children but also for the adults inspiring and guiding them to maintain purity in life's struggle, dilemmas and adventures.

CHILD FRIENDLY FORMS AND TYPES OF LITERATURE

The presentation of these ancient literature as well as the modern concepts of teaching, learning pedagogy needs to adopt and subsequently by use of latest technology should create child-friendly literature. This involves adapting of various media and means while retaining complex ideas, language, and themes into modern formats that are engaging, comprehensible and suitable for young readers.

Reading books is the next step after learning and writing the alphabets and numerals. When creating child-friendly literature, it's important to consider the target age group, the complexity of language and themes, and the use of engaging visuals. Additionally, a balance should be struck between providing entertainment and delivering valuable lessons or messages. For this, the ancient available literature is proven treasure.

To elucidate here are a few popular forms of child-friendly literature which are in use now:

Picture Books

Picture books combine simple text with colourful illustrations to tell stories that are easy for children to comprehend. They often convey important themes and messages through relatable characters and captivating visuals. These are easily convertible to various audio visual forms which can have far wide reach through multi-media modes. Format of these books can be of varied sizes, with vibrant graphics depicting the theme and narration.

Early Reader Books

These books are designed for children who are just beginning to read independently. They use simple language, short sentences, and repetitive words to build reading confidence. Format of these books use bigger text, san-serif fonts, four colour realistic illustration familiar to the reader, spread-out graphics, etc.

Chapter Books

Longer than Early Readers Books, these books are divided into chapters, making them suitable for more advanced readers. They maintain an emphasis on age-appropriate language and themes.

Graphic Novels

Graphic novels use a combination of various forms of graphics and text to narrate a story. They are appealing to reluctant readers who are attracted by visuals. This literature offers a visually engaging way to explore different genres and themes.

Interactive Books

Interactive books involve the reader in the storytelling process. They might include prompts to draw inferences/conclusions, solve puzzles, or make choices that impact the outcome of the story. Sometime even giving option to choose an ending or climax, subsequently enhancing the creative inclination of the reader.

Poetry and Rhyming Books

Poetry and rhyming books use rhythm and rhyme to engage young readers and make language more enjoyable. They often explore themes like emotions, nature, and friendship. They are more effective on the MIL (Modern Indian Language), where it connects the reader to its cultural ethos, various examples of these are available in regional languages and dialects.

Fairy Tales and Folktales

There is an abundance of classic fairy tales and folktales in India which are timeless that often carry moral lessons about life and society. These stories are frequently retold in child-friendly language and are accompanied by true to life illustrations.

Educational Non-Fiction

Non-fiction books for children can

cover a wide range of topics, from animals and science to history and geography. These textual books present factual information in an engaging and accessible way. A large chunk of books in quantity belongs to this category and named as textbooks, A compulsory reading material as children's literature often very didactic in nature. In near past with advent of technology there is a massive change in its presentation format, making it more user friendly and attractive.

Novelty Books

These are specially designed literature which has to be interactive and multisensory. The uniqueness of these are use of multiple media and platforms for dissemination. They might include pop-up elements, tactile textures, or lift-the-flap features that intrigue and engage young readers.

Audio Books and Podcasts

A simple voice narration or sound effects presentation or both of children's literature. These offer an auditory experience that can captivate children's imaginations while improving their listening skills.

VARIOUS PLATFORMS

Child-friendly literature can be shared with young readers through a variety of platforms, both traditional and digital. To effectively distribute child-friendly literature, it is important to tailor the content to the preferences of the target audience and choose platforms that align with the reading habits of children and their guardians.

Here are some ways to distribute child-friendly literature through the undermentioned channels:

Traditional Print Publishing

Publishing child-friendly literature in physical formats like picture books, chapter books, and graphic novels allows for a tangible reading experience. These books can be sold in bookstores, libraries, and schools.

Online Book Retailers

Online retailers such as Amazon, Flipkart, Snapdeal, Infibeam, BookMyShow, Paytm Mall, Crossword, SapnaOnline, Oxford Bookstore, BookAdda, Barnes & Noble, and other book-selling websites provide a convenient way for parents and educators to purchase child-friendly books in print or digital formats.

Libraries

Libraries play a crucial role in making child-friendly literature accessible. Libraries can offer physical copies of books, host reading programmes, and provide a space for children to explore and discover new stories.

Schools

Schools often incorporate child-friendly literature into their curriculum. Teachers may read aloud to students or assign books for independent reading. Books can also be a part of school libraries and learning source.

E-Books and Digital Platforms

E-books and digital platforms like Pratham Books, Storyweaver, Epic!,

Getlitt!, Juggernaut Books, Amazon Kindle Store, Rockstand, Apple Books, Penguin India e-books, Notion Press, Tinkle Comics and Google Play Books allow readers to access child-friendly literature on tablets, e-readers, and smartphones. These platforms often offer interactive features and adjustable fonts for personalised reading experiences.

Audio Books and Podcasts

Audio adaptations of child-friendly literature can be distributed through platforms like Audible and other podcast platforms. These are great for children who enjoy listening to stories on the go.

YouTube and Video Platforms

Some authors and publishers create video adaptations of child-friendly stories with narration and visuals. YouTube and similar platforms are used to share these videos, making stories accessible to a wide audience.

Reading Apps

There are various reading apps designed for children that offer a collection of child-friendly books. These apps often include interactive features, animations, and read-along options.

Social Media

Authors and publishers share snippets, illustrations, and updates about child-friendly literature on social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

Educational Websites

Educational websites and platforms focused on children's content often provide access to digital books, interactive stories, and other forms of child-friendly literature. NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training), NBT (National Book Trust, India), Oxford Owl India, Magic Crate, Pitara Kids Network:, PebbleGo by Capstone:, Karadi Tales, Mocomi, TurtleDiary, BrainPOP Jr. and TopperLearning are some examples of these sites.

Virtual Storytime Sessions

Authors, educators, and libraries can organize virtual storytime sessions through video conferencing platforms, allowing children to engage with stories in real time.

Interactive Learning Platforms

Educational apps and platforms that focus on literacy development often include child-friendly literature as part of their curriculum. Some of these are already mentioned above.

To effectively distribute child-friendly literature, it's important to tailor the content to the preferences of the target audience and choose platforms that align with the reading habits of children and their caregivers.

RESPONSE OF TEACHERS AND CHILDREN

The reactions of children, teachers, and parents to child-friendly literature

distributed through various media can vary depending on factors such as the quality of content, the format of distribution, and the preferences of the individuals involved.

Here are some common reactions you might expect:

Children

Engagement and Enthusiasm

Children often respond positively to child-friendly literature that is visually appealing, interactive, and relatable. Engaging stories, colourful illustrations, and interactive elements can capture their attention and spark enthusiasm for reading.

Curiosity and Exploration

Digital formats, such as e-books and interactive apps, can intrigue children and encourage them to explore stories in new ways. They might enjoy discovering hidden animations, sound effects, or interactive elements.

Empowerment and Independence

Children who are provided with access to child-friendly literature, whether in print or digital form, can feel a sense of empowerment as they navigate stories on their own. This can boost their confidence and foster a love for reading.

Teachers

Integration into Curriculum: Teachers often appreciate child-friendly literature that aligns with educational goals and curriculum standards. They can use these materials to teach various subjects, from language arts to social studies.

Engagement and Learning

High-quality child-friendly literature engages students and enhances their understanding of complex concepts. Teachers value literature that prompts meaningful discussions and critical thinking among students.

Diverse Representation

Child-friendly literature that features diverse characters, cultures, and perspectives is valuable to educators as it promotes inclusivity and helps students develop empathy.

Parents

Quality Content

Parents appreciate well-crafted child-friendly literature that offers educational value, moral lessons, and engaging storytelling. They often look for books that align with their values and encourage positive character traits.

Screen Time Considerations

Parents' reactions to digital media might be mixed. While they value the convenience of digital platforms, some parents might be cautious about excessive screen time and prefer a balanced approach between print and digital reading.

Shared Reading Experience

Parents often enjoy sharing child-friendly literature with their children as a bonding activity. Picture books and read-aloud sessions provide opportunities for shared experiences and conversations.

Educational Tools

Parents view child-friendly literature as a valuable tool for their children's intellectual and emotional evelopment. They seek books that not only entertain but also educate and stimulate creativity.

It's important to note that reactions can vary widely based on individual preferences, cultural backgrounds, and the specific content being presented. Providing a diverse range of child-friendly literature across various media platforms allows for more inclusive and personalised reading experiences for children, teachers, and parents.

IMPACT ON CHILDREN WITH EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCES

Child-friendly literature has a significant impact on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Here are some examples and evidence of the positive effects of child-friendly literature on children:

Language Development Example

Picture books with rich vocabulary and engaging storytelling help expand children's vocabulary and language skills.

Evidence

Research published in the journal "Developmental Psychology" showed that exposure to high-quality picture books positively correlated with children's vocabulary growth.

Imagination and Creativity

Example: Fantasy and imaginative stories encourage children to explore their creativity and think beyond the boundaries of reality.

Evidence: A study published in the journal "Child Development" found that exposure to imaginative stories led to higher levels of creativity and imagination in children.

Empathy and Emotional Understanding

Example: Stories that feature characters facing various emotions and challenges can help children develop empathy and a better understanding of others' feelings.

Evidence: Research published in the journal "Child Development" demonstrated that reading literature with emotional content improved children's ability to recognise and understand emotions.

Cultural Awareness and Diversity

Example: Books with diverse characters and settings expose children to different cultures and perspectives, promoting tolerance and cultural awareness. Stories reflecting various cultures, regions and traditions help children develop a sense of cultural identity and respect for diversity.

Evidence: Studies like those conducted by the Cooperative Children's Book Centre show the positive impact of diverse literature on children's understanding of cultural differences.

Cognitive Skills and Critical Thinking

Example: Stories with complex plots and problem-solving situations enhance children's cognitive skills and critical thinking abilities.

Evidence: Research in the journal "Reading Research Quarterly" found that exposure to narratives with challenging content led to improved cognitive skills and critical thinking in young readers.

Motivation to Read

Example: Engaging and entertaining stories foster a love for reading and motivate children to explore more books.

Evidence: The National Literacy Trust reports that children who enjoy reading are more likely to read frequently and perform better academically.

Parent-Child Bonding

Example: Reading child-friendly literature together allows parents and children to bond over shared experiences and discussions.

Evidence: A study published in the "Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics" found that reading with parents positively influenced children's socioemotional development.

Positive Values and Moral Lessons

Example: Stories with moral dilemmas and ethical choices can help children develop a sense of right and wrong.

Evidence: Research published in the "Journal of Moral Education" suggests that literature can play a role in fostering moral development in children.

Academic Achievement

Example: Exposure to various genres and topics through child-friendly literature can enhance children's knowledge and readiness for academic learning. Books related to science, history, and other subjects make learning more engaging and memorable.

Evidence: The U.S. Department of Education highlights that reading proficiency in early grades is a strong predictor of future academic success. Child-friendly literature serves as a powerful tool for children's holistic development, offering cognitive, emotional, and social benefits that extend beyond the act of reading itself. These impacts are supported by a wealth of research and observations in educational and psychological studies.

POTENTIAL

The field of child-friendly literature holds immense potential for further growth and innovation. As technology evolves and societies become more interconnected, there are several areas where this field can expand and make a positive impact:

Digital Innovations

Embrace technological advancements to create interactive e-books, apps, and digital platforms that engage children through animations, games, and multimedia elements. This can enhance the reading experience

and reach children who are more accustomed to digital devices.

Diverse Representation

Continue to prioritise diverse characters, cultures, and perspectives in child-friendly literature to promote inclusivity and expose children to a broader range of experiences.

Multilingual Offerings

Create child-friendly literature in multiple languages to cater to the linguistic diversity of India and other countries. Bilingual and multilingual resources can support language learning and cultural understanding.

Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR)

Integrate AR and VR technologies into child-friendly literature to provide immersive storytelling experiences that transport children into the worlds of their favourite stories.

Global Collaboration

Foster collaborations between authors, illustrators, and publishers from different countries to create cross-cultural stories that resonate with children worldwide.

STEM-focused Literature:

Develop child-friendly literature that explores Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) concepts in engaging and accessible ways, promoting interest in these fields from a young age.

Social and Environmental Awareness

Address important global issues such as climate change, sustainability, and social justice through child-friendly literature to inspire young readers to become informed and active citizens.

Personalised Learning

Leverage data-driven insights to create personalised reading experiences that adapt to each child's reading level, interests, and learning style.

Educational Partnerships

Collaborate with schools, libraries, and educational institutions to integrate child-friendly literature into formal education settings and curricula.

Parental Involvement

Develop resources that guide parents on effective ways to read and engage with child-friendly literature to maximise its educational and developmental benefits.

Cultural Preservation

Focus on preserving and sharing indigenous stories and folktales to ensure that cultural heritage is passed down to younger generations.

Empowerment Literature

Create stories that empower children by showcasing characters who overcome challenges, develop resilience, and embrace their uniqueness.

Literature in Marginalised Communities

Increase efforts to make child-friendly literature accessible to children in marginalised communities, including those with disabilities, refugees, and underserved populations.

Literary Events and Festivals

Organise events, festivals, and reading campaigns that celebrate child-friendly literature and encourage a love for reading among children and families.

Research and Impact Assessment

Invest in research to measure the impact of child-friendly literature on children's educational outcomes, cognitive development, and social skills.

The potential in the field of child-friendly literature is vast, and it offers opportunities to shape the future of education, storytelling, and children's development in innovative and meaningful ways.

GAPS AND EMERGING ISSUES

While child-friendly literature has the potential to make a significant impact, there are certain gaps and issues that need to be addressed to ensure its effectiveness and accessibility. Some of these include:

Access and Distribution

Physical infrastructure: Limited access to libraries and bookstores in certain areas prevents children from accessing a variety of child-friendly literature.
Digital Divide: Children without access to digital devices or the internet miss out on the benefits of digital child-friendly literature.

Quality and Cultural Relevance

Quality control: Ensuring the quality of child-friendly literature in terms of content, illustrations, and educational value is crucial for effective learning.
Cultural sensitivity: Stories should reflect the cultural diversity of the readers and avoid stereotypes or misrepresentations.

Linguistic Diversity

Language barriers: Availability of child-friendly literature in multiple languages is essential in linguistically diverse countries like India.
Translation Challenges: Translating stories accurately while retaining cultural nuances can be challenging.

Inclusivity

Diverse representation: Lack of representation of different genders, ethnicities, abilities, and backgrounds in child-friendly literature hinders inclusivity.
Stereotyping: Stereotypical portrayals of characters and cultures can reinforce biases and limit children's perspectives.

Engagement and Relevance

Changing preferences: Keeping up with evolving trends and the changing interests of children is important to maintain engagement.
Age-appropriate content: Ensuring

content is suitable for the target age group and aligns with their cognitive and emotional development.

Educational Integration

Alignment with curriculum: Integrating child-friendly literature into educational curricula can be challenging due to the need to balance creative content with academic requirements.

Educator Training: Teachers may need training to effectively use child-friendly literature as an educational tool.

Digital Overload

Screen time concerns: The growing reliance on digital platforms for child-friendly literature raises concerns about excessive screen time and its impact on children's well-being.

Parental Engagement

Parental involvement: Encouraging parents to engage in shared reading experiences with their children can be challenging due to busy schedules and varying literacy levels.

Affordability

Cost: The cost of purchasing child-friendly literature, especially in print format, can be prohibitive for families with limited financial resources.

Data Privacy and Online Safety

Digital platforms: Ensuring the safety and privacy of children when using digital platforms and apps is crucial.

Content Regulation

Quality Assurance: Ensuring child-friendly literature meets age-appropriate standards and doesn't contain harmful content is important.

Cultural Preservation

Loss of traditional stories: The popularity of modern child-friendly literature can sometimes overshadow traditional folktales and indigenous stories, leading to a loss of cultural heritage. Addressing these gaps and issues requires collaborative efforts from governments, educational institutions, publishers, NGOs, and technology providers. By acknowledging and working to overcome these challenges, stakeholders can create a more inclusive, educational, and enriching experience for children through child-friendly literature.

Suggestions for Way Forward

To move forward and maximise the positive impact of child-friendly literature, various stakeholders can implement strategies and initiatives. Here are some suggestions for the way forward:

Promote Cultural Diversity

Prioritise the creation and distribution of child-friendly literature that represents diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives.
Encourage collaboration with indigenous communities to preserve and share their stories.

Quality Assurance

Establish quality standards for child-friendly literature to ensure educational value, accuracy, and appropriateness for the target age group.
Encourage reviews by educators, child psychologists, and experts in children's literature.

Multilingual Approach

Create child-friendly literature in multiple languages to cater to linguistic diversity, with a focus on maintaining cultural nuances during translation.

Inclusive Representation

Ensure that characters in child-friendly literature reflect a wide range of genders, abilities, ethnicities, and backgrounds to promote inclusivity and representation.

Educational Integration

Collaborate with educators and educational institutions to integrate child-friendly literature into curricula, creating a seamless connection between reading and learning.

Parental Engagement

Offer resources and workshops to guide parents on the importance of reading with their children and strategies for fostering a love of reading.

Digital Literacy Programmes

Develop programmes that teach children and parents about responsible use of digital platforms for accessing child-friendly literature.

Public-Private Partnerships

Foster partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, publishing houses, and technology companies to collectively promote child-friendly literature.

Accessible Formats

Ensure that child-friendly literature is available in both print and digital formats to cater to varying preferences and resources.

Author and Illustrator Training

Provide training and workshops for authors and illustrators to create high-quality child-friendly literature that is both engaging and educational.

Literacy Campaigns

Organise reading campaigns, book festivals, and storytelling events to create awareness about the importance of child-friendly literature and reading.

Research and Impact Assessment

Conduct research to measure the impact of child-friendly literature on children's cognitive development, language skills, and empathy.

Creative Funding Models

Explore innovative funding models to support the creation and distribution of child-friendly literature, such as crowd-funding campaigns or collaborations with corporate sponsors.

Digitisation of Indigenous Stories

Collaborate with indigenous communities to digitise and preserve traditional stories while making them accessible to children in modern formats.

Empower Young Readers

Involve children in the creation and evaluation of child-friendly literature to ensure that the content resonates with their interests and needs.

Advocacy and Policy

Advocate for policies that promote the availability and accessibility of child-friendly literature, both in print and digital forms.

By implementing these suggestions, stakeholders can collectively work towards a future where child-friendly literature becomes an integral part of children's education, fostering a love for reading, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of the world.

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