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Original Article

Harnessing Gen Z Energy for Developing Reading Habits and Reducing Screen Time: A Library-Led Framework for India

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Abstract

Young people in many countries are reading fewer books while spending more time on smartphones and social media. This paper asks how Indian libraries can channel, rather than resist, the energy of Generation Z to build lasting reading habits and a healthier relationship with screens. It treats the issue as one of habit, motivation and environment, not a generational failing, and argues that libraries are well placed to influence all three. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Experiential Learning Theory and Diffusion of Innovations, it proposes a model in which reading displaces some screen time when it meets young people's needs for choice, competence and connection. The paper is a structured narrative review and policy analysis, with a scoping-review protocol and an empirical design for later testing; it reports no primary data. It offers a multi-level policy framework, a phased roadmap aligned with Viksit Bharat 2047, and indicators whose baselines and targets are to be set through pilots.

Keywords: *Generation Z; reading habits; screen time; academic libraries; reading motivation; digital well-being; India*

Introduction

Today's young people read more words than any earlier generation, but far fewer come from books. US survey data show that daily book or magazine reading among adolescents fell sharply between the 1970s and 2010s as digital media use climbed (Twenge et al., 2019). Long-term Indian data are scarce, but smartphones are now almost universal among rural youth (ASER Centre, 2024).This matters because book reading offers benefits that brief, fragmented screen reading does not. Cumulative print exposure is linked to vocabulary, comprehension and achievement from childhood to early adulthood (Mol & Bus, 2011), and early reading for pleasure is associated with better cognition and mental health in adolescence (Sun et al., 2023). Yet the screen evidence is more nuanced than public debate suggests, since average links between digital use and adolescent well-being are small (Orben & Przybylski, 2019).

The paper therefore treats neither screens nor Gen Z as the problem. Its practical question is how libraries can use young people's curiosity, social energy and digital skills to make book reading a rewarding habit that reclaims some time from scrolling.

The paper examines Gen Z's psychology and digital habits, the barriers to reading and library use, ways to engage young people, the changing role of librarians, policy options for India, and how progress can be measured. Its research questions are:

1. Which psychological and behavioural factors shape Gen Z's engagement with libraries and books?
2. Why do libraries and books seem less appealing to some young people than digital platforms?
3. How can libraries foster attention, motivation, curiosity, critical thinking, creativity and lifelong reading?
4. Can AI services, digital platforms, makerspaces and innovation hubs increase participation, including reading?

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5. What should librarians, educators, policymakers, institutions and technology partners each do?
6. How might library-based reading and innovation support employability, research, inclusion and national development by 2047?
7. Which policies, funding models, partnerships and indicators are required?

The paper distinguishes **established evidence**, **reasoned proposals** and **open questions** needing Indian research.

Background and Rationale

India has introduced several reading initiatives for children, but hardly any for college-age Gen Z, the group with the most control over its own screen use and whose habits will shape the 2047 workforce.

Existing initiatives. NEP 2020 calls for a joyful reading culture, books in local languages and stronger public and school libraries (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2020). The 100-day Padhe Bharat campaign (1 January to 10 April 2022) offered weekly reading activities from Balvatika to Grade 8 (Ministry of Education, 2022), and Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya, the National Book Trust's free digital library for readers aged 3–18, held over 5,500 titles from more than 200 publishers by 2025 (Central Board of Secondary Education [CBSE], 2025).

The gap. These programmes end at school. College students and those aged 18–29 depend on academic libraries centred on textbooks and exams, while near-universal smartphone access (ASER Centre, 2024) means books must compete with short videos, games and messaging for every free minute.

Why libraries. Libraries are the only public institution whose main purpose is linking people with books. Present in almost every college and widely trusted, they offer what classrooms and platforms do not: free choice, quiet space, a reading community and expert guidance. The IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (2022) lists building reading habits from an early age as a core library mission.

Rationale. Restricting screens seldom works for long. A better approach is to make reading appealing enough to win time voluntarily, and this paper offers a psychologically grounded framework for doing so in India.

Defining Gen Z in the Indian Context

Gen Z is a handy planning label, but Indian Gen Z is too varied for any single description to fit. Pew uses 1997–2012 as birth years (Dimock, 2019), while India's official youth band is 15–29 (National Statistical Office [NSO], 2022); this paper uses whichever matches the data.

Generational claims need care, since cross-sectional studies struggle to separate age, period and cohort effects and many supposed traits lack rigorous support (Rudolph et al., 2021). "Gen Z does not read" is better put as "many young people now spend less time on books than earlier cohorts did at the same age", a narrower but testable claim.

Indian data reveal wide variation. Nearly 90 per cent of rural youth aged 14–18 had a usable smartphone at home, yet 43.7 per cent of young men who could use one owned it, against 19.8 per cent of young women, and about a quarter could not fluently read a Standard II text in their regional language (ASER Centre, 2024). For many, basic fluency matters as much as habit, and many young women rely on someone else's phone.

Table 1 lists the main groups reading programmes should plan for; it is a working framework, not an empirical typology.

Group	Typical situation	Implication for reading programmes
Urban, well-connected students	Own phones, heavy social media use, access to English books	Compete on experience; use social energy (clubs, creator culture)
First-generation and rural students	Shared devices, regional-language schooling, few books at home	Free access to books in Indian languages; quiet space; fluency support
Young women with mobility limits	Lower device ownership, restricted movement	Safe library spaces, women's reading circles, take-home books
Students with disabilities	Inaccessible print and apps	Audiobooks, large print, screen readers, accessible e-books
Young people outside education	Working or seeking work	Public and community libraries, flexible hours, practical and career reading

Psychological and Behavioural Foundations of Reading and Screen Use

Reading becomes habitual when it is chosen, manageable and shared; screens win because they give these rewards faster and more easily.

Why reading matters. A meta-analysis found that print exposure predicts vocabulary, comprehension and achievement, with the link strengthening with age (Mol & Bus, 2011). Among over 10,000 US children, early pleasure readers showed better cognition and fewer mental health problems in early adolescence (Sun et al., 2023). Both studies are correlational, but consistent.

Motivation. Self-Determination Theory holds that people persist with activities that feel autonomous, build competence and connect them with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic reading motivation predicts reading amount and comprehension far more reliably than reading for grades (Schiefele et al., 2012), so choice is central to habit-building (Krashen, 2004).

Self-efficacy. People avoid tasks they doubt they can finish (Bandura, 1997). Short, achievable goals and well-matched books build the confidence later reading depends on.

Habit formation. Habits form when behaviour is repeated in a stable context; automaticity took a median of about 66 days in one study, varying widely (Lally et al., 2010). If-then plans such as "on the bus, I read ten pages" greatly improve follow-through (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006), so programmes should be sustained and tied to daily routines.

What screens offer. Short-video and social platforms supply novelty, social feedback and easy entertainment (Katz et al., 1973). Heavy media multitasking is linked to somewhat weaker attention on some tasks, though findings

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are mixed (Uncapher & Wagner, 2018), and the overall link between digital use and well-being is negative but small (Orben & Przybylski, 2019) and varies between individuals (Odgers & Jensen, 2020).

Reducing screen time. Four weeks off Facebook modestly improved well-being and lowered later use (Allcott et al., 2020), but digital detox studies show inconsistent effects (Radtke et al., 2022). Restriction alone is unreliable; an attractive alternative looks more promising but needs testing.

Evidence status. These mechanisms are well established generally; whether Indian library programmes can use them to shift time from screens to books remains open (Section 10).

5. Gen Z's Information-Seeking, Reading Habits and Relationship with Libraries

India's latest national data on youth leisure reading are over fifteen years old, which is itself a key finding.

Indian reading data. The National Youth Readership Survey, run by NCAER for the National Book Trust in 2009 among those aged 13–35, remains India's most comprehensive reading study. Secondary summaries report that about a quarter of literate youth read non-textbooks for leisure, often in Hindi and Marathi, and that most began in school with peers as an influence (National Book Trust & National Council of Applied Economic Research, 2010). These pre-smartphone figures should be checked against the original before use.

International trends. Daily book or magazine reading among US adolescents fell steeply from the late 1970s to the mid-2010s (Twenge et al., 2019), and across OECD countries 15-year-olds read less for enjoyment in 2018 than in 2009 (OECD, 2021). Whether India follows suit is unknown.

How young people search. Young people turn first to the quickest tools, such as search engines, video sites and AI chatbots, and ask librarians far less than instructors or friends (Head & Eisenberg, 2010). Many judge online credibility poorly (Breakstone et al., 2021).

Paper and screen. Two meta-analyses found a small, consistent comprehension advantage for paper, especially for informational texts under time pressure (Clinton, 2019; Delgado et al., 2018). E-books and audiobooks still widen access, but deep reading benefits from print or distraction-free settings that libraries can offer.

Relationship with libraries. Indian university students report moderate library anxiety, linked mainly to comfort, equipment and systems (Bharti et al., 2025). In many colleges libraries are associated with exams rather than pleasure reading, an observation from practice that needs systematic study.

Challenges and Barriers to Reading and Library Participation

Most barriers are features of environments and institutions that libraries can change, not fixed traits of youth. Table 2 groups them with the strength of Indian evidence.

Barrier type	Examples	Evidence status in India
Psychological	Low reading confidence, library anxiety, books associated with exams and duty, fear of being seen as "bookish"	Library anxiety documented (Bharti et al., 2025); reading confidence not measured nationally
Technological	Phones always at hand, apps designed to hold attention, catalogues and e-book apps that are hard to use	Smartphone access near universal among rural youth (ASER Centre, 2024); attention design widely discussed but not measured in India
Institutional	Libraries open only in class hours, textbook-heavy collections, no leisure reading budget, reading not valued in assessment	Common in practice; no national survey of college library collections or hours
Social and cultural	Peer norms favouring screens, family pressure for exam results, limited time for women with household duties	Peer and school influence on reading reported in the 2009 youth survey; others hypothesised
Linguistic	Few attractive books in regional languages, English-heavy collections, weak reading fluency	Fluency gaps documented in ASER 2023; regional-language supply not systematically measured
Infrastructural	Few seats, poor lighting and ventilation, no accessible formats, weak public library networks in rural areas	Varies widely; baseline data needed

Three points follow. Barriers accumulate, so a first-generation student in a regional-medium college may face language, confidence, access and time constraints together. The real contest is between a quick, social reward on the phone and a long, solitary, uncertain one in a book. And several barriers, including hours, collections and space, lie within the librarian's control and can be fixed quickly and cheaply.

Reimagining Libraries as Reading, Learning and Youth Development Hubs

To reclaim time from screens, the library must become somewhere young people want to be, where reading is social, chosen and visibly rewarding. Three ideas support this.

Free voluntary reading. Students given time and access to books they choose read more and develop literacy at least as well as those taught only through instruction (Krashen, 2004); what matters is plentiful appealing books, choice and untested reading time.

Libraries as third places. Oldenburg (1989) described "third places" beyond home and work where people gather

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by choice. With social zones and protected quiet areas, a library can be both a meeting point and a refuge for focused reading.

Table 3 summarises the resulting shift.

Dimension	Traditional college library	Youth reading hub
Purpose	Support syllabus and examinations	Also build lifelong reading and learning
Collections	Textbooks and reference works	Plus fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, regional-language books, audiobooks
Space	Silent reading hall	Quiet zones, reading lounges, discussion corners, events
Role of students	Borrowers following rules	Curators, club leaders, reviewers, co-designers
Activities	Issue and return	Reading circles, author talks, challenges, creative responses to books
Measures	Footfall and issues	Reading time, books finished, enjoyment, belonging

Communities of readers. Newcomers learn by participating alongside experienced members (Wenger, 1998); student-led reading circles, review blogs and book-to-film discussions can work this way, with seniors mentoring juniors.

These are reasoned proposals to be tested through the pilots in Sections 13 and 15.

AI, Digital Reading, Makerspaces, Gamification and Collaborative Reading

Digital tools can lead to books if designed as bridges, not substitutes; design and guidance matter more than the technology.

Using screens to lead to books. Libraries can reach young people where they already are, through student-made video book talks, reading lists in campus groups, QR codes linking to Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya or the catalogue, and audiobooks for commuters. Their effect on reading in India is unmeasured.

Artificial intelligence. AI can recommend suitable books, summarise unfamiliar topics and translate or read aloud, but it can also mislead; ChatGPT-generated bibliographies contained many fabricated citations (Walters & Wilder, 2023). Libraries should use AI to point to real books and teach verification (UNESCO, 2023).

Gamification. Gamification has small positive effects that depend heavily on design (Sailer & Homner, 2020), and leaderboards and badges lowered intrinsic motivation in one classroom study (Hanus & Fox, 2015). Reading schemes should reward personal progress and exploration, such as a genre passport or flexible streak, not public rankings.

Makerspaces and creative responses. Making broadens participation when it deliberately includes those who do not see themselves as makers (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014). Building a model from a science book, designing a cover, writing fan fiction or recording a podcast review offers non-readers an active route into books (Burke, 2014).

Collaborative reading. Reading circles, buddy reading, author talks and inter-college festivals tap the social energy that draws youth to screens (Katz et al., 1973) and meet the need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Entrepreneurship and careers. Linking business, biography, technology and policy reading to start-up clubs, internships and career guidance shows students the practical value of books.

Connected learning. Learning is strongest when interests, peer culture and academic opportunity are linked (Ito et al., 2013), so a fan of cricket, anime or film can be led to biographies, graphic novels or screenplays and then further.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Six theories, each addressing a different part of the problem, combine into one model (Table 4).

Theory	Core idea	Application to youth reading
Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)	Motivation lasts when autonomy, competence and relatedness are met	Free choice of books, achievable goals, reading with peers; avoid compulsion and grading of leisure reading
Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997)	Self-efficacy and role models shape behaviour	Peer readers and teachers as visible models; small successes build reading confidence
Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)	Intentions depend on attitudes, social norms and perceived control	Make reading feel worthwhile, normal among peers and easy to fit into the day
Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973)	People choose media to meet specific needs	Identify what screens give (fun, connection, escape) and design reading experiences that meet the same needs
Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984)	Learning cycles through experience, reflection and experimentation	Pair reading with discussion, creative making and real projects
Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 2003)	New practices spread through visible advantage, trial and early adopters	Start with enthusiastic student leaders; make successes visible; let others try with low commitment

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How the theories fit. Uses and Gratifications explains why screens currently win; Self-Determination and Social Cognitive Theory explain what makes reading self-sustaining; the Theory of Planned Behavior identifies the attitudes, norms and controls that turn interest into reading, with habit research (Lally et al., 2010) explaining automaticity; Experiential Learning links reading to deeper learning; and Diffusion of Innovations explains how good practice spreads.

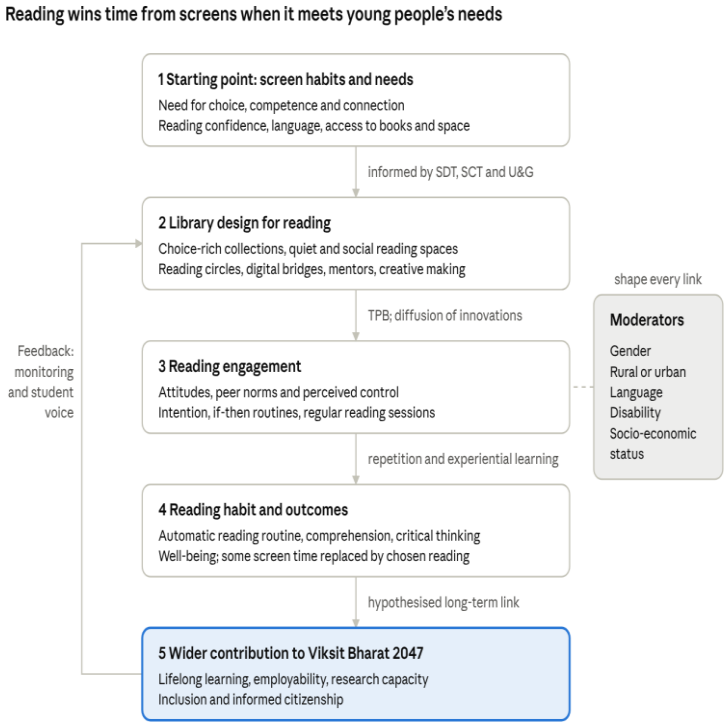


Figure 1. Conceptual model · from screen habits to a reading habit

In Figure 1, library design that meets young people's needs increases engagement, which with repetition becomes a habit that displaces some discretionary screen time. Gender, location, language, disability and socio-economic status moderate each link, and monitoring feeds back into design. Every arrow is a hypothesis to be tested.

Research Methodology

This is a structured narrative review and policy analysis, not a completed systematic or scoping review, and contains no primary data. It provides a scoping-review protocol and an empirical design for testing the model.

10.1 Approach used in this paper

Sources were chosen purposively, covering foundational theory, peer-reviewed research on reading, screens and libraries, and official documents, and were verified against publisher or official records where possible. As the search was not exhaustive, English-language and Western studies are probably over-represented.

Proposed scoping review protocol

A scoping review fits this broad topic (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010) and should follow PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018); Table 5 gives the protocol.

Element	Specification
Review question	What is known about interventions that increase young people's (15–29) book reading and reduce discretionary screen time, especially those delivered by or through libraries?
Population	Young people aged about 15–29; Indian and other low- and middle-income settings reported separately
Concept	Reading habits, reading motivation, reading for pleasure, screen time, digital well-being, library programmes
Context	Academic, public, school, community and digital libraries; other settings where interventions are comparable
Sources	Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, ERIC, LISTA, Google Scholar (first 200 results per string), Shodhganga, INFLIBNET repositories, and portals of the Ministry of Education, National Book Trust and MoSPI
Example search string	(youth OR "young people" OR student* OR "generation Z") AND ("reading habit*" OR "reading for pleasure" OR "leisure reading" OR

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Element	Specification
	"reading motivation") AND (librar* OR "screen time" OR smartphone* OR "social media")
Dates	2010 to the date of search, plus seminal works; exact search dates recorded
Languages	English, with Hindi and Marathi where reviewers are available
Inclusion	Empirical studies, systematic reviews and official evaluations
Exclusion	Opinion pieces without data; studies only of children under 12; clinical treatment of addiction
Screening	Two independent reviewers; disagreements resolved by a third; reasons for exclusion recorded
Appraisal	Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (Hong et al., 2018), used to inform interpretation rather than to exclude
Synthesis	Descriptive mapping and thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008)

Proposed empirical design

A two-phase mixed-methods design is proposed to test whether a library reading programme can shift time from screens to books (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

- **Phase 1, baseline survey.** A random sample of students aged 18–29, stratified by region, institution type, rural or urban location and gender, sized by power analysis.
- **Phase 2, pilot evaluation.** A cluster-randomised or stepped-wedge pilot in which colleges start at different times, allowing early and late starters to be compared.
- **Measures.** Reading motivation (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), need satisfaction (Chen et al., 2015), library anxiety (Bostick, 1992), problematic smartphone use (Kwon et al., 2013), reading diaries, books borrowed and finished, and consented, self-exported screen-time data. Scales would be translated, back-translated and piloted.
- **Qualitative component.** Focus groups with students and interviews with librarians and teachers, analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- **Analysis.** Reliability and validity checks, structural equation modelling, and multilevel models of pre- and post-programme change by gender, location and language.
- **Ethics.** Ethics approval, informed consent, right to withdraw, minimal data, secure storage under the DPDP Act 2023, no access to phone content, and referral information for distressed students.

Sources of bias

Key risks are bias towards Western, already-reading, English-language and self-reported data; stratified sampling, multilingual tools and objective screen-time data aim to reduce them.

Evidence-Based Analysis and Discussion

The review suggests that the move from books to screens reflects young people's environment more than lost interest, and libraries can reshape that environment. Table 6 summarises each answer and its evidence status.

Research question	Summary answer	Evidence status
RQ1: What shapes engagement with libraries and books?	Choice, confidence, social connection, perceived relevance and easy access	Mechanisms well established; untested in Indian library settings
RQ2: Why do screens seem more attractive?	Instant, social and effortless rewards, with devices always at hand	Supported by U&G theory and media research; Indian data limited
RQ3: How can libraries support attention and lifelong reading?	Free choice, protected quiet, reading communities and habit-forming routines	Supported by reading-motivation and habit research; needs local testing
RQ4: Can AI, digital platforms and makerspaces help?	Yes, if they act as bridges to books and are well guided	Mixed evidence (gamification, digital reading); open question for India
RQ5: Who should do what?	Shared responsibility of librarians, teachers, institutions, policymakers, families and technology partners	Policy proposal (Section 14)
RQ6: Contribution to national development	Plausible through literacy, critical thinking, research capacity and inclusion	Hypothesis; long-term effects unmeasured
RQ7: Policies and indicators needed	Multi-level policy with baselines from pilots	Policy proposal (Sections 12–16)

Four tensions stand out:

Attraction versus restriction. Banning phones may create quiet but rarely changes habits elsewhere; freely chosen experiences are likelier to last, though both need evaluation.

Print versus digital. Paper aids comprehension of informational texts (Clinton, 2019; Delgado et al., 2018), but e-books and audiobooks reach commuters, disabled readers

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and distant users. The aim is more deep reading in any format.

Fun versus depth. Games and events attract students, but if rewards replace enjoyment, motivation may fade when they end (Hanus & Fox, 2015), so programmes should move readers towards intrinsic pleasure.

Scale versus equity. National platforms reach many cheaply, but students with weak fluency, shared phones or no regional-language books need personal support, or programmes will mainly help existing readers.

Evidence and proposal. Links between print exposure and achievement, and the mechanisms of motivation and habit, are well supported; applying them to Indian Gen Z through libraries is a reasoned proposal; and the claim that this will cut screen time and aid national development is a hypothesis India cannot yet test.

Policy Framework for India

Eight measurable interventions are proposed at four levels. Timelines refer to the phases in Section 13 and are proposals, not government commitments.

12.1 National level

P1. Extend national reading campaigns to young adults.

- *Rationale:* Padhe Bharat and Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya serve school children; college-age youth (15–29) have no equivalent.
- *Mechanism:* an annual youth reading campaign led by the Ministry of Education, UGC, National Book Trust and Ministry of Culture through college and public libraries, with reading circles, author events and Indian-language festivals; piloted in Phase I.
- *Outcomes:* participating institutions and students meeting reading goals, by gender and location.

P2. Repeat the National Youth Readership Survey with screen-use measures.

- *Rationale:* the only national youth readership survey dates from 2009, before smartphones spread.
- *Mechanism:* a periodic survey by the National Book Trust with NCAER or NSO covering leisure reading, language, format, library use and screen time; first round in Phase I, then every three to five years.
- *Outcomes:* published national baselines and trends for Section 16 indicators.

P3. Support young-adult publishing and digital lending in Indian languages.

- *Rationale:* habits depend on appealing books in readers' own languages, especially for regional-language and first-generation readers.
- *Mechanism:* commissioning and translation grants from the National Book Trust, Sahitya Akademi and state language departments, and extending Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya or a similar platform to readers over 18 (Phases I–II).
- *Outcomes:* titles per language; digital loans by readers aged 18–29.

Institutional level

P4. Create leisure reading collections and reading-friendly spaces, co-designed with students.

- Per student; seat use outside exam periods.
- **P5. Recognise** *Rationale:* choice and comfortable space are preconditions for voluntary reading (Krashen, 2004).
- *3* members, sessions, books discussed and student-led events.

P6. Train librarians as reader-development professionals.

- *Rationale:* staff approachability contributes to library anxiety (Bharti et al., 2025), and LIS curricula seldom teach reader development.
- *Mechanism:* certified modules from INFLIBNET, UGC centres and LIS departments in youth psychology, reader advisory, digital pedagogy, AI literacy and running reading communities (from Phase I).
- *Outcomes:* librarians trained; student ratings of staff helpfulness.

Community level

P7. Build community reading partnerships for rural, multilingual and inclusive reading.

- *Rationale:* rural youth, young women, first-generation learners, disabled readers and those outside education are least served by college libraries.
- *Mechanism:* mobile and village libraries, women's reading circles, accessible formats and family events run by public libraries, colleges, NGOs and panchayats; piloted in Phase I and expanded in Phase II.
- *Outcomes:* participants by target group; books lent in community settings.

Technology and well-being

P8. Adopt digital well-being and responsible-AI standards in library services.

- *Rationale:* digital tools can lead to or away from books, and AI and data use raise privacy and accuracy risks (IFLA, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).
- *Mechanism:* voluntary phone-free reading hours and zones, AI recommendations linked to real available books, no marketing use of reading data, and accessible e-books and audiobooks; standards set in Phase I and reviewed each phase.
- *Outcomes:* compliant services, phone-free session participation and user trust ratings.

Strategic Roadmap for Reading Habits and Viksit Bharat 2047

The roadmap has three proposed phases: foundation and pilots (2026–2030), expansion and integration (2031–2038), and consolidation (2039–2047). Progress depends on evidence, not dates; a programme that raises visits but not reading should be redesigned before scaling.

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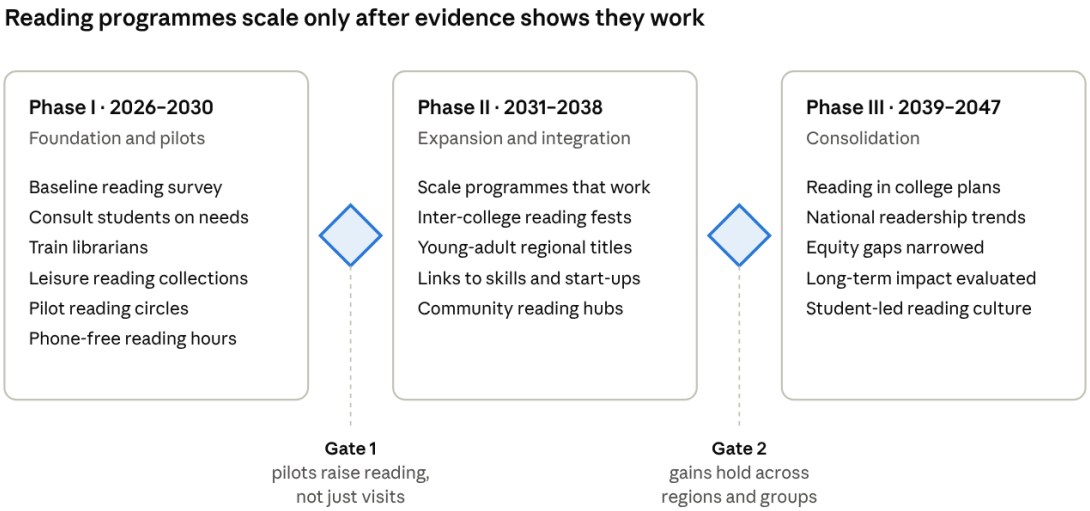


Figure 2. Proposed roadmap · three phases and two evaluation gates
Each phase holds short-, medium- and long-term milestones respectively, and a gate is passed only when evaluation data meet its criterion.

Roles of Stakeholders

Building a reading culture is a shared task, but the librarian's role changes most, from custodian to reader-development professional, facilitator, research mentor, digital and AI literacy educator and innovation partner (Table 7).

Stakeholder	Core role	Key actions
Young people	Co-designers, curators and peer leaders	Choose books, lead reading circles, make book videos and reviews, mentor juniors
Librarians	Reader-development professionals and learning facilitators	Build leisure collections, run reading communities, give reader advice, teach digital and AI literacy
Teachers	Reading role models and co-designers	Recommend non-syllabus books, share their own reading, design assignments that use whole books
Counsellors and psychologists	Advisers on motivation and well-being	Support students with anxiety or problematic phone use; advise on programme design
Institutional leaders	Enablers	Protect a leisure-reading budget, extend hours, include reading in institutional plans
Policymakers (MoE, UGC, Ministry of Culture)	Framework setters and funders	Extend reading campaigns to young adults, fund surveys and pilots (P1–P3)
National Book Trust and publishers	Content providers	Commission and translate young-adult titles in Indian languages; widen digital lending
Technology partners	Responsible suppliers	Provide accessible, privacy-respecting e-book and recommendation tools
Families and communities	Supporters	Value reading at home, give young women time and space to read, take part in community events

Implementation Plan and Institutional Responsibilities

Each institution should start a modest, student-led programme lasting at least one academic year, long enough for habits to form (Lally et al., 2010), and link it to quality processes so it outlives individual enthusiasts.

Governance. A Reading and Library Engagement Committee, chaired by the principal or nominee with the librarian as member-secretary, two teachers, a counsellor and at least four students (half women), reports to the IQAC.

A suggested first year:

8. **Months 1–2: listen and measure.** Survey reading habits, interests, languages, barriers and screen use; hold focus groups; record baseline loans and visits.
9. **Months 2–3: build the offer.** Assemble a student-chosen leisure collection, open a reading lounge, extend hours and link to free e-book sources such as Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya.

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10. **Months 3–4: form communities.** Launch two or three student-led circles across languages and genres, with simple if-then routines like a weekly reading hour.
11. **Months 4–10: run and adapt.** Hold phone-free hours, author talks, book-to-film discussions and creative activities, gathering monthly feedback.
12. **Months 10–12: evaluate and decide.** Repeat the survey, compare results with the baseline, publish a brief report and decide what to keep.

State and national roles. Universities and state departments should pool results, share collections and fund training; national agencies should supply common survey tools and a platform for sharing good practice (P1, P2).

Resource principle. Most early steps need goodwill and staff time more than money; bigger investments should follow evidence of demand.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Key Performance Indicators

Following logic-model practice (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004), indicators distinguish outputs, outcomes and long-term impacts; baselines and targets are to be set from Phase I pilots (Table 8).

Level	Indicator	Measure and source	Baseline and target
Output	Youth visits and active membership	Gate counts and membership records by age band, outside examination periods	Set in Phase I
Output	Use of print, e-books, audiobooks and open resources	Loans, e-book and audiobook downloads, Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya and OER usage	Set in Phase I
Output	Reading programmes delivered	Reading circles, author talks, phone-free sessions, events held	Set in Phase I
Outcome	Reading participation	Self-reported weekly reading time; books finished; reading diaries	Set in Phase I
Outcome	Reading motivation and enjoyment	Validated reading motivation scale, pre and post	Set in Phase I
Outcome	Screen-time balance	Participant-exported phone screen-time data (with consent); problematic smartphone use scale	Set in Phase I
Outcome	Information and AI literacy, critical thinking	Pre- and post-tests including verification tasks; rubric-scored writing on books read	Set in Phase I
Outcome	Innovation and project participation	Makerspace and project participants linked to reading tracks	Set in Phase I
Outcome	Satisfaction, belonging and usefulness	Annual student survey with validated items	Set in Phase I
Outcome	Inclusion	All indicators disaggregated by gender, rural or urban origin, disability, language and socio-economic status	Gaps narrowed over time
Impact	Sustained reading habit	Follow-up surveys one and three years after the programme	Tracked from Phase II
Impact	Research, creative and career outputs	Student writing, presentations, prototypes, community projects; graduate tracer studies	Tracked from Phase II

Evaluation design. Comparison groups, such as later-starting colleges, help attribute change to the programme; numbers show what changed, and focus groups explain why.

Avoiding perverse incentives. Counting loans or pages invites box-ticking, so enjoyment, depth, inclusion and well-being should carry equal weight, with indicators reviewed yearly with students.

17. Ethical Considerations, Digital Well-Being, Equity and Inclusion

Reducing screen time must respect autonomy by offering better choices, not surveillance or moralising.

Respect and autonomy. Screens are central to how youth learn, socialise and earn. Programmes should not shame phone use, should keep phone-free sessions voluntary, and should present reading as an addition to digital life; controlling approaches undermine motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Privacy. Reading and screen-time data are revealing. Under the DPDP Act 2023 (Government of India, 2023), libraries should collect only necessary data with consent, store it securely, never share individual reading histories, and rely on participants' own exported summaries rather than phone content.

Responsible AI. AI tools can carry bias and error, so libraries should apply fairness, transparency and human oversight (UNESCO, 2021), test for language and regional bias, and teach disclosure and honest attribution under the UGC academic integrity regulations (University Grants Commission, 2018).

Digital well-being. Average effects of screen use on well-being are small (Orben & Przybylski, 2019), though some youth experience problematic use (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Librarians should refer students to counselling, not diagnose "addiction".

Equity and inclusion. Programmes must reach the least likely readers through regional-language books, accessible formats under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (Government of India, 2016), safe spaces and timings

for young women, and outreach beyond education, with all indicators disaggregated.

Recommendations

Ten actions, roughly in order of how soon they can start:

13. **Ask students first.** Survey habits, interests, languages and screen use before designing programmes.
14. **Fund leisure reading.** Protect a small, partly student-directed budget for non-syllabus books, including regional-language titles, graphic novels and audiobooks.
15. **Make the library inviting.** Add reading lounges, extend hours and separate quiet and social zones.
16. **Start student-led reading circles.** Support several circles across genres and languages, mentored by seniors.
17. **Build routines, not events.** Hold a weekly reading hour, encourage if-then plans and run programmes for a full year.
18. **Offer voluntary phone-free reading time.** Invite, never compel, and present it as a chosen break.
19. **Use screens as bridges.** Promote books through student videos, QR codes and campus groups, and use AI to suggest real, available titles.
20. **Train librarians in reader development.** Include youth psychology, reader advisory, digital pedagogy and AI literacy in training.
21. **Extend national campaigns to young adults.** Widen Padhe Bharat and Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya to college students and over-18s.
22. **Measure reading, not just footfall.** Repeat the national youth readership survey with screen-use measures and evaluate pilots against comparison groups.

Limitations and Future Research

The framework rests on general psychological evidence and policy reasoning and is untested with Indian youth in libraries.

Limitations. The review is structured but not systematic and may miss studies, particularly in Indian languages. Most evidence is from the US and Europe, and India's only youth readership survey (2009) is known here through secondary summaries. Generational labels are disputed (Rudolph et al., 2021) and may hide differences of class, gender, caste, region and language. Screen-time displacement is a hypothesis, and self-reported screen time is often inaccurate.

Future research should:

23. conduct the Section 10.2 scoping review with a pre-registered protocol;
24. run a new national survey of youth reading and screen use;
25. evaluate library programmes using comparison groups and objective screen-time data;
26. study rural, first-generation, women and regional-language readers;
27. follow participants over years to see whether habits last and how they relate to learning, well-being and careers; and
28. Assess librarians' readiness for reader-development roles.

Conclusion

Young people still want to learn, imagine and connect; they simply find those rewards most easily on screens. Libraries should not fight that energy but redirect some of it to books by making reading chosen, achievable and shared.

Three conclusions emerge. Book reading builds language, comprehension and possibly well-being in ways brief screen reading does not. Motivation and habit research shows that reading becomes routine through choice, confidence, community and repetition. And many barriers facing young Indians, such as short hours, textbook-only collections, unwelcoming spaces and scarce regional-language books, are within institutions' power to remove.

Building on Padhe Bharat and Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya, India can extend its commitment to college-age youth through redesigned libraries, trained librarians, student-led communities and careful measurement. This framework is a starting point to be tested and refined with young people, so that the India of 2047 is built by citizens who read deeply, think critically and keep learning.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of thesis paper.

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