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Students' Attitude towards Digital Reading: A Study in Universities in Kerala, India

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the attitude of students towards digital reading. Survey method was used to conduct the study among the postgraduate students of the universities in Kerala state of India. Stratified random sampling method was used to select a representative sample of 588 students from the teaching departments of the universities. Results reveal that majority of the students have an average level of attitude towards digital reading and the male students have more positive attitudes towards digital reading than the female students. Further the results reveal that there is no significant discipline and university wise difference in the attitude of the students towards digital reading. Findings suggest that educators can tailor lessons and assignments to maintain positive attitude among the students towards digital reading.

Keywords: *Attitude, Digital reading, Online reading, E-resources, Students, Universities in Kerala*

1. Introduction

Reading is a precise procedure which includes definite, point by point consecutive perception and recognisable confirmation of letters, words, spelling patterns, illustrations and gigantic dialect units. More essentially expressed, reading is a psycholinguistic game and it incorporates a communication between thoughts and language (Mohsin & Sonwane, 2013). Despite current advances in information technology and the development of a range of communication tools in the modern world, learning to read and maintaining an interest in reading stay important. Attitude towards reading have been found to have an effect on both engagement and achievement in reading (Mckenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995).

Attitude towards reading are described as an individual's feeling about reading which makes readers to embrace or stay away from a reading circumstance. Attitude and enthusiasm towards reading can be related to feeling and their ability or willingness to read (Karim & Hasan, 2007). Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) define attitude as a scholarly manner on the most proficient method to behave, either negative or positive; and the attitude of reading alludes to the individual's tendency towards reading as an activity. Attitude is a learned product of a cognitive procedure and has an impact on behaviours. Most human attitudes emerge from a direct interaction with the attitude object. The sort of the attitude one has towards that object depends

on the positive or negative encounters with the attitude object (Keskin & Bastug, 2014).

Then again, Zajonc (1968) focuses to 'the exposure effect', keeping up those attitudes are shaped as an after effect of many times of exposure to the attitude object. At the point when the reading frequency is considered as exposure to reading, the argument appears to recommend that the reading frequency is an element in reading attitude. Students attitude towards reading are a focal element influencing reading performance. The level of positive or negative attitudes towards reading differs according to the sort of reading to be performed and the motivation or purpose behind reading (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995). Positive reading attitudes motivate positive reading experiences. This makes the potential outcomes to energize higher scholarly performances (Bintz, 1993; Walberg & Tsai, 1985).

As per McKenna et al. (1995), the reading attitude is molded by past reading experiences and by one's perceptions and beliefs about the result that is derived from reading. With respect to family environment, it is an important variable in the process by which reading experiences affect attitudes. That is on account of children see their parents as a source of learning that includes various learning types (Keskin & Bastug, 2014). By understanding students' attitudes and text preferences, empowers the academician and parents to plan, design and teach reading activities that are pertinent to the necessities and interests of each student. Then it helps to improve positively the students' level of engagement with reading. Consequently, the purpose behind this research is to study the students' attitude towards digital reading with the goal that it will propel valuable solution for the conveyance and management of digital reading materials in higher education.

2. Related Literature

The discussion of reading behaviour in digital environment is a growing area of interest for many researchers, yet the attitude of students towards digital reading is a relatively unexplored area of research. Attitude towards reading are portrayed as an individual's slant or feeling about reading. It makes learners to grasp or avoid from a reading condition. Reading attitude is characterised as a course of action of feelings related to reading which causes the reader to approach or keep up a strategic distance from a reading circumstance and it is more essential and viable to discuss reading attitudes with reference to a particular sort of reading (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995).

Karim and Hasan (2007) observed the reading habits and attitudes of Bachelor of IT students and Bachelor of Arts students from the International Islamic University, Malaysia in the digital age. From the analysis it was found that the Website is seen as an undeniably essential reading source. There exist significant differences between academic programs and type of reading materials and reading resources especially on the websites. Walberg and

Tsai (1985) contemplated that an inspirational or positive attitude toward reading is one of the most grounded correlates of reading accomplishment. Among the adolescents some elements add a positive attitude towards reading which include: when they trust that reading is significant and enjoyable, when they have a high-self concept as a reader and having a home circumstance where verbal collaboration happens consistently.

Annamalai and Muniandy (2013) attempted to comprehend the reading habit and attitude of the students in a Malaysian polytechnic. Study adapted ASRA (Adult Survey of Reading Attitude) based on Smith's (1991) reading habit questionnaire. Findings of the study revealed that the polytechnic students were not enjoying reading as much as other activities that include technologies and furthermore they have a low enthusiasm for reading and felt reading as troublesome and bringing anxiety. Likewise they think that there were diverse approaches to learn new things than by reading, as find reading was exhausting and not motivating.

Akarsu and Dariyemez (2014) explored the reading habits and attitudes of university students, who were studying English language and literature at Ataturk University. Results revealed that reading habits of respondents were influenced by the media and technology. The vast majority of the members spend a really long time in front of their computer screens. Most of the respondents claimed that they regularly read online news, checking their messages, view the climate report and read funny strips. Study recommends that instructors ought to work on some pertinent strategies to develop the students reading habits, as well as the language aptitudes such as reading, composing, speaking and listening.

A case study was conducted by Seitz (2010) to investigate student attitudes toward reading at summer reading clinic through an urban teaching college in upstate New York. Attitude of the students was evaluated through class room observations, informal interviews, reading specialist candidate interviews and the ERAS (Elementary Reading Attitude Survey). Findings demonstrated that reading specialist candidate's consistent involvement in the learning procedure was very crucial for the achievement of student. Besides student attitudes toward reading were observed to be multidimensional and challenging to assess.

By acknowledging the complex process associated with reading online, Putman (2014) created the SORAB (Survey of Online Reading Attitude and Behaviours) which is a 71 item self report instrument developed for an overall assessment of student's attitudes and behaviours towards online reading. Factor analysis revealed the instrument which includes five elements (intellectual and behavioural engagement, self administrative behaviour, anxiety, value/interest and viability for online reading) that are hypothesised to add to students general dispositions for online reading. Extra analysis revealed SORAB scores were firmly correlated with general

attitude toward technology and reasonably correlated with context for Internet use.

Attitudes of students towards reading and the texts they choose to read have impact on education accomplishment and readiness to engage with literacy-related activities in the primary years of schooling. Black (2006) led a study in an urban Catholic school in Queensland in years 1 to 7. Study examined the developing attitudes of students towards reading and the perceptions of these attitudes held by their teachers. A redesigned version of the ERAS and Teacher Checklist was used. Results from the study demonstrate that there is no significant difference between the older students (in primary school) and younger students' attitudes towards recreational reading. More positive attitudes towards recreational reading were shown by female students than male students. Results also reveal that there is a negative attitude for older students towards academic reading, but female students indicated significantly more positive attitudes than their male associates.

In a study, Schaffner, Schiefele and Ulferts (2013) found that the quantity of reading serves as full mediator for the reading inspiration, which proposes that those students who are involved in more broad or extensive reading will probably have positive reading attitudes. McKenna Model of Reading Attitude Acquisition proposes three factors that lead to the development of individual's reading attitude. First factor is normative beliefs i.e., how one's friends view about reading, second factor is beliefs about the results of reading (whether reading is probably going to be pleasurable, significant, frustrating or boring) and beliefs about outcomes of competing activities and third factor is particular reading experiences (McKenna et al., 1995).

The above mentioned reviews measure the students' attitude towards reading digital texts which rapidly turning out to be broader. Students' attitude has a vital part in their inspiration or ability to take part in academic activities such as reading. Students' attitudes to reading have been found to have an effect on both engagement and accomplishment in reading. From the above cited reviews, it can be concluded that positive attitudes toward reading can lead students to read all the more regularly, in this manner increasing achievement. Likewise, the degree to which students positively or negatively engage in reading is influenced greatly by the attitude they have towards reading.

3. Research Design

The potential population of study comprises of postgraduate students of universities in Kerala state of India. There are around 17 universities approved by UGC in Kerala state. Out of the 17 universities, four state universities were selected based on their geographical locations viz. south, centre and north of Kerala and also on the basis of their year of establishment and the similarity of the nature of courses. They are University of Kerala, Mahatma Gandhi University, University of Calicut and Kannur

University**.** The research method applied to carry out the study was survey method. For collecting the data, the investigator used fully structured questionnaire. Total number of the students in campus of four selected universities was 4507. Subsequent to determining the sample size of the students by taking into account the Krejcie and Morgan table, 700 questionnaires were distributed to the students of University of Kerala (214), University of Calicut (183), Mahatma Gandhi University (115), and Kannur University (188). Out of which 634 questionnaires were returned. Due to deficiencies existing in the answers, properly filled 588 questionnaires were taken as sample for the study, constituting 84 per cent return rate. Data collected from the respondents were evaluated and analysed to find the results. The data collected were segregated and consolidated with Microsoft Excel. SPSS version 21 was used to do the required statistical analysis. The collected data was subjected to various statistical tests such as Simple Percentage analysis, Mean, Standard Deviation, ANOVA and Z-test.

For measuring the attitude towards digital reading, the study adopted the Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA) from the work of Smith (1991) with modification which includes 23 statements related to their enjoyment, anxiety, modality and difficulties they feel when reading digitally. Prior to the descriptive analysis of the construct, the reliability analysis of the variables utilised in the study was conducted. The Cronbach Alpha value is 0.715 and it is acceptable in light of the suggestion made by Bryman and Cramer (2001). The response to the items in this part followed a five point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher score indicated higher values.

4. Results and Discussion

Attitudes towards reading have been characterised as individuals feelings about reading, which result in approaching or avoiding reading tasks (Cooter & Alexander, 1984). Attitude has been appeared to be a significant dimension in reading. If attitude, the main prerequisite for reading is not positive, then it is likely that the other necessity such as motivation, attention, comprehension and acceptance won't happen at all or will happen haphazardly (Brooks, 1996). Positive dispositions or attitude, mindsets, and beliefs are key measurements of successful reading and learning, especially for students growing up in a digital information age (Coiro, 2012).

Students who enjoy reading and who perceive themselves to be good readers will read more frequently and more widely, which in turn expands their reading experience and improves their comprehension skills. Reading attitudes are learnt characteristics that impact whether students participate in or abstain from reading activities and they can be affected by societal, familial, and scholastic based variables (Zarra-Nezhad, Shooshtari & Vahdat, 2015). Attitudes towards reading have been positively identified with attainment across studies. Compared with enjoyment of reading, the relationship between reading attitudes and attainment is clearer and the

proof more consistent that research has repeatedly found that positive reading attitudes are linked to achievement (McKenna & Kear, 1990). Ramirez (2003) is of the opinion that the young generation who have more experienced with computers and grown up with this technology will reveal distinctive attitude towards reading in digital environment. In this study, attitudes towards digital reading were assessed by students agreement or disagreement to twenty four statements listed in table 1.

It is found that nearly fifty (49%) per cent of the students favoured to the statement that digital reading is one of their favourite activities and also get really excited about what they read digitally. According to Skinner, Kindermann and Furrer (2009), while most pupils at first feel positive about reading, the individuals who are not good at reading frequently create negative attitudes towards it. They likewise reported in their review that these negative attitudes could much of the time be reversed by intervention programmes that helped to enhance their skills, change their view of themselves as readers, in this way motivating them to improve. Meanwhile around 33 per cent of the students neither agree nor disagree that they spend lot of spare time for digital reading. Also 43 per cent of the respondents give a negative attitude towards reading digitally while at home. When they get free time they like to read digitally which was opined by 50 per cent of the students.

A staggering 88 per cent of the students favoured digital reading as they access up-to-date information and also helps to get in 24 X 7 hours. Nearly 40 per cent of the students neither agree nor disagree with the statement that they quickly forget what they read digitally and feel anxious when they have lot of digital reading to do. Almost close to 50 per cent of the students not supported the statement that they tried but just cannot read digitally well. More than fifty per cent of the students have negative feeling for getting upset when they think about having to read digitally and positive feeling for the liking towards digital reading. Nearly 50 per cent of the students favoured the opinion that encountering unfamiliar words and getting tired and sleepy is the hardest part of digital reading and around 42 per cent of the students have a negative feeling towards the statements like digital reading required a lot of help, lot of hard work and it’s a very difficult exercise.

Table 1
Attitude towards Digital Reading

Statements	Responses (n=588)				
	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
Digital reading is one of my favorite activities	29 (4.9%)	100 (17.0%)	176 (29.9%)	230 (39.1%)	52 (8.8%)
I get really excited about what I have read digitally	12 (2.0%)	104 (17.7%)	184 (31.3%)	251 (42.7%)	37 (6.3%)
I spend a lot of my spare time for digital reading	33 (5.6%)	172 (29.3%)	192 (32.7%)	167 (28.4%)	24 (4.1%)
Digitally I read a lot, when I am at home	59 (10.0%)	195 (33.2%)	185 (31.5%)	130 (22.1%)	19 (3.2%)
I like to read digitally whenever I have free time	8 (1.4%)	90 (15.3%)	194 (33%)	259 (44%)	36 (6.1%)
I can access up-to-date information through digital reading	1 (0.2%)	11 (1.9%)	54 (9.2%)	328 (55.8%)	194 (33%)
Digital reading helps me to get information in 24 X 7 hours	2 (0.3%)	9 (1.5%)	57 (9.7%)	259 (44%)	261 (44.4%)
I quickly forget what I have read digitally even if I have just read it	26 (4.4%)	180 (30.6%)	227 (38.6%)	132 (22.4%)	23 (3.9%)
I try very hard, but I just cannot read digitally very well	52 (8.8%)	222 (37.8%)	196 (33.3%)	105 (17.9%)	12 (2.0%)
I get upset when I think about having to read digitally	86 (14.6%)	225 (38.3%)	196 (33.3%)	74 (12.6%)	7 (1.2%)
Encountering unfamiliar words is the hardest part of digital reading	25 (4.3%)	112 (19%)	168 (28.6%)	235 (40%)	48 (8.2%)
When I read digitally I usually get tired and sleepy	17 (2.9%)	134 (22.8%)	167 (28.4%)	211 (35.9%)	59 (10%)
I often feel anxious when I have a lot of digital reading to do	34 (5.8%)	162 (27.6%)	217 (36.9%)	154 (26.2%)	21 (3.6%)
I need a lot of help in digital reading	49 (8.3%)	188 (32%)	173 (29.4%)	146 (24.8%)	32 (5.4%)
Digital reading is one of the best ways for me to learn new things	1 (0.2%)	33 (5.6%)	140 (23.8%)	310 (52.7%)	104 (17.7%)
There are better ways to learn new things than by digital reading	10 (1.7%)	112 (19%)	197 (33.5%)	200 (34%)	69 (11.7%)

Digital reading makes me more relaxable	22 (3.7%)	173 (29.4%)	265 (45.1%)	121 (20.6%)	7 (1.2%)
It is easier for me to understand what I read digitally if pictures, audio & video are included	1 (0.02%)	21 (3.6%)	90 (15.3%)	293 (49.8%)	183 (31.1%)
I like digital reading very much	13 (2.2%)	104 (17.7%)	173 (29.4%)	265 (45.1%)	33 (5.6%)
Digital reading is a very difficult exercise	43 (7.3%)	209 (35.5%)	200 (34%)	120 (20.4%)	16 (2.7%)
I get a lot of enjoyment from digital reading	26 (4.4%)	93 (15.8%)	204 (34.7%)	248 (42.2%)	17 (2.9%)
Digital reading is very informative	1 (0.2%)	6 (1%)	78 (13.3%)	379 (64.5%)	124 (21.1%)
Digital reading gives me more fun	8 (1.4%)	127 (21.6%)	262 (44.6%)	173 (29.4%)	18 (3.1%)
Digital reading needs a lot of hard work	25 (4.3%)	224 (38.1%)	224 (38.1%)	107 (18.2%)	8 (1.4%)

Kretzschmar et al. (2013) did a study that compared reading effort on three distinct media such as an e-reader, a paper page and a tablet computer and furthermore examined the eye movement, brain activity and reading speed while reading these three media. Results reveal that all the students preferred reading on paper, despite the fact that the study found no support for it being more effortful to read on digital media. The authors propose that it is more about individuals' attitude towards digital media than the actual reading experience. Digital reading is one of the best ways to learn new thing which is supported favourably by nearly 70 per cent of the students. Around 45 per cent of them have positive feeling to the statement that there are better ways to learn new things than by digital reading and also get a lot of enjoyment from digital reading. At the same time 45 per cent of the students neither agree nor disagree that digital reading makes them more relaxable and fun. Above 80 per cent of the students have a favoured opinion that it is easy for them to understand what they read digitally, if pictures, audio and video are included and that is also very informative.

A score for attitude towards digital reading is calculated by adding the scores of statements related to attitude towards digital reading. For each aspect, a score of 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 were given to the response strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly agree in the case of positive statement and reverse score were given in the case of negative statements. Then the total scores is divided by the maximum expected score (number of statements x 4) and multiplied it by 100 to get the percentage score. Then these percentage score is classified into three equal classes. Low level with scores less than 33.3, average level in between 33.3 and 66.7 and high level with score greater than 66.7. Assessment of attitude towards digital reading is given in Figure below.

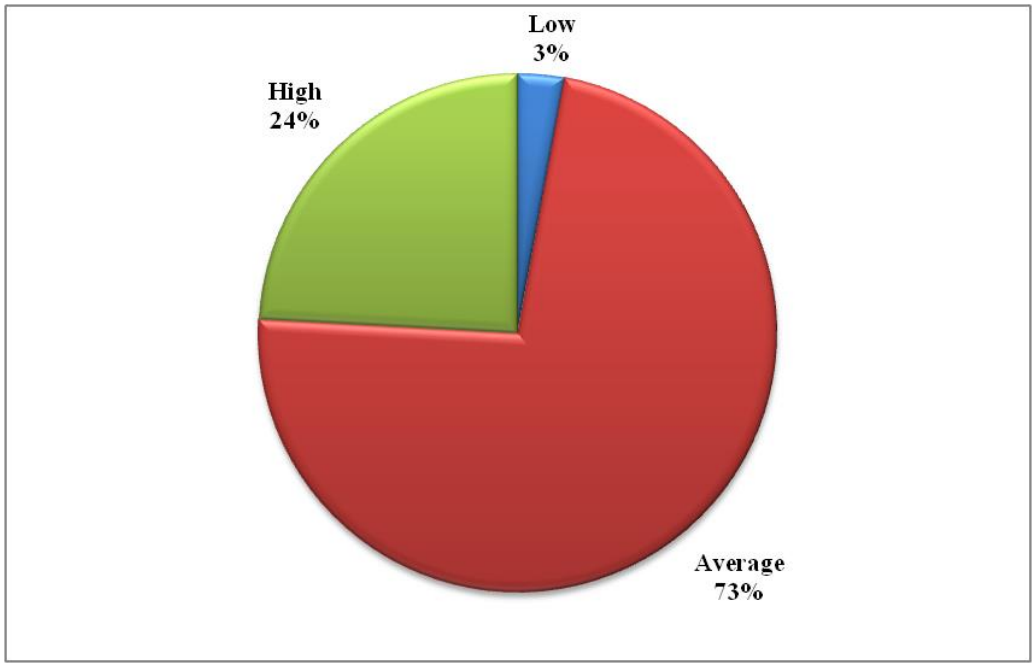

Figure 1
Attitudes towards Digital Reading

From the figure it can be clearly seen that a majority (73%) of the students have an average level of attitude towards digital reading. Meanwhile nearly quarter (24%) per cent of the students have high attitude and a very few students (3%) have a low attitude towards digital reading. Ackerman and Lauterman (2012) let 80 undergraduate engineering students read five texts either on paper or computer screen under three diverse time conditions. For two texts they were allowed just seven minutes to read (pressured), for two texts they were permitted as much time as they required (free) and for one text the participants thought they could use as much time as they needed, however were interrupted after seven minutes. The paper readers generally got better results, yet not under the interrupted time condition. The results of this study demonstrate that the problem with screen reading is more psychological than technological.

Percentage score for the attitude were subjected to Kolmogrov-Smirnov test to test the normality of the variable. Test statistic Kolmogrov-Smirnov Z (1.041) found to be non-significant as the p-value (0.229) is greater than 0.05 level. Hence the percentage scores were subjected to parametric test for testing the significant difference among the sub samples based on gender, discipline and university.

With the end goal for students to develop into effective readers, they must possess both the skill and the will to read. As noted by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), motivation is the thing that activates behaviour. The degree to which

students positively or negatively take part in reading is impacted incredibly by the attitude they have towards reading. Students' attitude towards reading is a focal component influencing reading performance. Students' attitude to digital reading can be affected by their recreational and academic experiences. These experiences may differ for male and female students.

The investigators tried to identify the male and female students' attitudes towards digital reading by applying independent Z-test. From the analysed results given in table 2, Z-value is found to be significant at 0.01, since the p-value is less than 0.01. It is clear that there is a significant gender difference in the attitudes towards digital reading. However, it doesn't agree with the study of Karim and Hasan (2007), which found no significant difference between the attitude of men and women towards digital reading.

Table 2
Attitude towards Digital Reading (Gender-Wise)

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	z-value	p-value
Male	262	60.07	13.43	3.801**	< 0.001
Female	326	55.99	12.48		

*** Significant at 0.01 level*

Comparing the mean scores with those from male (60.07), the female students have a lower mean scores (55.99) and hence it can be concluded that the male students have more positive attitudes towards digital reading than the female students. A trend also identified in a study done by Liu (2008), which stated that female students were more unsatisfied with digital reading (30.9 per cent vs. 18.8 per cent) and male students have more positive attitude towards digital reading, compared to female (30 per cent vs. 22 per cent) students. This is somewhat contradictory to the past research that female students have more positive attitudes toward digital reading than male students (Allen, 2013). Again another interesting contradictory finding was observed by Huang et al. (2013) that both genders represented positive attitudes towards reading digitally.

Table 3 shows the results of discipline-wise analysis of attitudes towards digital reading. By applying one way ANOVA test, p-value is found to be greater than 0.05, hence F-value is non-significant at 0.05. Also the mean score value of three discipline is almost found to be similar.

Table 3
Attitude towards Digital Reading (Discipline-Wise)

Discipline	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	p-value
Science	191	58.01	12.35	0.754^{ns}	0.471
Humanities	191	57.00	13.30		
Social Science	206	58.47	13.49		

ns non-significant at 0.05 level

It is clear that there is no significant association between discipline and attitudes towards digital reading. This result does not fit, however, with past research conducted by Karim and Hasan (2007) about reading habits and attitude in the digital age. They explored 127 undergraduate students' reading habits and attitudes across two disciplines, namely, Information Technology and Arts. They found that there is a significant difference between students of these two majors, i.e., students of Arts have a more positive attitude towards digital reading and enjoy reading more compared to students of Information Technology. Table 4 highlights the results of university-wise comparison of attitudes towards digital reading.

Table 4
Attitude towards Digital Reading (University-Wise)

University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	p-value
University of Kerala	175	58.38	13.30	0.262^{ns}	0.853
Mahatma Gandhi University	111	57.78	13.71		
University of Calicut	140	57.09	13.55		
Kannur University	162	57.81	13.06		

ns non-significant at 0.05 level

By conducting statistical test one way ANOVA, It is clearly seen that p-value is greater than 0.05, hence F-value is non-significant at 0.05 level. Thus it can be concluded that there is no significant association between the variables.

5. Conclusion

The extent to which students positively or negatively engage in reading is influenced greatly by the attitude they have towards reading. Positive attitude is a key dimension of effective learning, particularly for students growing up in a digital information age (Guthrie, Wigfield & Perencevich, 2004). From the findings it is clear that majority of the students in the

universities in Kerala have an average level of attitude towards digital reading and the male students have more positive attitudes towards digital reading than the female students.

Guardians doing literacy practice with their children considerably affects their children's attitude developments towards reading and writing (Hume, Lonigan, & McQueen, 2015). As indicated by DeBaryshe (1995), parents must involve in exercises such as literary practice and library visits which help their children to build up a positive attitude to reading as parents are their role models. To experience the entertaining aspect of reading, reading activities at home should be arranged co-operatively by guardians and children. Moreover, having a reading attitude has an influence on one's reading motivation. In this manner, it can be argued that through the reading attitude the frequency and quantity of reading indirectly affects the reading motivation (Keskin & Bastug, 2014).

In this way, attitude, a person's prevailing feelings and evaluative beliefs about something assume a noteworthy part in motivation to participate in particular activities. In relation to education, student's attitudes have an essential part in their motivation or willingness to take part in academic exercises, such as reading. In the mean time, student's attitudes impact their willingness to participate in an activity, such as reading and it is notable that students who spend the most time engaged in reading have the highest achievement. For instance, responsive educators that know their students' attitudes about reading can tailor lessons and assignments to match students' interests, in this manner maintaining positive attitude and discouraging negative attitude.

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