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Reading Habits and Attitudes among University Students: A Review

Zubaidah Sadeq Alsaeedi^{1*}, Nurizah Binti Md. Ngadiran¹, Zulida Abdul Kadir¹, Wahid Ali Hamood Altowayti², Waleed Mugahed Al-Rahmi³

¹Centre for General Studies and Co-Curricular,
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn, Batu Pahat, Johor, MALAYSIA

²Faculty of Civil Engineering and Built Environment,
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Batu Pahat, Johor, MALAYSIA

³Computer Science Department, Community College,
King Saud University, Riyadh 11437, SAUDI ARABIA

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract: Reading is the core element in the learning process. Reading habits and attitudes towards reading is one of the primary concerns in the field of education. Researchers report a pattern of low reading habits and attitudes among university students. This paper aims to review the latest literature on reading habits and attitudes among university students. The scope of this literature review was extracted from journal articles and electronic media on the subject of reading habits and attitudes.

Keywords: Reading habit, reading attitude, undergraduates

1. Introduction

Reading is the gateway to success in education. Reading is the core element in the learning process. Reading in literate societies serves as a means of communication and language acquisition. It is the source of knowledge and entertainment as it satisfies one's longing for knowledge about the world (Erdem, 2015; Thums, Artelt, & Wolter, 2020). Furthermore, reading is the practice of understanding and obtaining information for progression and personal growth (Fatiloro, Adesola, Hameed, & Adewumi, 2017). However, reading should start at an early age and sustain for a lifetime (Daniel, Esoname, Chima, & Udoaku, 2017). Reading is also a crucial factor in helping students improve their fluency, increase their vocabulary and enhance general knowledge (Ho & Lau, 2018). Reading skills can be seen as a required tool for an individual to successfully engage in social life (Williams, 2017). People who possess good reading skills are eligible to have better job opportunities (Ene, 2017).

However, Reading does not become a 'habit' unless it is carried regularly. When reading is carried persistently, constantly and critically, it is called 'a habit' (Erdem, 2015). These habits are measured in terms of the frequency, the number of materials as well as the time spent on reading (Fatiloro et al., 2017). Students who read enough are more likely to become proficient readers (Krashen, 2009). Their reading skills assist them in thoroughly comprehending knowledge and information (Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013).

Reading attitudes are closely linked to reading activities. Positive reading attitudes are essential factors for success in the learning process. Fluency, awareness of reading strategies, and a positive attitude towards reading are all needed for basic reading skills (Keskin, 2013). According to studies in the United States, students' attitudes toward reading are

*Corresponding author: Zubedasadeq@gmail.com

deteriorating as they get older (Baba & Affendi, 2020). Studies on reading attitudes vary in terms of the enjoyment and difficulty faced by students.

Although the importance of reading has been established, a pattern of low academic reading commitment among university students has been reported. St Clair-Thompson, Graham, and Marsham (2018) reported that students, in a university in the UK, spent an average of 14.1 hours per week reading textbooks and journal articles for their assigned reading. They added, only a small percentage of students read the materials suggested by teachers. Another study in the US by Nadelson et al. (2013) showed that students spent less than an hour on their course readings. Owusu-Acheaw (2016) found that 81.92% of students in Ghana have not read any novel or fiction in the past year. He confirmed that the poor pattern of reading habits of students was related to their time spent on social media. Similarly, Huang, Orellana, and Capps (2016) in their study of reading habits revealed that students in the United States spend an average of 4.94 hours a week on college reading, 4.17 hours on extracurricular reading, and 16.40 hours per week on Facebook. Okolo and Ivwighrehweta (2020) state that the majority of students do not read daily unless there is a need to read.

Thus, this paper summarizes the related literature pertaining to reading habits and attitudes towards reading among university students.

2. Literature Review

This review focuses on reading habits and attitudes towards reading to understand this area better and to provide an overview of the recent existing literature on reading habits and attitudes.

2.1 Reading

Reading is defined as a process of decoding and comprehending printed and written texts (Hoover & Gough, 1990). In other words, reading requires the recognition of words and the construction of meanings. The more a person reads, the more a person comprehends. This suggests the importance of reading in developing a good reading skill which results in strengthening vocabulary, inferring meanings and drawing conclusions. As agreed by many researchers, reading is a “developmental process”. It should start at an early stage of students’ life and continues for a lifetime (Butler, 1982; Karageorgos, Richter, Haffmans, Schindler, & Naumann, 2020). Notably, early-stage reading depends on simply recognizing the written words and their explicit meaning while at an advanced stage it requires adept cognitive abilities, coherence, syntax and semantic integration (Karageorgos et al., 2020).

2.2 Benefits of Reading

Primary Source of Knowledge

Reading is the primary source for obtaining knowledge and information. Most knowledge can only be acquired by reading in different areas and fields. Van Woudenberg (2018) argues that reading is not simply seeing words, it is about forming beliefs and obtaining knowledge. Through reading, one can form ideas, beliefs, and visions about general topics. Similarly, Sallabaş (2008) notes that reading keeps us updated with information and knowledge about everything in the world. He claims that reading has a positive effect on students’ academic reading because reading develops their learning skills, enriches their vocabulary and expands their general knowledge. In addition, reading boosts the student’s sense of self-esteem (Veerabasavaiah & Shivappa, 2018) and self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003) which is why students should comply with reading and make it a daily activity.

Enrich Vocabulary

Along with increasing knowledge, reading enriches vocabulary acquisition. Nation (2015) asserts the role of reading in expanding the knowledge of vocabulary. Likewise, students acquire vocabularies through exposure to different forms of texts (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). In other words, the amount of reading materials contributes to the development and increase of vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, acquiring vocabulary is essential to mastering the language as stated by (Krashen, 1989, 2004). Nippold, Duthie, and Larsen (2005) point out that one-half of the vocabulary knowledge is gained through reading. Consequently, the knowledge of grammar and spelling expands (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Therefore, it is crucial to teach students from primary levels how to read in order for them to improve and increase their vocabulary knowledge. Researchers believe that lack of vocabulary and prior knowledge hinder comprehension as noted by (Sidek & Rahim, 2015). On the other hand, adults who have good vocabulary knowledge are likely to have good reading skills in terms of understanding the meaning of the words and conveying their knowledge to others (Duff, Tomblin, & Catts, 2015).

Several studies have focused on the importance of reading to develop vocabularies among students at an early age (Marulis & Neuman, 2010; Mol, Bus, De Jong, & Smeets, 2008; Sullivan & Brown, 2015). Undoubtedly, there is an association between reading and word meaning that persists to adulthood (Frishkoff, Perfetti, & Collins-Thompson, 2011). To put it another way, the more students expose to words while reading the more students discern their meanings.

Wasik, Hindman, and Snell (2016) in their article 'Book reading and vocabulary development' highlight the effective role of reading books in increasing vocabulary since reading from books allows repeated exposure to words and ideas which in turn, helps students learn the meanings of the words and practice them.

Enhance Fluency

Enhancing fluency is a result of continuous reading (O'Connor, White, & Swanson, 2007). Students who read a lot, encounter words and understand their meanings become more fluent and automatically identify terms without struggling. The term 'reading Fluency' is defined by Lee and Yoon (2017) as the ability to read texts fast and accurately with little mistakes and effort as well as reading texts expressively with correct pauses, articulation and phrasing. According to Paige, Rasinski, and Magpuri- Lavell (2012), fluent readers can interpret meaning while less fluent readers strive for meaning. The reader's disability to form meaning is hampered by low and tedious word recognition skills. Moreover, researchers studied the role of text-reading fluency on reading comprehension. They emphasized that there is a positive relationship between fluency in text-reading and reading comprehension (Kim, 2015; Kim, Park, & Wagner, 2014; Kim, Wagner, & Lopez, 2012). According to them, students who read fast, precise and with expressions tend to comprehend texts well unlike their counterparts whose comprehension is retarded because of slow and inadequate reading fluency. In a similar view, Hook and Jones (2002) note that fluent readers read easily, correctly and adequately with correct intonation as compared to sluggish and struggling readers. Fluent readers can use reading as a powerful learning method. Therefore, reading is a fundamental step in developing fluency which in turn enhances comprehension.

Reading is Crucial to Academic Success

The foremost advantage of reading is its influence on academic success. Reading habits enhance and boost the growth of reading comprehension skills and have a positive effect on the academic success of students as noted by (Stoller & Nguyen, 2020). Numerous researchers confirmed the relationship between reading and academic success (Anderson, 1985; Diwan, 2020; Sikora, Evans, & Kelley, 2019). They emphasized the positive and definite impact of reading on academic performance. Whitten, Labby, and Sullivan (2019) stress that leisure reading (non-academic readings) influences student's grades. Students who read for pleasure scored more than students who do not read. Comparatively, Sappington, Kinsey, and Munsayac (2002) found that leisure reading positively influenced students' CGPA in the US. Thus, students who spend their time reading academic or non-academic materials tend to score better and become skillful readers. Interestingly, some studies found a positive relationship between reading and students' math scores (Gorard, Siddiqui, & See, 2017; Jæger & Breen, 2016; Wang et al., 2020). To illustrate, reading accelerates the learning process and prepares students to be skilled readers and succeed in their academic and professional life.

2.3 Purposes of Reading

Academic Reading

Academic reading refers to the reading activities that are done either voluntarily or assigned by teachers, parents or tutors for the sake of gaining academic knowledge and skills (De Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, & Rosseel, 2012). It also refers to all-school-related readings that are done in school and universities to gain knowledge. According to Manarin, Carey, Rathburn, and Ryland (2015), academic reading is concerned with combining knowledge to generate new insights using distinct techniques to interpret scholarly texts. Besides, academic reading involves reading long texts for a specific major subject area as proposed by (Sengupta, 2002). However, this reading should be done critically and purposefully (Isakson & Isakson, 2017). Academic reading is complex and differs from other forms of readings in terms of the length and level of texts (Sohail, 2016). She adds that these texts are challenging as they contain complex sentence structures. Therefore, academic reading is a multifaceted process that involves critical and cognitive abilities

Academic reading is essential to success at the university level. Manarin et al. (2015) claim that academic reading makes students engage with knowledge and cognitive processes and is considered crucial to university success. However, Gorzycki, Howard, Allen, Desa, and Rosegard (2016) asserts that the lack of critical reading skills may lead to students' failure. Further, in order to improve disciplinary comprehension, the undergraduate reading experience builds on adolescent academic reading skills, shifting a person from a beginner to an experienced academic reader (Manarin et al., 2015). An experienced reader tends to interpret, synthesize, evaluate and apply the information contained in the text, thereby getting more involved in the process of discerning meaning than in the process of gathering key concepts that are more frequently used by inexperienced readers (Horning, 2011).

Students mainly rely on textbooks, lecture notes articles and online resources for their academic readings. According to Medar and Kenchakkanavar (2015), students depend on the textbook for their learning. Besides reading textbooks for course-related purposes, students also depend on lecture notes especially for exam preparation (Barnett et al., 2012). Students also rely on articles for study purposes because they are clear, short and contain more discussions (Özkan, 2017). Markedly, students prefer short and to-the-point materials. In addition, online resources have become an increasingly important source for reading. Huang et al. (2016) in their study of academic and leisure reading in the U.S and Chilean,

pointed out that online materials were the most popular source for reading. It seems that students have limited resources related to their academic readings.

Leisure Reading

Researchers have emphasized the role of leisure reading in an individual's life (Attiyat, 2019; Mak & Fancourt, 2020; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017; Whitten et al., 2019; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016). Leisure reading is also referred to as 'pleasure reading' (Sullivan & Brown, 2015; Whitten et al., 2019), 'recreational reading' (Mueller, Hanson, Martinez, & Meyer, 2017; N Khreisat & Mugableh, 2020; Putro & Lee, 2017), and 'voluntary reading' (Sholeh, Setyosari, & Cahyono, 2019; van Bergen et al., 2018). Leisure reading reflects the person's choice of reading materials, time and place (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). It also enhances reading skills and academic performance (Wang et al., 2020). Unlike academic reading, leisure reading is done voluntarily and out-of-school activities (McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012).

A variety of leisure reading materials are available for leisure purposes such as newspapers, fiction books, magazines, comics, novels and many other genres. Nonetheless, newspapers and magazines are the most popular materials students read. As cited in (Rahmat, Rahman, & Hassan, 2018), 82% of students, identified as Gen Z, from the University of Mississippi and Purdue read newspapers for trustworthy information. Erdem (2015) found that students of Ankara university read novels, newspapers and magazines in their free time. Similarly, Baharuddin and Kadir (2015) reported in a review paper of reading habits in Malaysia that students mostly read newspapers, magazines and novels. Bharuthram (2017) found that students prefer to read newspapers followed by magazines for their pleasure. Apparently, students seem aware of the current issues and prefer specific type of information.

3. Previous studies on Reading Habits

There are various reasons why students read. They read for different purposes such as for knowledge, enjoyment and academic purposes. They read from different materials including books, printed materials and digital materials such as websites, digital libraries and reading applications. The reading habits of students around the world are not the same. However, there are some consistencies as discussed below.

Previous research has investigated the reading habits among university students. (Rasiah, Kaur, & Nagaratnam, 2011) studied the reading habits of Y-generation students at Taylor University in Malaysia. They stated that most of the respondents prefer to read online websites followed by newspapers. 39% of students dedicated 1-3 hours for reading per week while 21% of them spent less than an hour per week in reading. Concerning leisure reading materials, they revealed that the majority of students read true stories followed by mystery books. Furthermore, most of the students with 42% of respondents mainly read to pass their examinations, 30% to gain knowledge, and only 28% of them read for pleasure. However, the findings of this study are quite similar to the findings of Huang, Capps, Blacklock, and Garza (2014) who revealed that students spent 7.72 hours in academic reading, 4.24 hours for leisure reading and 8.95 hours using the internet. In addition, they reported that the students preferred to read online materials frequently followed by newspapers and magazines whereas books that are unrelated to their study field were the least popular materials read. They also revealed that students spend more time on the internet and online applications compared to reading. Similarly, a recent study by (Tanjung, Ridwan, & Gultom, 2017) on reading habits among 320 undergraduates in Borneo university in Indonesia showed that students used the internet for 1-3 hours because it allows them to access information easily and rapidly. They also reported that while they sometimes read newspapers, novels and magazines, students read online information frequently. Accordingly, students are more familiar with accessing information in digital form while books and printed materials have plummeted down.

In like manner, a study on reading habits of the private university (Afe Babalola) students in Nigeria took place in the year 2017 by (Daniel et al., 2017). The authors examined the reading habits among 180 students enrolled in the university. A structured questionnaire was distributed to the respondents to collect the data. The results showed that 47.2% of students spend 2-4 hours on reading, 41.1% of them read between 4-6 hours and only 8.3% of them read more than six hours. Further, they claimed that students mainly read to pass examinations, for self-development and for improving their skills in the English language. Moreover, in terms of materials, they pointed out that students read notebooks, textbooks and electronic materials. However, the main reason militating against students' reading habits is their engagement in social media websites such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. In the same year, 200 university students were surveyed in Nigeria by (Fatiloro et al., 2017) to identify the reading habits of students at Oyo University. Concerning materials and frequency of items read on daily basis, more than half of the students read books in areas of specialization with 65%. 63% of respondents used the internet as a source of knowledge, 62% of respondents like reading texts from various fields, and 61.5% of them liked reading textbooks. Moreover, the study showed that 55% of students read motivational books whereas 53.5% read novels and 52% of them like read to informational books such as magazines. Thus, from the previous studies, results show that students need to read more recreational materials to boost their vocabulary and reading skills.

In Macedonia, reading habits were investigated too. A study was conducted by (Skenderi & Ejupi, 2017) in four universities in Macedonia namely the University of Tetovo, University Cyril and Methodius, South East European University, and University American College Skopje. A total number of 149 students participated in this study by

responding to a questionnaire developed by the authors. They revealed that the majority of students enjoy reading and the most favourable types of materials students read were romance, psychology and economy while politics and poetry were the least genres favoured by students. They mentioned, concerning the frequency of reading books, that 43.6% of participants read one book every month and 28.2% of them read books once a year. In addition, they found that 44.3% of participants were driven away from reading by social networks such as Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram. In short, the number of books read is falling year by year and the interest in reading among university students is diminishing. However, the findings of this study are consistent with the literature reviewed above.

Unlike the previous studies, (Bahoo, Ismail, & Saleh, 2017) investigated the reading habits of Medical students in Erbil and found that 57.5 % of students read in their spare time. The results showed that students read more than one hour per day according to the time frame provided by the authors (less than 15, 15-30, 30-60 minutes and more than an hour). Furthermore, considering the materials read, students favoured reading printed books (42%) followed by e-books (35%) and 14% of them read website materials. On the other hand, the least materials students preferred to read were magazines with 11% and newspapers with only 10%.

Diwan (2020) in a case study described the reading habits of 200 university students in one of the universities in India. Around half of the students spend 1-3 hours reading, mainly, for passing exams and preparation for competitive tests. Nearly 35% of them read notes followed by textbooks with 23.68%. However, only 5 respondents reported reading in their free time which is not so optimistic; students are expected to read more and to allocate time for non-academic readings to develop their personalities and become more qualified and proficient to succeed in their subsequent stage of life.

A study done by (Okolo & Ivwighreghweta, 2020) among university students in Nigeria showed that 40% of students read only when the need arises. Around 55% of students read 2-4 hours, 25% read less than an hour, 20% read for 4-6 hours and none of the students read more than 6 hours. Remarkably, 35% of students were categorized as moderate readers that are reading 1-4 books in a month while only 7.5% of students were considered heavy readers reading up to 8-12 books in a month.

Considerably, comparative studies between different countries in terms of reading habits have taken place in literature. A recent study by (Hejase, Hejase, Chehimi, & Younis, 2020) was carried out to investigate the reading habits among equal samples of 130 graduate and undergraduates from Lebanon and France. The participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire translated into Arabic and French to facilitate the responses of participants. The authors asked about *how many books in print were read in the last 12 months?* They found that 21.9 % of Lebanese have not read any book in the past year while only 2.3 % of French respondents did not read any book in the past year. On the other hand, when the authors asked about *how many online books have you read in the past year?* It was revealed that 40 % of Lebanese have not read any E-books while only 17% of French respondents have not. However, the authors reported that the average time spent on reading per week by most Lebanese and French respondents was between 1-4 hours. Furthermore, most of the respondents from both countries spend most of their spare time on social media, online games and the internet. Consequently, reading habits are declining and students prefer to spend their time on the internet neglecting the importance of reading in boosting their academic achievement and quality of life.

On the whole, according to research on university students' reading habits in one or more languages, non-academic materials were preferred by university students such as newspapers, magazines, literature, web-based materials, etc while textbooks and journal articles were the academic materials preferred by students. Some of these studies show a clear decline in reading habits among university students.

3.1 Reading Attitudes

A study conducted by Annamalai and Muniandy (2013) on the reading habits and attitudes of the students in a Malaysian polytechnic. The researchers adapted Smith's (1991) Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA) and Pandian's (1997) questionnaire in their study. A total of 119 polytechnic students from the Engineering and Business department were selected as respondents. The study showed that students of polytechnic have low interest in reading and do not enjoy reading as much as technological activities. In fact, students perceive reading as difficult, boring and causes anxiety. They also think that there are other ways to learn new things than by reading. This means that students have a negative attitude towards reading.

In contrast, a study done by Baba and Affendi (2020) on reading habits and attitudes of 80 students in the Faculty of Education in Universiti Teknologi Mara, Puncak Alam. The study revealed that students had overall positive attitudes towards academic and leisure reading. 90% of students depend on websites for academic reading and they prefer comics, novels and magazines for leisure reading.

In addition, reading habits and preferences were investigated by (Ahmed, 2016) in UMSKL, a public university in Malaysia. He conducted his study among 314 students from different backgrounds. He stated that the majority of them prefer to read online e-books and journals followed by textbooks, comics, magazines and newspapers. Moreover, he reported that a high percentage of respondents (74%) did not read any book or novel for the past year. Besides, students enjoy surfing the internet for 1-2 hours daily while reading is the least activity preferred by students in their spare time. The study also revealed that students did not enjoy reading and find it as a source of difficulty and anxiety despite their positive attitude towards it.

4. Conclusion

Based on the literature, the majority of students do not enjoy reading and mainly read to pass the examination. Most of the students like to read novels and magazines. However, the most favourite source of reading among students is electronic materials. Furthermore, studies show that social networking sites negatively affect the reading habits of students. Reading habits can be cultivated if students are encouraged to read from an early stage of life. Home, teachers, and peers play a vital role in promoting reading habits among students and instilling positive attitudes towards reading. Moreover, it is an axiomatic fact that reading boosts the academic performance and professional development of students. Therefore, students must value the importance of reading and allocate time for reading books and other materials that contribute to inculcate reading habits.

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