

Exploring gender-wise, sector-wise, and grade-wise difference among secondary school students' reading habits

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine students' perceptions regarding reading habits and to explore gender-wise, sector-wise, and grade-wise differences in secondary school students' reading habits. The students (N=538) who participated in this cross-sectional survey were selected through a non-proportional stratified random sampling technique from district Lahore. The researchers developed a questionnaire comprised of four subscales (perceptions, purpose, preferences, and problems in reading) to measure students reading habits. They ensured the validity of the instrument from experts and calculated the reliability that was Cronbach's alpha=0.802. Data were analyzed by using different statistical techniques (mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-tests). The results of descriptive statistics indicated that students gave more preferences to reading than perceptions about reading, the purpose of reading, and problems in reading. However, the least contributing factor was problems in reading. Whereas the findings of independent samples t-tests showed a significant difference in students' perceptions about reading habits based on gender and class. However, an insignificant difference was found in students' perception of reading habits based on sector-wise (public and private) schools. Books of students' interests may be provided in libraries to encourage them to read. Moreover, teachers may also arrange more reading activities to enhance students' reading skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is considered a priceless activity for the educational development of a nation because it helps to bridge the gap between knowledge and ignorance [1]. While researchers believed that reading is the gateway to all other information [2], which may lead to understanding the world outside the text [3], [4]. Hence, Loan [1] believed that a clumsy person can scale mountains of information by reading. Moreover, Lonigan, Burgess, and Schatschneider [5] stated that reading is a multifaceted cognitive process of constructing meaning out of texts written in various sources. Though Chotitham and Wongwanich [6] and Anggeraini and Madenta [7] argued that developing a reading habit is a necessary and effective part to improve the thinking process, generate new ideas, develop creative and critical thinking, and mould personalities. However, Bano, Jabeen, and Qutoshi [8] believe that out-of-school readings, as well as leisure reading, are vital for the cognitive development of a person.

Reading is the ability to comprehend a writer's message that allows readers to enhance their knowledge for personal growth and academic success [2], [9], [10]. However, Alzahrani, Park, and Tekian [3] believed that reading is an art of decoding and construing messages beneath and through written materials. Hence Walia and Sinha [11] stated that reading depends on various skills for example scanning, perceiving messages from written words through skimming. Thus, reading is an important opportunity for learning exchange while developing a reading habit is an academic practice that improves mental abilities [12], [13]. While reading printed and non-printed materials (e.g., books, magazines, electronic journals) provide you with information that influences the cognitive process whereas reading habits assist the reader to acquire useful and desirable information [12], [14]. Therefore, books are the best tool for passing down information from generation to generation [15], [16].

Students vary in their level of academic achievement because of differences in demographic characteristics such as location, background, grades and gender [17]–[19]. These factors also lead to differences in students' reading patterns. As a result, reading patterns play a critical role in a person's ability to achieve functional productivity. Students' reading habits and patterns are influenced by their gender, ethnicity, and educational background [20]. Hence, Dilshad, Adnan, and Akram [21] believed that students' reading abilities are influenced by their gender and context. Research on young school children's and teenagers' reading habits especially in developing countries as EFL learners is very hot in recent years [22]. In the background of Pakistan, a small number of such studies appeared that prompted the report [4], [23] at the university level. Two studies stand out: Gujjar, Bajwa, and Ramzan [24] compared the reading attitudes of students studying in two different education systems one is formal and another is non-formal. While looking at this situation, there is a pressing need to investigate students' reading habits and attitudes on a broader scale. This research aims to examine students' perceptions regarding reading habits and to explore gender, sector, and grade-wise difference in reading habits among secondary school students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is an important phase in one's academic life that leads people how to be more creative and critical thinkers. It helps readers to know how to meet their needs, get mature, and maintain their freedom of expression and reflection [10]. People read books, journals, novels, academic papers, and documents to acquire information [4]. Sherafat and Murthy [25] concluded that students preferred reading storybooks, magazines, comics, books on sports, and cartoons. Hussain and Munshi [4] found that Pakistani students tended to read books, journals, poetry, and stuff for entertainment, to spend their time during holidays for emotional satisfaction. Most of the time they read religious content for spiritual satisfaction. However, Rasheed [23] determined that Pakistani students were more likely to read English written material about their surroundings while their study patterns were different from one another.

Tonka and Bakir [26] believed that individuals' reading tastes vary based on student's interests, aptitude, and circumstances while students' characteristics (i.e., gender, class, socioeconomic status) influence their reading habits. Hence, many future researchers designed studies to find out the influence of these constructs on students reading habits and academic achievement. For example, male have different preferences and abilities for reading than female, however, female like to read more as compared to male while both like to read textbooks along with other reading material [20]. Pehlivan, Serin, and Serin [27] determined from a descriptive survey; students moderately prefer to read books while gender and socioeconomic status significantly influence their perception regarding reading habits. Moreover, Schwabe, McElvany, and Trendtel [28] were surveyed to examine gender-based differences in reading habits among college students in Jammu and Kashmir, India. They found gender influences students' reading choices, male students read for learning while female students read for more education.

Students prefer to read textbooks as well as other material that enrich their knowledge while gender influences their reading habits [13]. They also concluded that female students' reading habits vary significantly from male. Subsequently, Dilshad, Adnan, and Akram [21] investigated gender influence on Pakistani students' reading habits and concluded that male and female reading habits significantly differed while reading depending on their goals, preferences, and research schedules. In comparison to male peers, female students had a more optimistic attitude toward reading. Both male and female students had positive attitudes toward reading, the female had more positive attitudes than male students towards reading [6]. Tonka and Bakir [26] investigated students' preferences and found that 44.8% of students prefer online reading content. Reading materials that are available online can be easily accessed through the internet in this technological age. Furthermore, 20% of them prefer magazines over other reading materials. Magazines are typically easier to read because their contents are brief. Magazines are usually read in one's spare time. Newspapers and books are preferred by the remaining 18.1% and 17.1%, respectively. While traditional and contemporary printed materials are useful, some students prefer to read them. The research objectives of this

study are: i) To examine the level of secondary school students' perception regarding their reading habits (i.e., perceptions, purpose, preferences, and problems in reading); ii) To explore the differences in secondary school students' perception regarding reading habits based on gender, sector, and grade. Then, the research question were: i) What is the level of secondary school students' perception regarding their reading habits (i.e., perception, purpose, preferences, and problems in reading)?; ii) Whether any significant difference between male' and female' student perceptions regarding reading habits?; iii) Whether sector-wise (public and private) significant differences exist in secondary school students' perception of reading habits?; iv) Whether grade-wise (9th and 10th) significant differences exist in students' perception of reading habits?

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted to examine students' perceptions regarding their reading habits (i.e., perceptions, purpose, preferences, and problems in reading) and to explore gender-wise, sector-wise, and grade-wise differences in students' reading habits. A descriptive research design of a quantitative approach was used while a cross-sectional survey method was applied to collect data about reading habits. A total of 600 students (300 male and 300 female) were selected through a non-proportional stratified random sampling technique from the population group of district Lahore. The researchers developed a questionnaire of 35 closed-ended items which comprised of four subscales (i.e., perception, purpose, preferences, and problems in reading). Each item was constructed on a five-point Likert type scale (5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=undecided, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree). The validity of the instrument was checked by five educational and assessment experts.

While a pilot study was conducted to measure the reliability level of the questionnaire items to do so 100 students were selected conveniently out of the target population. These students did not take part in the actual study. An analysis of items' reliability was determined through the reliability coefficient test. The value of Cronbach Alpha was 0.802 which shows acceptable consistency of reliability. This shows that the questionnaire items were completely appropriate for the research goal. The data from the schools of Lahore were collected by the researchers personally. Students were informed about the purpose of the research before distributing the questionnaire. Afterwards, researchers circulated the questionnaire personally among the participants. A total of 538 participants provided their valuable responses about reading habits and researchers ensured that they filled the questionnaire properly. The response rate was 89.6% which is acceptable in social sciences research for quantitative data. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were applied by using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20 software. Mean, Standard deviation, and independent samples t-tests were applied to answer the research questions.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Q 1: What is the level of secondary school students' perception regarding their reading habits (i.e., perception, purpose, preferences, and problems in reading)?

Table 1 describes the results of students' responses about their reading habits. The table indicates that students give more preferences to reading than perception about reading, the purpose of reading, and problems in reading as $M=4.11$; $SD=.536$ of preferences in reading was higher. However, the least contributing factor was problems in reading as $M=3.63$; $SD=.813$. Overall, results demonstrated that participants had better reading habits.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of reading habits (N=538)

Scales	Mean	SD
Perception about reading	3.67	.676
Purpose of reading	3.91	.612
Preferences in reading	4.11	.536
Problems in reading	3.63	.813
Overall reading habits	3.86	.455

4.2. Q 2: Whether any significant difference between male' and female' student perceptions regarding reading habits?

Table 2 describes the results regarding the gender-based difference in students' reading habits. Results of the table indicates there was a significant difference in male' and female' student perception about reading, preferences in reading, problems in reading, and overall reading habits as p-value is less than 0.05 ($t(522.311)=-3.420$, $p<0.001$; $t(519.781)=-2.149$, $p<0.018$; $t(529.358)=2.153$, $p<0.003$; $t(526.946)=-2.624$, $p<0.008$, respectively). However, there was an insignificant difference in male and female student perception

about the purpose of reading as the p -value is greater than 0.05 $t(536) = 0.327, p > 0.744$. It is also found that female students spend more time in reading as compared to male students. Hence, the results also indicate that gender influences students' perceptions about reading habits as Cohen's d value demonstrate a small effect size as $d = 0.462$.

Table 2. Independent samples t-test between male and female's students reading habits

	Male (257)		Female (281)		df	t	P	d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Perceptions about reading	3.57	0.836	3.77	0.516	522.311	-3.420	.001*	0.288
Purpose of reading	3.92	0.597	3.90	0.634	536	0.327	.744	0.032
Preferences in reading	4.02	0.560	4.19	0.511	519.781	-2.149	.018*	0.317
Problems in reading	3.77	0.847	3.48	0.778	529.358	2.153	.003*	0.357
Overall reading habits	3.78	0.472	3.99	0.437	526.946	-2.624	.008*	0.462

Note: N=538; d=Cohen's d ; and * = $p < 0.05$.

4.3. Q 3: Whether sector-wise (public and private) significant differences exist in secondary school students' perception of reading habits?

Table 3 describes the results regarding the sector-wise difference in students' reading habits. Results of the table indicate that there was an insignificant difference in public and private sector secondary school students' perception about reading, problems in reading, and overall reading habits as p -value is greater than 0.05 ($t(536) = 1.115, p > 1.031$; $t(536) = 0.312, p > 0.701$; $t(536) = -0.210, p > 0.534$, respectively). However, there was a significant difference in public and private sector secondary school students' perception about purpose of reading and preferences in reading as p -value is less than 0.05 ($t(526.394) = 2.019, p < 0.016$; $t(531.257) = -2.719, p < 0.032$). It is also found that students from public sector schools have better reading habits than private-sector students. Hence, the results also indicate that sector has a small effect size on students' perception about reading habits as Cohen's d value shows a small effect size as $d = 0.190$ nonetheless sector has a large effect size on students' preferences in reading as $d = 0.933$.

Table 3. Independent samples t-test between public and private secondary students reading habits

	Public (273)		Private (265)		df	t	P	d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Perceptions about reading	3.68	0.536	3.59	0.519	536	1.115	1.031	0.171
Purpose of reading	3.91	0.617	3.63	0.584	526.394	2.019	.016*	0.466
Preferences in reading	4.04	0.535	3.58	0.447	531.257	-2.719	.032*	0.933
Problems in reading	3.71	0.813	3.52	0.772	536	0.312	.701	0.240
Overall reading habits	3.81	0.472	3.72	0.471	536	-0.210	.534	0.190

Note: N=538; d=Cohen's d ; and * = $p < 0.05$.

4.4. Q 4: Whether grade-wise (9th and 10th) significant differences exist in students' perceptions about reading habits?

Table 4 describes the results regarding the grade-wise difference in students' reading habits. The results exhibited there was a significant difference in 9th and 10th grade students' perception about reading, preferences in reading, and overall reading habits as p -value is less than 0.05 ($t(531.454) = 2.068, p < 0.013$; $t(524.249) = 3.270, p < 0.000$; $t(530.348) = 2.392, p < 0.009$, respectively). However, there was an insignificant difference in 9th and 10th class students' perception about purpose of reading and problems in reading as p -value is greater than 0.05 ($t(536) = 1.171, p > 0.242$; $t(536) = 0.542, p > 0.588$). It is also found that 9th grade students have better reading habits as compared to 10th grade students. Hence, the results also indicate that grade influences students' perception about reading habits as Cohen's d value demonstrate a small effect size as $d = 0.262$.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test between class 9th and 10th students reading habits

	9th grade (292)		10th grade (246)		df	t	P	d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Perceptions about reading	3.72	0.501	3.59	0.595	531.454	2.068	.013*	0.236
Purpose of reading	3.94	0.589	3.85	0.664	536	1.173	.242	0.143
Preferences in reading	4.14	0.436	3.89	0.676	524.249	3.270	.000*	0.440
Problems in reading	3.73	0.833	3.68	0.770	536	0.542	.588	0.062
Overall reading habits	3.86	0.417	3.73	0.565	530.348	2.392	.009*	0.262

Note: N=538; d=Cohen's d ; and * = $p < 0.05$.

5. DISCUSSION

Reading habit is an essential aspect of creating a literate society because it helps to shape the personality of individuals, develop thinking abilities, and to create new ideas [6]. Therefore, this study is designed to investigate the secondary school students' perceptions regarding their reading habits and to explore gender-wise, sector-wise, and grade-wise differences in reading habits. The descriptive findings indicated that secondary school students give more preferences to reading than perceptions about reading, the purpose of reading, and problems in reading. These results support the finding of Tonka and Bakir [26] that students prefer academic reading materials and Wu, Valcke, and Keer [29] found that students prefer to read relevant academic books. It is also determined that there was a significant difference in male and female students' reading habits while female have better reading habits than male. These findings are in line with the results of Silverrajoo and Hassan [30] that female prove to be more positive than male towards reading. Ehsan and Sultana [31] also found that female read more books and magazines and they had a greater tendency to read for a longer duration.

While another studies [23], [27] found significant variation in students' reading habits in terms of gender and socioeconomic background. Anggeraini and Madenta [7] found somewhat differences in the reading habits of male and female students, while female students exhibited a comparatively more positive attitude towards reading as compared to their male counterparts [21]. Moreover, Chotitham and Wongwanich [6] believed that individual reading preferences differ in terms of interest, attention, aptitude, and situation. Reading interest, curiosity or inclination seems to be different with different age levels. Male and female have different reading habits and reading aptitudes; female enjoy reading more than male. However, Schwabe, McElvany, and Trendtel [28] suggested male students read for information and female students read for more education. Conversely, Ameyaw and Anto [32] found female students lack healthy study habits and effective reading skills. Whereas Alzahrani, Park, and Tekian [3] revealed that gender has no significant impact on the study habits and academic achievement of students. Abid and Akhtar [33] found a gender influence on students' variables such as engagement, interpersonal skills, study skills. Moreover, Abid *et al.* [34] found that reading habits influence on academic achievement through study skills.

6. CONCLUSION

Reading habit is an essential aspect for students to develop creative and critical thinking abilities. However, students' demographics influence their perception, preference, and purpose of learning. Therefore, this study is designed to investigate students' perceptions regarding their reading habits and to explore gender, sector, and grade-wise difference in reading habits. It is concluded that students give more preferences to reading than perceptions about reading, the purpose of reading, and problems in reading. Moreover, it is determined that there was a significant difference in male and female students' reading habits while female have better reading habits than male. Hence, a grade-wise significant difference was found in students' perceptions of reading habits. However, there was no significant difference in students' perception of reading habits based on sector (public and private).





A variety of books especially books of students' interests may be provided in libraries to encourage them to read. Moreover, teachers may arrange more reading activities relating to their subjects to enhance students' reading skills. Male students have less reading habits as compare to females; thus, it is recommended that male students may be encouraged to visit the library by fixing one period for the library with a minimum of three days of the week.

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