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A research on reading habits of university students: (Sample of Ankara University and Erciyes University)

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Abstract

The activity of reading of an individual, which commences together with the beginning of school age and continues throughout their lifetime, is also the basic tool of learning. After acquiring basic skills pertaining to reading, ensuring that these skills are permanent, sustained throughout life, and transition to functional and critical literacy is closely related to the reading habit of the individual. In individualistic terms, the habit of reading is also one of the most important foundations of a robust and developed personality. In the world of today where knowledge is increasing rapidly and science and technology impose constant changes to human life, it is observed that humans constantly need to improve themselves in both their professional and social lives. In occupational and career development after formal education, especially for the purpose of being able to adapt to change, education and lifelong learning has become a necessity. University students are groups that are expected to have a high level of reading habit, which is among the individual and social development criteria. Thus, the determination of reading habits of university students is considered important in both areas they need and in their self developments throughout their lives.

This study has the objective of determining the reading habits of students studying at the Ankara University Department of Primary Education and Erciyes University History Department. To that end, data of questionnaires applied to a total of 326 students consisting of 225 students from Ankara University and 101 students from Erciyes University have been analyzed and the results have been presented in the form of tables.

According to the data obtained in the study, it has been determined that students at Ankara University and Erciyes University read novels, newspapers and magazines in their spare time, they enjoy reading literary works, historic, romantic, entertaining-humorous, and psychological genres the most, and they could not spare much time for reading books due to the intensity of lessons, busy social life, preparation for examinations and spending time on the computer/internet.

Keywords: Reading, reading habit, university students.

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1. Introduction

In the world of today, where change is inevitable, just as it is in every area, rapid change is being experienced in information, information resources, and access to information. It is a fact that a person, who keeps their knowledge up-to-date, and not a person, who is just knowledgeable, shall adapt easily to this change and be successful in every field. When it is considered that a significant proportion of acquired knowledge is acquired through reading, the importance of reading in adapting to this changing age can be better understood. Reading, which has been defined as "the process of the brain evaluating and making sense of signs and symbols perceived through the eyes" (Özbay, 2007:4), is a complex process that consists of various stages of development. Above all, it is a process of perceiving where symbols are recognized (Bamberger, 1990:10). Having reading become a habit and sustaining it throughout life is among the basic objectives of education

A habit is a characteristic behavioral pattern that is learnt and reinforced in a manner realized in every case automatically (Blaha & Bennett, 1993:86). Habits enter our lives at a slow pace and become established after a certain period. If habits are not quitted, in time they become needs (Aksaçlıoğlu, 2005). When reading, which is the basic manner of acquiring information, is transformed into a habit, another notion called "reading habit" comes into being. The habit of reading is the act of reading being carried out throughout life in a constant, regular and critical manner as a result of it being perceived by the individual as a need and source of pleasure (Yılmaz, 1993). The habit of reading is the basis of lifelong learning. For the purpose of the individual being someone that learns throughout his/her life, it is necessary for the act of reading to be conducted regularly throughout life (Odabaş, Odabaş & Polat, 2008). The university period, which is the most intense stage of formal education, is a period when young people carry out the act of reading the most frequently and necessarily. In terms of the conditions it creates, this period is an advantageous period for the acquisition of enjoying, awareness and consciousness in reading (Yılmaz, Köse & Korkut, 2009:23). University youth is the youth group consisting of people aged between 17-25, who are receiving education at the final stage of formal education, are inquisitive and have acquired a scientific mentality, have created a unique youth culture, and are going to be leaders of society. The fact that they are knowledgeable, administrator and decision maker candidates of the future, is the most important characteristic that makes university youth distinct from other youth groups (Yazıcı, 2003:13).

The quality of the interest in reading and habit of reading of teacher candidates among university students is of critical significance in terms of them being examples for children and young people (Saracaloğlu et al., 2003:150). Studies indicate that with a proportion of 70.7%, teachers are the ones who influence children the most in acquiring the habit of reading. Similarly with a rate of 33.0%, teachers are the ones who give their first books to students (Tosunoğlu, 2002:556-558). Teachers continue to be models even after they have acquired children with the habit of reading. As it can be observed, as it is in all areas of education, in this area it is also teachers who have the role of being a model, laying foundations, and formalizing the new generation. Another department among university students where reading habits are perceived to be important is history. This is because history is a branch of science where reading is of particular importance. Students studying history are expected to improve themselves as individuals that explore, interpret, question and can think critically. Therefore, reading habits become crucial in students acquiring and developing these skills.

In the world of today, where knowledge is rapidly increasing and science and technology have caused changes in human life to be necessary, it can be observed that it has become compulsory for humans to continually improve themselves in both their professional and social lives. In our age, where education and "lifelong learning" have become a must for professional and career development after formal education and especially adapting to change, it is expected that university students have the habit of reading, which is among the criteria of social and individual development, at a high level. Thus, the determination of reading habits of teacher candidates and persons receiving education in the field of history, among university students, in areas they need and improving themselves throughout their lives has been considered to be important.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the reading habits of teacher candidates at Ankara University and students studying at the History Department at Erciyes University.

2. Method

2.1. Model of the study

The survey model has been utilized in the study. In the survey model, an existing circumstance is aimed to be described as it is and no effort is made in any manner to change, or influence it (Karasar, 2003:77).

2.2. Study Group

There are a total of 326 students in the study group consisting of 225 teacher candidates in years 3 and 4 of the Ankara University Faculty of Educational Sciences Department of Primary Education and 101 students studying in years 3 and 4 at the Erciyes University Faculty of Sciences and Arts History Department during the 2013-2014 academic year.

2.3. Data Collection Tool

As a data collection tool in this study, a questionnaire developed by researchers through a review of the related literature has been used. There were questions in the questionnaire oriented at determining the personal details and reading habits of students. A preliminary trial of the questionnaire has been performed prior to implementing the questionnaire to the students in the study group. In this process, the questionnaire form has been applied to 50 students attending the 2nd year of the Ankara University Department of Social Studies Teaching. The response of teacher candidates to the questionnaire have been examined by itemizing the data of the questionnaire form, whose preliminary trial has been performed, the necessary corrections have been made on the questionnaire and the questionnaire form had been finalized.

2.4. Collection and analysis of the data

The study was performed in the spring semester of the 2011-2012 academic year. The data obtained in the study has been analyzed with the SPSS 16.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) statistics program. Data obtained as a result of the analysis, have been interpreted after being presented in the form of tables.

3. Findings and Interpretations

In this section, the personal details of a total of 326 students in the study group, consisting of 225 students from Ankara University and 101 students from Erciyes University, have been presented and the response of students to the questionnaire have been presented in the form of tables and analyzed and interpreted.

Table 1. Distribution of students participating in the study according to gender

Gender	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female	145	64	48	48	193	59.2
Male	80	36	53	52	133	40.8
Total	225	100	101	100	326	100

As it can be observed in Table 1, 64% of students participating in the study from Ankara University are females and 36% are males whereas 48% of participants from Erciyes University are females and 52% are males. While the number of students from Erciyes University can be considered to be at an equal rate according to gender, it can be said that the number of female students at Ankara University is nearly twice as much as males. This can be interpreted as the profession of teaching being widely preferred by females.

Table 2**.** Distribution of students participating in the study according to their class of education

Class level of education	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Year 3	127	56	61	60	188	57.7
Year 4	98	44	40	40	138	42.3
Total	225	100	101	100	326	100

As it can be observed in Table 2, 56% of students participating in the study from Ankara University are attending year 3 and 44% of students are attending year 4 whereas 60% of students participating from Erciyes University are attending year 3 and 40% are attending year 4. It can be said that the distribution of students

participating from both universities are almost the same in terms of their year of education.

Table 3. Distribution of student responses on what they prefer to read in their spare time[*]

The most preferred items for reading in spare time	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Novel	151	67,1	53	52,5	204	62,6
Newspaper	130	57,8	58	57,4	188	57,7
Magazine	68	30,2	23	22,8	91	27,9
Exam Preparation Books	53	23,6	32	31,7	85	26,1
Poems	46	20,4	15	14,9	61	18,7
Articles	20	8,9	26	25,7	46	14,1
Other	25	11,1	15	14,9	40	12,3

* As students could mark more than one option, each option has been assessed separately within itself but presented in the same table. This case also applies for some of the other tables.

When table 3 is examined, it can be observed that students at Ankara University and Erciyes University read novels, newspapers and magazines the most in their spare time. Students at Ankara University prefer to read magazines and poems more than Erciyes University students. It can be observed that students at Erciyes University prefer to read Examination Preparation Books more than students at Ankara University.

Table 4. Distribution of responses of students on the book genres they enjoy reading the most

Book Genres that enjoyed most for reading	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Literary works (novel, story, poem)	152	67,6	57	56,4	209	64,1
Historic	94	41.8	81	80.2	175	53.7
Romantic	87	38.7	37	36.6	124	38.0
Entertainment-humor	99	44.0	23	22.8	122	37.4
Psychology	88	39.1	18	17.8	106	32.5
Personal development	69	30.7	26	25.7	95	29.1
Politics	63	28.0	32	31.7	95	29.1
Adventure	56	24.9	24	23.8	80	24.5
Religious	52	23.1	27	26.7	79	24.2
Crime Novel	56	24.9	17	16.8	73	22.4
Culture Arts	49	21.8	21	20.8	70	21.5
Science Fiction	47	20.9	23	22.8	70	21.5
Education	57	25.3	11	10.9	68	20.9
Philosophy/thought	56	24.9	8	7.9	64	19.6
Horror	36	16.0	16	15.8	52	16.0
Essay	39	17.3	4	4.0	43	13.2
Professional	35	15.6	5	5.0	40	12.3
Popular science	28	12.4	7	6.9	35	10.7
Sociology	24	10.7	4	4.0	28	8.6
Economy	9	4.0	3	3.0	12	3.7
Other	9	4.0	3	3.0	12	3.7

When the data in Table 4 is analyzed, it can be observed that students at Ankara University and Erciyes University enjoy reading literary works, historic, romantic, entertainment-humor, and psychology book genres the most. These findings of the study demonstrate similarity with the findings of Yılmaz (2009:157), Yılmaz, Köse & Korkut (2009:34-35) and Sevmez (2009:48).

Nearly all of the students at Erciyes University enjoy reading historic books the most. It can be said that while students at Erciyes University enjoy historic, political, and religious books more than students at Ankara University, students at Ankara University enjoy books on education, psychology, philosophy/thought and profession more than students at Erciyes University. This can be interpreted as university students enjoying books related to their field of

education more.

Table 5. Distribution of the response of students in relation to them prioritizing Turkish or world *literature*

Prioritization of Turkish or world literature	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
No differentiation	138	61,3	53	52,5	191	58,6
Turkish literature	46	20,5	41	40,6	87	26,7
World literature	41	18,2	7	6,9	48	14,7
Total	225	100	101	100	326	100

According to the data in Table 5, it can be observed that a majority of students at Ankara University and Erciyes University do not make a differentiation between Turkish and world literature. However, it can be observed that in both universities there are more students that prefer Turkish literature over world literature. These findings of the study demonstrate differences to those of Kolaç's (2007:17). According to Kolaç's study, it is stated that 45.7% of primary school teacher candidates prefer Turkish literature.

Table 6. *Distribution of responses of students with regards to the means of obtaining books*

Means of obtaining books for reading	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Purchasing	180	80,0	73	72,3	253	77,6
Borrowing from friends	84	38,3	33	32,7	117	35,9
Borrowing from libraries	86	38,2	28	27,7	114	35,0
Other	13	5,8	6	5,9	19	5,8

When the data in Table 6 is examined, it can be observed that students in both universities obtain books they intend to read by means of purchasing them. From the data in the table, it can be inferred that distribution of the rates of the means of obtaining books for students of both universities are similar. This finding of the study is similar to the findings of Sevmez (2009) and Yılmaz, Köse & Korkut (2009) (Sevmez, 2009:58; Yılmaz, et al., 2009:36).

Table 7. Distribution of student responses concerning them enjoying reading books/periodicals

Status of enjoying reading books/periodicals	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	147	65,3	56	55,4	203	62,3
No	17	7,6	10	9,9	27	8,3
Partially	61	27,1	35	34,7	96	29,4
Total	225	100	101	100	326	100

According to Table 7, a majority of students at both Ankara University and Erciyes University have stated that they enjoy reading books/periodicals. It can be inferred that the distribution rates of enjoying reading books/periodicals demonstrate similarity for both universities.

Table 8. Distribution of responses concerning the last time the students purchased a book

Time of last book purchase	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Within the last month	95	42,2	40	39,6	135	41,1
Within the previous month	67	29,8	29	28,7	96	29,4
Within the last three months	35	15,6	15	14,9	50	15,3
Can not remember	28	12,4	17	16,8	45	13,8
Total	225	100	101	100	326	100

According to the data in Table 8, nearly half of students both at Ankara University and Erciyes University stated

that they purchased a book within the last month. This finding of the study varies from the findings of Yılmaz, Köse & Korkut (2009:42). According to the results of the study of Yılmaz et al, a large proportion of the students of Hacettepe and Bilkent Universities (40.4%) stated that they last purchased a book within the "previous month". It is striking that the distribution of the last book purchasing date intervals for students of both universities are similar.

Table 9. Distribution of student responses concerning the frequency of reading books

Book reading frequency	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never read	11	4,9	9	8,9	20	6,1
One or less books within 2 months	70	31,1	29	28,7	99	30,4
1 book a month	99	44,0	41	40,6	140	42,9
Two or more books a month	45	20,0	22	21,8	67	20,6
Total	225	100	101	100	326	100

According to the data in Table 9, it can be observed that nearly half of the students at Ankara University and Erciyes University, read one book a month. The distribution for students at both universities demonstrated similarity in terms of book reading frequency.

These findings of the study demonstrate differences from those of Kolaç (2007) and Yılmaz's (2009). According to Kolaç's study, primary school teacher candidates have notified that they read one book a month at a rate of 1% (Kolaç, 2007:10). According to the study of Yılmaz, students of the Turkish education department read around four books a month (Yılmaz, 2009:156-157).

Table 10. Distribution of student responses concerning the frequency of reading periodicals

Reading frequency of periodicals	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Every day	62	27,6	34	33,7	96	29,4
Once in a couple of days	91	40,4	23	22,8	114	35,0
Once a week	29	12,9	16	15,8	45	13,8
Less frequently	39	17,3	22	21,8	61	18,7
Never	4	1,8	6	5,9	10	3,1
Total	225	100	101	100	326	100

According to the data in Table 10, the number of students reading periodicals everyday was higher at Erciyes University and the number of students reading periodicals everyday was higher at Ankara University. It can be said that nearly all students at both universities read periodicals every day or once in a couple of days.

Table 11. Distribution of student responses concerning the purpose(s) of reading books/periodicals

Purpose of reading books/periodicals	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Being informed	168	74,7	80	79,2	248	76,1
Personal development	148	65.8	58	57.4	206	63.2
Keeping up-to-date	127	56.4	53	52.5	180	55.2
Making the best of spare time	89	39.6	42	41.6	131	40.2
Professional development	97	43.1	33	32.7	130	39.9
Entertainment	104	46.2	2	22.8	127	39.0
Reinforcing lessons	65	28.9	42	41.6	107	32.8
Relaxation	87	38.7	14	13.9	101	31.0
Other	7	3.1	1	1.0	8	2.5

When table 11 is analyzed, it can be observed that a majority of students of both Ankara University and Erciyes University read books/periodicals for the purposes of being informed, personal development, and keeping up-to-date. For the students of both universities, reading books/periodicals for the purposes of relaxation and reinforcing lessons are at the lowest level. Whilst the rate of reading books for the purposes of making the best of spare time and

reinforcing lessons was higher among students of Erciyes University, the rate of reading books for the purposes of personal development, keeping up-to-date, professional development and, entertainment was higher among students of Ankara University.

The data obtained in this study demonstrated similarity with the findings of Yılmaz (2009:154), but varied from the findings of Yılmaz, Köse & Korkut (2009:33-34). According to the study of Yılmaz, 41% of students at the department of Turkish education stated that they read periodicals for the purpose of self development and 37% for the purpose of personal interest. According to the study of Yılmaz, Köse & Korkut, a large proportion of students attending Hacettepe and Bilkent Universities stated they read the most due to lesson related purposes.

Table 12. *Distribution of responses of students concerning changes in their reading habits after coming to university*

Status of change in reading habits	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Improved	112	50	59	58	171	53
Deteriorated	55	24	12	12	67	21
No change	58	26	30	30	88	27,0
Total	225	100	101	100	326	100

When Table 12 is observed, half of students attending Ankara University and more than half of the students attending Erciyes University stated that their reading habits improved after coming to university. This finding of the study demonstrated similarity with the findings of Sevmez (2009:61).

Table 13. Distribution of student responses with regards to the reasons for not being able to spare enough time for reading

Reasons for not being able to spare enough time for reading	Ankara University		Erciyes University		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Intensity of studies	137	68,2	51	52,6	188	63,1
Busy social life	100	49,8	35	36,1	135	45,3
Preparation for examinations	99	49,3	29	29,9	128	43,0
Spending time on the computer/internet	75	37,3	30	30,9	105	35,2
Chatting with friends	64	31,8	31	32,0	95	31,9
Watching television	40	19,9	20	20,6	60	20,1
Expensive prices of books	29	14,4	14	14,4	43	14,4
Other	17	8,5	9	9,3	26	8,7

When Table 13 is examined, it has been determined that both students of Ankara University and Erciyes University could not spare time for reading books due to intensity of lessons, busy social life, preparation for examinations and spending time on the computer/internet. This finding of the study demonstrates similarity with the findings of Kolaç (2007:10-11), Yılmaz (2009:160-161), Odabaş, Odabaş & Polat (2008:449), Sevmez (2009:52) and Saracaloğlu, Bozkurt & Serin (2003).

From these findings, it can be interpreted that intense lessons and busy social life, examination preparation process, and spending time on the commuter/internet occupy an important period of time for students and this causes students to spend less time for reading.

4. Conclusion

The students in Ankara and Erciyes Universities read mainly novels, newspapers, and magazines in their spare time. The students in Ankara and Erciyes Universities enjoy reading literary works and history, romance, entertainment-humor, and psychology book genres the most.

Whilst the students at Erciyes University compared with the ones at Ankara University prefer reading books on history, politics, and religion, the students at Ankara University compared with the ones in Erciyes University like reading books on education, psychology, philosophy/argument, and profession.

Most of the students in both universities do not make a distinction between Turkish and world literature. The students in both universities obtain books for reading by purchasing them. Most of the students in both universities enjoy reading books/periodicals.

Almost half of the students in both universities have purchased a book within the last month. Almost half of the students in both universities read a book in a month. The number of students reading periodicals each day is higher in Erciyes University but the number of students reading periodicals once in a couple of days is higher in Ankara University. Magazines on humor and children are preferred more by the students at Ankara University but magazines on news and sports are preferred more by the students at Erciyes University.

Most of the students in both universities read books/periodicals to get informed, develop personally, and keep up-to-date. The reading habits of half of the students in Ankara University and more than half of the students in Erciyes University have developed after starting their higher education. The students in both universities cannot spare enough time to read books because of intense lessons and busy social lives, preparation for examinations and time spent on the computers/internet.

5. Recommendations

- Access of university students to reading materials in different genres in their spare times may be ensured.
- Activities may be organized with a view to developing the reading habits of the university students.
- University students may be encouraged to develop their reading habits.
- Among university students the ones with exemplary reading habits may deliver speeches and share their own encouraging experiences on reading books with the others.
- Activities where persons such as authors, journalists, and publishers appear as guests may be organized and the interaction of university students with them may be ensured.
- Activities may be organized for the purpose of promoting books advised by students.

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