Reading Habits Among University Students:
A Study of Students of the Department of English Language, Batna, Algeria

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Abstract

Reading is considered as an essential tool for success, not just for students, but also for lifelong development of humanity. However, the reading habit of students is believed to be undergoing a decline because of the technological changes. To put it otherwise, the spread of modern digital technologies, such as mobile phones, televisions, and the growing popularity of social networking on the web, are likely to be the reason behind this decline. This paper reports the results of a study on the reading habit of the students of the department of English language at the University of Batna, and tries to identify their attitudes and trends in their reading habits. From 200 copies of questionnaire distributed, 191 copies, representing 95.5 % were filled and returned. The main findings to emerge from this study show that new media technologies are negatively affecting reading habits among students. The study recommended among others that teachers should be advised to stop providing handouts to students but rather encourage them to use the library for research and a compulsory reading lecture in the department is recommended.

Keywords: reading habits; students; university; department of English language.

الملخص:

تعتبر القراءة أداة أساسية للنجاح ليس فقط للطلاب، ولكن أيضا لتطور الحياة البشرية. ومع ذلك، يعتقد أن عادة القراءة لدى الطلاب تشهد انخفاضا كما هو الحال مع أي تغييرات تكنولوجية. ومن المرجح أن يكون السبب وراء هذا الانخفاض انتشار التكنولوجيا الرقمية الحديثة، مثل الهواتف المحمولة وأجهزة التلفزيون، وتزايد شعبية الشبكات الاجتماعية على شبكة الإنترنت. يقدم هذا البحث تقريرا عن نتائج دراسة حول عادة القراءة لدى طلبة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة باتنة، ويحاول التعرف على مواقفهم واتجاهاتهم في عادات القراءة. من إجمالي 200 نسخة من الاستبيان وزعت على الطلبة، 191 نسخة-ما يمثل 95.5٪-تم ملؤها وإعادتها. وتظهر النتائج الرئيسية التي تحصلنا عليها من هذه الدراسة أن تقنيات الإعلام الجديدة تؤثر سلبا على عادات القراءة لدى الطلاب. يختتم المقال بتوصيات لتحسين عادات القراءة لدى الطلاب في جامعاتنا.

Introduction

Reading is an important source of acquiring knowledge and language as well, and thus it is highly considered by both teachers and students. Despite of the fact that the university resources, libraries, include many varied books, reading among students is believed to reach its lowest rates nowadays because of the emergence of digital technologies; several theorists in reading and literacy such as Landow (1992)[1], Lanham (1993)[2], O'Donnell (1998)[3] and Murray (1997)[4] support this view. The present article aims to evaluate the reading habit of the students of the department of English language at the University of Batna. It aims also to put forward suggestions for the amelioration of the reading habits among the students of our university in particular and other universities in Algeria in general.

Statement of the problem

The lack of proper reading habits among students in Algerian universities is an increasing concern and demands serious analytic attention. Nowadays, due to the influence of the new technologies, students do not show much interest in reading. Many students prefer to spend their leisure time surfing on the net or watching TV rather than reading. This work was conducted to investigate the reading habits among university students, which in this case referring to department of English language students at Batna University.

Objectives of the study

This is an investigative study to explore the reading habit of the students of the department of English language in the faculty of Letters and Languages at the University of Batna, Algeria with the following objectives:

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[1] Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim & Amelia Hasan, Reading habits and attitude in the digital age, (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, USA, Vol. 25 No. 3, 2007).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

- To identify reading interest and habits of students of the department of English language at the University of Batna
- To uncover the major materials students prefer to read
- To evaluate the influence of modern digital technologies, such as mobile phones, televisions, and social networks on the reading habits of those students
- To suggest recommendations for the improvement of the reading habits of these students in particular and other students in general

Research questions

The objectives of the actual study were achieved based on finding answers to the following questions:
1. What are the reading habits and interests among students?
2. What types of reading materials do the students read?
3. Do new technologies have an effect on the reading habits?

Literature review

"Reading is the construction of meaning from a printed or written message. The construction of meaning involves the reader connecting the information from the written message with previous knowledge to arrive at meaning at an understanding" (Day & Bamford, 1998, p.12)[5].

In other words, reading is the ability to understand words contained in a document and make use of the knowledge for personal growth and development. This implies making meaning out of recorded information either printed or non-printed in the life of an individual. People read for different reasons and purposes, some of which include pleasure, leisure, relaxation, information and knowledge (Owusu-Acheaw, 2014)[6].

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[5] Edina Anak Lanying, Survey on reading habits of students in the faculty of cognitive sciences and human development university Malaysia Sarawak April 2005 http://docplayer.net/28697265-Human-development-universiti-malaysia-sarawak.html

[6] Owusu-Acheaw, Micheal, "Reading Habits Among Students and its Effect on

Reading is an essential tool for knowledge transfer and the habit of reading is an academic activity that increases skills in reading strategies. To know about the world and its environment, a student helps himself through reading books, newspapers and other magazines. Once the student has been taught to read in his/her early age and has developed the love for books, he/she can explore for him/herself the wealth of human experiences and knowledge through reading. Students, who miss the opportunity of getting in touch with books in their early stages of life, find it hard to acquire good reading habits in their later years (Deavers, 2000)[7]. Reading is an intellectual action that is possible only if a man forms a habit of reading and practices these from childhood. Reading habits, therefore, play a very crucial role in enabling a person to achieve practical efficiency.

Abdulkarim & Hasan (2006)[8] state that in a survey by the Malaysian National Library 2006 with a sample of 60,441 respondents, it was found that the literacy rate has slightly decreased to 92 percent from 93 percent in 1996. There has been no increase in the amount of reading as compared to the past ten years. Among the factors that make people refuse to read are:

‒ There has never been a reading culture so it is difficult to create one when there are no examples or role models and the environment is not conducive to reading. From the survey, 64 percent of the respondents indicated that they were more interested in other activities, 15 percent indicated that they did not have time, and 13 percent were not interested in reading, even if Malaysians did read, about 80 percent of the reading materials were newspapers and magazines.

‒ The electronic media is challenging the reading habit in the society by shifting the attention to computer and television viewing. This is

Academic Performance: A Study of Students of Koforidua Polytechnic" (2014). Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal). 1130.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1130

7 Ibid.

8 Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim & Amelia Hasan, Reading habits and attitude in the digital age, (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, USA, Vol. 25 No. 3, 2007).

proven through the increase in computer literacy from 6 percent in 1996 to 27 percent in 2005, and watching television as the number one hobby (34 percent).

Other factors such as read as for passing examination only, absence of encouragement from parents, lack of public reading places that are easily accessible, expensive books and lack of interest in reading serious materials also contribute significantly to the Malaysian reading culture (Pandian, 1997)[9].

Research methodology

The present study is a descriptive one in which the sample was selected randomly. A survey was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire as a method of collecting data. The data analysis is descriptive in nature. A total of 191 students took part in this study during the first semester of the 2012/2013 academic year. Participants were voluntary and no inducements were offered or given. The respondents were students from all levels (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and master classes) at the department of English language.

Data analysis

Findings on reading habits were analysed through different aspects such as the types of reading materials read, the amount of time spent on reading per week, the sources used to get the reading materials, and the time of day spent on reading. Before doing that, we collected some demographic information about our respondents.

Table 1. Demography of respondents

Male	Female	Level[*]				Age[**]		
46 24.0%	145 75.9%	1st	2nd	3rd	Master	<20	20-30	30<
		43 22.8%	22 11.7%	95 50.5%	28 14.8%	23 12.7%	156 86.1%	02 01.1%

[9] Ibid.

*: three students did not mention their level.
**: ten students did not mention their age.

A total of 191 respondents took part in this study. Among the respondents, 145 (75.9%) were females and the 46 respondents (24.0%) were males. It is reported that the respondents were students of all undergraduate levels at the department of English language (Licence and master classes). Table 1 also shows that the majority of the respondents' 86.1% (156) are aged between 20 and 30 years. Respondents who are aged less than 20 years represent 12.7% (23) of the whole population. Finally, respondents whose ages are more than 30 years represent 01.1% (02) of the population of our study.

Table 2. Reading habit among students

Are you an avid reader?	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	94	49.3
No	97	50.7
Total	191	100 %

Table 2 shows that students' answers to the question: "are you an avid reader?" are almost equal between those who said 'yes' and those who said 'no'. It is remarked also in question #2 (table 3. Favourite leisure time activities) that from a total of 94 respondents who answered 'yes' for the question #1 (table 2. Reading habit among students), only 43 respondents (45.7%) said they read books in their spare time!

Table 3. Favourite leisure time activities

Activities	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Play computer or smart phone	101	52.8
Sleep	37	19.3
Watch TV	95	49.7
Read books	68	35.6

Table 3 presents a list of activities students like to do during leisure time. Dominating on the list: playing computer or smart phone, followed by TV watching, these findings answer one of our research questions asked at the beginning of the study (question N° 3). This shows that the students do not prefer to read during their spare time. A majority of the respondents were found to prefer different activities rather than reading (only 35.6% of the respondents said they read during leisure time). This agrees with what Pandian (2000) and Subashini & Balakrishnan (2013)[10] have found and where they stated that the spread of modern digital technologies affected negatively students' time allocated to reading.

Table 4. Types of books

Types of Books	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Fiction	58	30.3
Non-fiction	25	13.2
Both	108	56.5
Total	191	100%

Table 4 shows that the majority of the respondents read both types of books (fiction & non-fiction). In addition, there are students who prefer reading only one type of books (fiction or non-fiction).

Table 5. Genre of books on fiction

Genre of Books on Fiction	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Thriller	72	37.6
Classics	28	14.6
Romance	81	42.4
Comics	32	16.7
Science	41	21.4

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[10] Subashini Annamalai & Balakrishnan Muniandy, Reading Habit and Attitude among Malaysian Polytechnic Students, University of Science, Malaysia 2013, www.iojes.net/userfiles/article/iojes_946.pdf

Fiction		
Others	16	08.37

Table 5 illustrates the distribution of genres of books on fiction students read the most. i.e. thriller, classics, romance, comics, science fiction and others. The majority of the respondents read 'Romance' books. Thriller and science fiction are among the most popular reading materials read by students in this category of books. There are students who chose 'Others' in which they had mentioned: detective work, tragedy, horror stories, and crime.

Table 6. Genre of books (texts) on non-fiction

Genre of Books on Fiction	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Magazines	82	42.9
Philosophy	25	13.0
Autobiographies	28	14.6
Biographies	21	10.9

Table 6 shows that the majority of the respondents read magazines in this category of books. This fact is consistent with the results from research conducted by Abdulkarim & Hasan (2007)[11]. University students tend to read magazines during their leisure time. Other students were reported to read biographies, autobiographies, and philosophy.

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[11] Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim & Amelia Hasan, Reading habits and attitude in the digital age, (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, USA, Vol. 25 No. 3, 2007).

Table 7. Time spent on reading (per day)

Length of Book Reading	Respondents*	Percentage (%)
Less than an hour	122	65.2
2 to 4 hours	53	28.3
4 to 6 hours	9	04.8
Above 6 hours	3	01.6
Total	187	100%

*: four students did not answer this question.

Table 7 shows the distribution of the amount of time spent on reading per day by the students. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents spend less than one hour per day on reading, and only three students who are considered avid readers since they spend more than six hours per day on reading.

Table 8. Newspaper reading habit

Do you read newspapers every day?	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	40	20.9
No	55	28.7
Not regularly	96	50.2
Total	191	100%

Table 8 shows newspaper reading habit among students. It reflects that the majority of respondents do not regularly read newspapers. This may be explained by the fact that students were found reading for academic purposes only and not for general knowledge and pleasures by some studies in the past.

Table 9. Attractive factors in books

Factors	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Cover Page	67	35.0
Author	63	32.9
Recommendation	18	09.4
Summary	98	51.3

Table 9 reports that the majority of the respondents decide to read a book only after reading its summary. This can be interpreted by the fact that they are selective and know exactly what they want to read. This interpretation is supported by the answers of the students, which were reported in table 10.

Table 10. Reasons of reading

Reasons of Reading	Respondents	Percentage (%)
To pass the exam	40	20.9
For fun	55	28.7
To be well informed	92	48.1
To be well developed	95	49.7
To while away time	21	10.9

Table 10 shows that two major reasons push students to read. The first one is to be well developed and the second one is to be well informed. This explains why the majority of the students read the summary of the books first (we have mentioned that the respondents are selective in their readings -table 10-).

Table 11. Sources of information about books

Sources of Information About Books	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Library	53	27.7
Bookstores	43	22.5
Blogs	31	16.2

Friends	86	45.0
Family	26	13.6
Newspapers	20	10.4
All of the above	37	19.3

Table 11 illustrates the distribution of seven sources students use to get information about books. The majority of the students get informed about the books they read through their friends. In addition to that, the other sources like libraries, bookstores, blogs, family and newspapers as varied sources available for the students to get informed about books.

Table 12. Access to books

Sources of books	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Buy books	93	48.6
Borrow from friends	64	33.5
Borrow from library	42	21.9
Read them online	90	47.1

Table 12 indicates that the majority of the students either buy the books or read them online. Borrowing books from the library comes at last, only 21.9% of the students chose the library as a source for the books they read. We can understand from this that the majority of the students do not visit the libraries of the university.

Table 13. Students' attitudes towards reading habits

Do you think there is a decline in the reading habit?	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	128	67.0
No	63	32.9
Total	191	100%

Table 13 does not offer an encouraging finding, because the majority of the students 128 (67.0%) believe that there is a decline in the reading habits. This view supports the main idea behind this research paper.

Table 14. Reasons of the decline of reading habits among students

Decline Reasons	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Lack of Patience	60	31.4
Advent of TV	55	28.7
Lack of Interest	59	30.8
Cost Factor	07	03.6
School Assignments	10	05.2
Lack of Access to Books	27	14.1
Others	10	05.2

Table 14 presents reasons given by the students that they think are the obstacles to reading. On the top of the list, we can notice the lack of patience. As we expected, in the research questions, that students are going to mention new technologies as a main factor to the decline of the reading habits like the advent of TV, which comes in the third place (28.7%). Finally, cost factor (03.6%) which was a little bit

surprising as it came at the bottom of the list as far as the low living standards of the majority of the students are considered and compared to the expensive prices of the books.

Table 15. Students' suggestions to improve the reading habits

Suggestions	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Make reading compulsory in academic curriculum	41	21.4
Encouragement by family/friends	76	39.7
Launching reading clubs	50	26.1
Gift books can help!	76	39.7
Others	04	02.0

Table 15 reports the suggestions of the students to improve their reading habits. It is also surprising when we find the 'encouragement by the family and/or friends' and 'gift books' as the main suggestions with 39.7% for both of them. Whereas, the library of the department suggests hundreds of books for free but only 21.9% of the respondents who visit it (table12).

Table 16. Students' opinions about reading habits (Open question)

What is your opinion about reading habits amongst students? Do you think they help in shaping personalities?	
Reading creates new world	Yes reading habits help in shaping personalities
Reading provides an open window to a larger world	Honestly reading so much made me feel isolated
Students who read are different from those who do not	The audiobooks influenced reading, however they developed listening
Reading is a source of motivation	Students never or rarely advise each other's to read
The more you read the more you develop yourself	Only few students borrow books from the library

Table 16 shows an example of students' answers about the open question. The majority of the respondents think that reading is very important. The experiences they gain from reading different books help them in shaping their personalities. Different views also were found among students' responses such as "reading so much made me feel isolated" or "few students borrow books from the library".

Discussion of findings

A total of 191 respondents took part in this study. The majority of the participants were female (75.9%). This needs a sociological study because it is not specific for the University of Batna but all universities of Algeria. A high majority of the respondents were found aged between 20-30 years (about 86.1%). This is considered a normal age range for undergraduate studies. Our respondents were from all levels (from first year to master class) which is explained by the fact that the students of our sample were selected randomly.

Due to the academic process at the university, students were expected to spend more time on reading, contrarily; they prefer to do other activities. They spend quite a significant amount of time surfing the internet, playing computer/mobile games and other technology-related activities compared to reading. It is explained by the fact that young people are the most affected by the emerging digital technologies, especially the internet and television. Reading is reported to be a minor activity during leisure time of those students because they think it is boring and not motivating (lack of patience 31.4% and lack of interest 30.8%).

As shown in table 7, the majority of the respondents (65.2%) indicated that they read less than one hour per day. This is confirmed when we go back to table 3, a majority of the respondents were found to prefer different activities (play computer or smartphone, watch TV and sleep) rather than reading. The study confirms Palani (2012)[12]

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[12] Sonia Kaul Shali, The Power of Listening Ability and Its Effects on Academic Performance: An Examination of College Students, Imperial Journal of

assertion that due to the influence of the mass media, people do not show much interest in reading books, magazines and journals among others.

Concerning the reasons of the decline of the reading habits among students, table 14 shows that the majority of students think that the lack of interest causes the decline of the reading habits. This confirms the revelation in table 7 where 65.2% of the respondents read less than one hour per day.

The study confirms Deavers's (2000)[13] assertion that once the child has been taught to read and has developed the love for books, he can explore for himself the wealth of human experiences and knowledge through reading. Thus, students, who miss the opportunity of getting in touch with books in their early stages in life, find it hard to acquire good reading habits in their later years.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Make reading compulsory in academic curriculum as suggested by the students themselves. We suggest also the introduction of reading lectures in all schools (primary, middle, secondary and university).
- Students recommend that there should be encouragement by family and friends. We add to them the teachers. Teachers should encourage students to visit the library and read not only lecture notes but novels and fiction as well.
- "Launching reading clubs," the students suggested. It is recommended that the department staff should engage students in several contests, presentations and clubs. These should form a greater part of the assessment process of students. Currently, examination takes 70% and assignments take only 30%. When

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[13] Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim & Amelia Hasan, Reading habits and attitude in the digital age, (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, USA, Vol. 25 No. 3, 2007).

this trend is reversed, it will help students to acquire more skills in searching for information than adopting the "chew and pour" syndrome.

- Finally, gift books can help! It is recommended that parents and/or teachers (in the early stages) should help their children cultivate the reading skills when they are young, so that it becomes part of their life. When this is done, it will help them express themselves well and write in a good way, which will eventually lead to better academic performance.

Conclusion

This study was conducted in an attempt to enhance our understanding about reading habits and attitudes of the university students in the Department of English Language at Batna University. Students from different levels (first, second, third and master classes) took part in our study. In the overall analysis, results indicate that university students spend quite a significant amount of time doing other activities linked to new technologies rather than reading. Reading has become a minor activity during their leisure time.

The study revealed that 67% of the respondents acknowledge the decline of the reading habits among students (table 13). However, it was also found that the majority of the students are aware about the importance of reading (table 16). The study revealed that the majority of the respondents had the view that the reading habits have an effect on the academic performance; Table 10 shows that two major reasons push students to read. The first one is to be well developed (95 respondents, 49.7%). The second one is to be well-informed (92 respondents, 48.1%). The study further found out that lack of patience and interest are the basic hindrances to reading among the respondents.

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