

READING HABITS, ATTITUDES, AND PREFERENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THEIR PERCEIVED BENEFITS ON ONE'S KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Recreational or leisure reading is all about the reader selecting their reading material. It is intrinsically or socially motivated and is generally considered a pleasurable activity for the reader. Reading has many direct and indirect personal, social, and, health benefits to the reader like enhancing literacy, improving cognitive skills, and reducing stress levels. Despite the numerous benefits, there has been a visible decline in the reading habits of college students in recent years. Additionally, physical books are losing popularity in the digital age with the rise of smartphones, tablets, and electronic devices. This study aims to identify the reading habits, preferences, and attitudes toward leisure reading and gain a deeper understanding of this trend.

Keywords: Reading, Recreational reading, Books, Habit, College students.

INTRODUCTION

Recreational Reading and its Evolution There are two widely accepted forms of reading – the formal kind that we do at schools to gain knowledge and the other being recreational or leisure. Recreational or leisure reading is a beloved pastime that has captured the hearts and imaginations of people throughout history. The act of reading for pleasure has long been recognized as a source of entertainment, education, and enlightenment. From the earliest manuscripts to modern-day e-readers, the medium of reading has evolved, but the desire to lose oneself in a good book remains as strong as ever. The history of recreational reading dates back to ancient times. The first recorded instances of literature come from ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China, where texts were often religious or philosophical in nature. The Greeks and Romans also contributed to the development of literature, with works such as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey and Virgil's Aeneid. During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church & Monks in monasteries played a significant role in the preservation and dissemination of literature that were mostly religious in nature. However, as literacy rates increased, the demand for secular literature grew, and works of fiction, became popular. The advent of the printing press in the 15th century revolutionized the world of literature. The mass production of books made them more affordable and accessible to the general public, and literacy rates increased dramatically. The popularity of literature grew during the Renaissance, with writers such as Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Milton producing works that are still read and enjoyed today. The 19th century saw the rise of the novel, which quickly became the most popular form of literature. The 20th century brought significant changes to the world of literature. The introduction of new technologies such as radio, television, and film created new forms of entertainment, but books remained a popular form of leisure activity. The paperback revolution of the 1930s and 1940s made books even more affordable and accessible, and the rise of science fiction and fantasy as popular genres broadened the range of literary options available to readers. The advent of

digital technology in the 21st century has further transformed the world of leisure reading. E-readers and audiobooks have made books more accessible than ever before, and the rise of social media and online book communities has created new ways for readers to connect and share their love of literature. Despite these changes, the fundamental appeal of reading for pleasure remains the same. Whether it's the escape of a thrilling adventure story, the emotional journey of a well-crafted novel, or the intellectual stimulation of non-fiction, the act of reading provides a means of exploring new worlds, experiencing different perspectives, and enriching our lives in countless ways.

Benefits of Reading

During and post the WWI, the United States Library War Service sent around 700 million books and magazines to the troops. The librarians observed that reading calmed troops who had just returned from the battlefield and put them on the road to emotional and mental recovery. It is no surprise that reading books have numerous benefits ranging from building one's knowledge on that subject to making one a model human.

Health: A study conducted by a team of researchers from Georgia, USA, attempted to measure the effect of reading a novel, on the brain and found out that during the reading period and the days afterward, brain connectivity increased. Since reading uses a complex network of brain circuits, the more one reads, the stronger and more sophisticated the brain networks become. Reading also helps in prevent age-related cognitive disorders and diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia. Reading fiction sometimes allows one to escape one's world and be swept up by the imagined experiences of the character, which ultimately helps in alleviating the symptoms of depression. Fictional stories are also full of details that help the readers to remember their long-term goals and actions has been proven to slow down memory decline in the senior years.

Social: Avid readers tend to be more open-minded, inclusive and tolerant towards society and community. It also helps the readers in understanding the struggles of minority communities and minimizes negative perceptions that they have about others. In the age of digitalization is important that for people bond with each other by wanting to know and understand others and that reading books is a gateway to that.

Personal: Literary fictions, using incomplete features characters, have the power to make the reader more empathetic and more understanding of people around them, which is necessary for managing social relationships. Reading can also influence one's ability to communicate effectively, be it verbal or written. In research conducted by University of Liverpool, UK, it was found out that adults who read regularly were less stressed, had higher levels of self-esteem and were better able to cope up with challenges.

Reading in the Digital Age

We are far beyond the point of claiming that technology and digitisation has changed the way of reading and learning. Increasing concerns over the environment paved the way for e-books. They also come with their unique set of benefits – they're flexible, easy to access and do not take up a lot of storage space. Although there have been many concerns over how the advent of technology has brought down the reading habits of people, not everybody agrees with it. On one hand, the fact that we are spending more time on the internet might mean that we are moving further and further away from recreational reading, it could also be possible that readers now have more avenues to find the stories that they want to. Audible (an audiobook service by Amazon) was launched in the year 2016 has a collection of over 200,000 audiobooks, podcasts and short stories, all accessible at a cost of \$22 per month. It also has a lot of pocket-friendly plans to suit a casual reader. Apart from Audible, Spotify,

Google books and LibriVox are some of the sites that offer free audiobooks. There are many who think all these changes are good and the others who are growing increasingly concerned. On one hand, it is good to have increased literacy and easy access to knowledge but the internet is also full of unnecessary distractions and misinformation that might deviate the reader from their true purpose.

Objectives of the Study

To analyse the reading habits of college students.

To know about the attitudes and preferences of college students on leisure reading.

To understand how reading habits, attitudes and preferences of college students help them to gain knowledge.

Variables of the Study

Independent Variable:

a. Reading Habits: This part of the study aims to analyse the average time spent on leisure reading, frequency of leisure reading and the factors that motivate college students read for pleasure.

b. Reading Preferences and attitudes: Reading preferences includes the format of books preferred, genres favoured and the how they choose what books to read. It also determines that factors that deter or prevent students from spending time on leisure reading.

Dependent Variable:

The knowledge gained from leisure reading and the other benefits that is afforded from the same, like, expanding vocabulary, improving memory and enhancing ones writing skills is studied under this variable

Research hypothesis

H₁: There is a significant correlation between field of study and time spent on leisure reading.

H₂: There is a significant association between gender and reading habits.

H₃: There is a significant relationship between age and frequency of leisure reading.

REVIEW of Literature

Levine et al (2020) Recreational reading was associated with reductions in psychological distress during the school year. Recreational reading fought against the frustration of one's basic psychological needs which led to reductions in psychological distress. Furthermore, recreational reading is driven intrinsic needs. Recreational reading is a simple and cost- effective tool which could be used to help improve the mental health of college goers.

Shabir, Bilal and Javed (2019) have found that there is a link between poor test performance and lack of reading habits. Furthermore, they claim that the main reason female children are performing better in academics than their male counterparts are because of their significantly better reading habits. Library resources also play a vital role in their reading habits and academic achievements of the students. But most of the student remain least satisfied with the current state of the library resources and services.

Azad (2019) This research has found out that female collegiate students have the least interest towards reading journals. They rather prefer textbooks, magazines and reference books. The most important reason that is limiting their reading time is their busy academic

schedules that leave no space for recreational reading. It was recommended that education policy makers, teachers and mentors consider the importance of recreational reading and make the student schedules a bit more flexible to accommodate their leisure needs.

Fatiloru (2017) Although it was found that the reading habits of college students are encouraging, it is important that they consume more novels and articles to develop their vocabulary. It was recommended that teachers, parents, librarians, mass media and the governments should encourage and support the students to read more. It was also deduced that most of the students read extensively on topics related to their academic specialisations.

Naseri & Noruzi (2016) set out to study the effect of digital age on the youth reading habits and found out that internet has increased interactive reading (a reading model that encourages the interaction of top-down and bottom-up approach) and reduced concentrated and in-depth reading. It was found that internet has no significant impact on spiritual and religious literature.

Applegate et al (2014) in their research of more than 1000 college sophomores found out disappointingly low levels of enthusiasm for reading. Less than 50% were classified as enthusiastic readers and around 5% of them were considered as engaged and avid readers. It was concluded that teachers must transcend their affinity towards reading to motivate their students to do the same. It was recommended that they also need to identify learners who appear to be developing a passion for reading. The respondents who took a passive approach to read were classified to be likely less enthusiastic since reading is termed an active and thoughtful process.

Loan (2011) learns the reading habits of college students across disciplines, he found out that most of the students read in English and not in their native tongue. Lack of qualitative reading material in their native tongues might be a reason for it along with a lack of reading and writing skills of the students in that language. Many of them do not have a positive attitude towards recreational reading, which could possibly be attributed to the pressure from parents and teachers to improve their academic performance. Gallik (1999) It was discovered that recreational reading habits were developed fairly early in one's school life. If students are to have good reading skills and positive attitudes toward reading, these must be practiced during the elementary years, and studying their leisure reading habits will aid in making predictions about their future academic success. Furthermore, this relationship could indicate that students who spend more time reading have, superior academic skills, and these skills help them achieve academic success. Lastly, spending time reading for pleasure could indicate that the student has the ability for sustained attention and concentration necessary for better academic performance. Kiran et al. (2023) college students who face the harmful effects of social media marketing use on mental health with more hour's usage in smartphone addiction and social isolation, can be reduced by the reading habit training their minds with good food for thought.

Research Design

The design of this research was descriptive in nature as the primary goal of this study is to provide an accurate, comprehensive, and detailed account of the leisure reading habits, preferences and attitudes of college students. In this study population includes all college students since it is aimed at studying their reading habits. The respondents are College going students with sample size is 120. The sample technique was taken for the study was Non-Probability Convenience Sampling. The primary source of data was collected through a questionnaire and the data collected from respondents were regarding their recreational reading habits, their preferences and their attitude towards the same. The secondary data is collected from various research articles and other published records related to the same study.

The questionnaire, created through Google-forms, was partly inspired by the various studies that have aimed to study the reading habits of college students, benefits of reading habits and academic performance of college students in relation to their reading habits. The respondents were asked a series of close-ended questions comprising of multiple choices. It was divided into three parts: Part I: Demographic Profile of respondents Part II: Recreational Reading Habits of College Students Part III: Preferences and Attitudes of College Students Towards Leisure Reading. The Software used for analysis is Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and MS-Excel. The Statistical Tools used in this research are Percentage Analysis – as a method of description, Chi-square Analysis, Correlation Analysis and Weighted Average Analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Weighted Average Analysis

Research Question: To determine the factors that deters college students from indulging inleisure reading as a habit Tables 1-6.

Table 1 THE WEIGHTED AVERAGE OF FACTORS THAT PREVENT LEISURE READING	
Factors	Weighted Average
Finding time to read	4.17
Finding books of interest	4.08
Understanding complex ideas	3.63
Keeping focus	3.83
Cost of purchasing/ borrowing	3.76
Unavailability of the books	3.55

Interpretation: Majority of the respondents agree that finding enough time (4.17) 0 indulge in leisure reading followed by finding books that are of interest (4.08) to them are the leading factorsthat prevent or deter them from making a habit out of leisure reading. Unavailability of the books (3.55) was found out to be the least important reason why college students do not indulge in leisure reading.

CORRELATION

Research Question: To determine whether there is a significant correlation between field of study and time spent on leisure reading.

Table 2 CORRELATION B/W FIELD OF STUDY & HOURS SPENT PER WEEK ON LEISURE READING			
		Field of study	Hours per week spent on leisurereading
Field of study	Pearson Correlation	1	0.055
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.548
	N	120	120
Hours per week spent on leisure reading	Pearson Correlation	0.055	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.548	
	N	120	120

Analysis

The correlation value is 0.055. There is a weak positive correlation between these twovariables.

Interpretation

The p value is 0.545 which is more than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. Which means that there is no significant correlation between field of study and time spent on leisure reading.

CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS

Research Question: To determine whether there is a significant association between gender and number of books read in 2022.

Table 3 CASE PROCESSING SUMMARY OF CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS						
	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
o. of Books ReadIn 2022	120	100%	0	0.00%	120	100.0%

Table 4 GENDER * NO. OF BOOKS READ IN 2022 CROSSTABULATION							
Count							
		NO. OF BOOKS READ IN 2022					Total
		1 - 25 books	25 - 50 books	50 - 75 books	More than 75books	Did not read anybooks	
GENDER	Male	34	6	1	3	15	59
	Female	40	7	0	2	12	61
Total		74	13	1	5	27	120

Table 5 CHI-SQUARE TESTS			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.064 ^a	4	0.724
Likelihood Ratio	2.452	4	0.653
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.991	1	0.320
N of Valid Cases	120		

Analysis

57.6% of men and 65.57% of men read less than 25 books and only 5% of men & 3% of women have read more than 75 books.

Interpretation

The p value is 0.724 which is more than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. Which means that there is no significant correlation between field of study and time spent on leisure reading.

ONE WAY ANOVA

Research Question: To determine whether there is a significant relationship between age and frequency of leisure reading.

Table 6
ANOVA BETWEEN AGE AND FREQUENCY OF LEISURE READING

How often do you read for pleasure?					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.551	2	0.776	0.523	0.594
Within Groups	173.574	117	1.484		
Total	175.125	119			

Interpretation

The p-value is 0.594 which is more than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant relationship between age and frequency of leisure reading.

DISCUSSION

It is found that more than half (54.2%) of the respondents spend less than 5 hours every week on leisure reading and 1/4th (25%) of them do not spend any time at all. It can be observed that 10% of the respondents never take up pleasure reading as a hobby and only 13.3% of the respondents spend some time everyday reading. Majority of respondents 78.3% preferred to do solo reading and only 21.7% of them preferred to be a part of a book club. Vocabulary Enrichment (50.8%) and Gaining Knowledge (47.5%) about a subject are the strongest motivators for college students to take up leisure reading. More than half the respondents 61.7% read less than 25 books in the year 2022 and roughly 20% of them did not read any books in the year 2022. Print books are the most preferred (44.2%) format of books for college students. Fiction and more specifically Mystery/thriller/horror is the most preferred (54.17%) genre of books while literary fiction which includes classics is the least preferred (15%) genre of books. Majority of the respondents (80%) let their personal interests and preferences guide them to find what books to read, followed by recommendations (54.2%) from others and around 15% of them judge a book by its cover and choose them. Majority of the respondents agree that finding enough time (4.17) to indulge in leisure reading is the leading factor that prevents or deters the respondents from making a habit out of leisure reading. The unavailability of the books (3.55) was found out to be the least important reason. 57.6% of men and 65.57% of men read less than 25 books and only 5% of men & 3% of women have read more than 75 books in the year 2022.

Recommendations

For Colleges and Educational Institutions

Colleges should provide a diverse selection of reading materials apart from the academic resources. This includes books, magazines, newspapers, and online resources including quality fiction, non-fiction, and literary classics. Students must be encouraged to come together and discuss books in a relaxed and informal setting. These groups faculty or student-lead that meets regularly to discuss books and share recommendations. It creates a sense of community. Integrating reading into coursework and encouraging students to read for pleasure outside of class. For example, assign books that are both academically and personally engaging, or incorporate discussions about reading into class discussions. Hosting book fairs and inviting authors to speak on campus will provide opportunities for students to meet authors, purchase books, and engage in discussions about literature. Create comfortable reading spaces such as cozy corners, libraries, and lounges with comfortable furniture, good lighting, and quiet atmospheres.

Make sure these spaces are accessible to students at all times. Use social media platforms and technology to promote reading and engage students. This includes creating online reading lists, hosting online book clubs, and promoting reading-related events through social media channels. Gather a group of friends who enjoy reading, and organize regular meetings to discuss books. This can be a fun way to explore new genres and authors, and to hold each other accountable for reading regularly. Set a goal for the number of books to read each month or semester, and track progress using a reading log or app. This can help students stay motivated and focused on their reading goals. Use free time between classes, during breaks, and in the evenings to read for pleasure. Bring a book or e-reader with you wherever you go, and use downtime to catch up on reading. Read books from a variety of genres and authors, and seek out books by diverse voices and perspectives. This can broaden horizons and expose students to new ideas and experiences. Join online book communities and forums to connect with other readers, get book recommendations, and participate in discussions about books. Swap books with friends to save money and discover new titles. This can also provide opportunities to discuss books with others and get different perspectives on what you've read. Limit time spent on screens and social media, and prioritize reading as a form of relaxation and entertainment. Make it a habit to read before bed instead of scrolling through social media, for example. By implementing these suggestions, colleges can create a welcoming environment and a culture of reading on campus and encourage students to engage in recreational reading habits college students can improve their own recreational reading habits, and inspire others to do the same Anand, et al. (2023).

CONCLUSION

It infers that happiness index represents the personal, social and national wellbeing of a country evaluated on the basis of non-economic parameters viz. health, education which is healthy way to improve by reading habits which in turn increases the psychological wellbeing for college students. The history of recreational reading has been a long and fascinating one, with literature evolving over time to reflect changes in society, culture, and technology. From the earliest manuscripts to modern-day e-readers, the medium of reading has changed, but the joy and benefits of reading for pleasure have remained constant. As we continue to explore new ways of enjoying literature, it is clear that reading will remain an important part of our lives for many years to come. It is imperative for us to understand the benefits of leisure reading and encourage college students to make it a part of their lifestyle. The findings of this research paper suggest that the leisure reading habits of college students are dismal. Despite the numerous benefits of recreational reading, such as improved vocabulary, critical thinking skills, and reduced stress levels, many college students appear to be neglecting this important activity. While this is certainly concerning, it also presents an opportunity for colleges and universities to take action and promote a culture of reading on campus. By creating welcoming reading environments, hosting book clubs and reading groups, offering a variety of reading materials, and incorporating reading into academic programs, colleges can encourage students to read for pleasure and improve their overall well-being. At the same time, individual college students can also take steps to improve their own recreational reading habits, such as setting goals, joining book communities, and swapping books with friends. By working together, we can foster a love of reading among college students and help them reap the numerous benefits of this enriching activity.

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<p>Received: 17-May-2023, Manuscript No. AMSJ-23-13601; Editor assigned: 18-May-2023, PreQC No. AMSJ-23-13601(PQ); Reviewed: 26-Jun-2023, QC No. AMSJ-22-13601; Revised: 16-Aug-2023, Manuscript No. AMSJ-23-13601(R); Published: 22-Sep-2023</p>
