

An Investigation of UTHM Undergraduates' Reading Habits Through a Pilot Study

Zubaidah Sadeq Alsaeedi^{1*}, Nurizah Md. Ngadiran^{2*}, Zulida Abdul Kadir¹

¹Centre for Language Studies,
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn, Batu Pahat, Johor, MALAYSIA

*Corresponding Author: zubedasadeq@gmail.com

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Abstract: Reading is inextricably linked to student success in education and the overall improvement of the human being. The significant decline in leisure reading habits among university students created the impetus for this study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the general reading habits and reading medium preference among UTHM undergraduates. Data were collected with an online survey sent to students across faculties. A total of 50 students completed the survey. The findings showed that the majority of students read between 30 minutes-1 hour per day and online reading materials (websites) were the most popular type of materials students read. University students' reading habits have changed to new venues as Internet technology has advanced, with online reading being the medium of choice.

Keywords: Reading, Reading habits, University students

1. Introduction

The habit of reading is one of the best qualities a person can possess. Reading is one of the most effective learning methods. It is through reading that one develops language skills and vocabulary. It is a mean of seeking knowledge and entertainment. Reading shapes an individual's personality and aids in the development of good thinking skills and the generation of new ideas. Regular and frequent engagement in reading sharpens thinking and prepares an individual to be successfully involved in social and cultural life (Erdem, 2015).

Reading habit depicts the behaviour which expresses the likeness of reading of individual types of reading and tastes of reading (Sangkaeo, 1999). Reading is a precursor to students' achievement in the academic domain. However, the habit of reading does not reflect in the lives of most students in colleges and universities. The findings of the previous studies on university students reading habits are not encouraging. Alsaeedi, Ngadiran, Kadir, Altowayti, et al. (2021) reported in a review paper that university students have poor reading habits. Annable (2017) confirmed that university students reading habits have declined.

*Corresponding author: zubedasadeq@gmail.com

Diwan (2020) reported in his study that the majority of Indian students mainly read to pass examinations. Rasiah et al. (2011) found that the majority of Malaysian students read between one to three hours per week. Similarly, Huang et al. (2014) reported that U.S students spend only 4.7 hours on leisure reading per week. Owusu-Acheaw (2016) found that 81% of students in Ghana have never read a novel or fiction book in a year. Moreover, Annamalai and Muniandy (2013) revealed in their study that students do not enjoy reading as compared to other technological activities. Due to the advancements in information technology and media, students are reading less and spending more time watching television, chatting online, and participating in social media activities (Fatiloru, Adesola, & Adewumi, 2017). A study in the US among 12th-grade students showed that reading books and magazines declined from 60% in the late 1970s to 16% in 2016 with the adoption of digital media which replaced the traditional media (Twenge et al., 2019). It is based on this premise that this study was conducted to investigate the reading habits among students at the university.

1.1 Objective of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine the reading habits of students at UTHM. The study encircles the students' favourite leisure activity, time spent on reading, frequency of reading materials and their most preferred medium for reading.

2. Materials and Methods

This pilot study is survey-based quantitative research. A close-ended questionnaire was adapted from (Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013) and distributed to students via a google form. Simple random sampling was used for data collection. The participants of the study are undergraduate students studying in different engineering and non-engineering faculties at the university. 50 students responded to the questionnaire out of which 30 (60%) were female and 20 (40%) were male respondents.

3. Results and Discussion

Students were asked to rate their favourite leisure activity during free time and their choices were as follows:

Table 1: Leisure time activities

Activity	Number of respondents	Frequency
Play games	20	40%
Surf the internet	11	22%
Listen to music	8	16%
Watch TV	8	16%
Reading	3	6%

Table 1 illustrates the students' choice of five pre-determined favourite activities during free time, i.e., playing games, reading, surfing the internet, watching TV and listening to music. The majority of students preferred playing games (40%), followed by surfing the internet (22%), watching TV (16%), listening to music (16%) and reading (6%).

Based on the findings, reading is not a favourite activity among the students. These findings are in line with other studies that found reading to be at the bottom list of students' most favourite activities during free time (Ahmed, 2016; Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013). Time spent on digital media and social media sites displaced time spent on reading for leisure. Previous studies showed that students spend countless hours immersed in social media networking sites and playing games (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). Consequently, the reading culture is fading away, especially among university students.

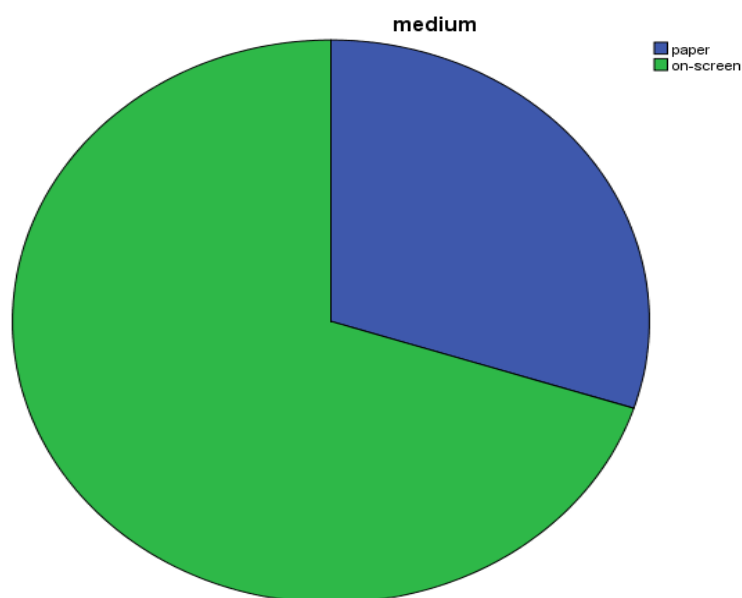


Figure 1: Reading medium

Figure 1 shows the results of students' preferred reading medium. The majority of students were in favour of on-screen medium (70%) and a total of 30% of the respondents were in favour of printed paper materials. These findings are consistent with the results revealed by Stoller and Nguyen (2020) who reported that 61% of Vietnamese university students prefer on-screen media for leisure reading. Similarly, Alsaeedi, Ngadiran, Kadir and Altowayti (2021) reported that students prefer online medium for enjoyment. The spread of digital media devices and the features implemented in them make these devices more appealing than paper materials. Moreover, digital media facilitates access to reading materials by providing a variety of reading choices based on the interests of users.

Table 2: Time spent on reading

Time	Number of respondents	Frequency
Less than 30 minutes	18	36%
30-1	30	60%
1-2	2	4%
2-3	0	0%
More than 3	0	0%

Table 2 shows the distribution of the amount of time spent on reading among the students. A total of 60% of the students spent less than 30 minutes reading, and none of the students read more than two hours per day.

These results contradict other studies where students read for two to four hours per day (Medar & Kenchakkanavar, 2015). On the other hand, the results are in line with Huang et al. (2016) who reported that students read for about 4 hours per week. However, the results are not shocking since reading is not preferred by students during leisure time. Besides, students are occupied with academic readings that require a considerable amount of time to succeed academically.

Table 3: Frequency of reading materials

Materials	Everyday	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a year	Never
Novels	4%	6%	36%	38%	16%
Story books	2%	20%	48%	24%	6%
Comics	14%	24%	28%	18%	16%
Newspapers	12%	14%	30%	34%	10%
Magazines	0%	6%	26%	44%	24%
Websites	38%	26%	10%	6%	6%

Table 3 displays the findings on the frequency of reading materials among students. A total of 38% of the students read novels once or twice a year and 16% of them never read novels. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) read storybooks once or twice a month, and 20% of them read storybooks once or twice a week. a total of 14% of the respondents read comics almost every day and 16% never read comics, however, 28% of them read comics once or twice a month. A total of 34% of the students read newspapers once or twice a year meanwhile 30% of the respondents read newspapers once or twice a month, however, a total of 12% of the students read newspapers on daily basis. Moreover, a total of 44% of the respondents read magazines once or twice a year, 24% of them never read magazines and none of the students read magazines every day. The majority of respondents (38%) read websites every day.

Based on the findings, students read different types of reading materials such as novels, magazines, storybooks, newspapers, comics and websites. The findings are consistent with other studies where university students prefer reading online materials such as websites (Ahmed, 2016; Fatiloro, Adesola, Hameed, et al., 2017; Hejase et al., 2020; Rasiyah et al., 2011) and other studies which showed that students prefer reading novels and comics frequently (Baba & Affendi, 2020; Erdem, 2015). Moreover, the results revealed that about a quarter of students never read magazines as opposed to the finding of Akanda et al. (2013) who reported that 85% of the students frequently read magazines. The results are expected because this generation is techno-savvy; they prefer online reading materials because they can be easily accessed through modalities that present visual, aural and easy-to-access packages (Pandian, 2011).

4. Conclusion

This study attempted to understand the leisure reading habits of university students. The overall results indicated that students enjoy playing games, surfing the internet and doing other activities rather

than reading in their spare time. The findings also showed that students barely read for one hour per day. They read different types of reading materials such as novels, storybooks, comics, newspapers and magazines, however, they frequently read online websites. Students showed a preference for an on-screen medium for leisure reading activities. It is recommended that students develop a habit of reading through parents, teachers and mass media. Students should be motivated to read more and lessen the time on social media sites and other activities that may hinder the inculcation of good reading habits. Moreover, university administrators may provide students with a variety of reading materials and choices over the internet and promote reading habits through reading campaigns and competitions.

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