



READING HABITS OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS: REFLECTIONS FROM ETHIOPIA

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Abstract: Reading is an ingredient component of education, especially in the higher education. It is also influenced by a number of direct and indirect factors. The inclination to read is considered as an essential component in developing the spirit of inquiry. The changing socio-cultural situation and the increased influence of technology have significantly made an impact on the very habit and pattern of reading. In this context, the present study aimed to assess the reading habits of University students in Ethiopia. The participants of the study were selected from the University of Gondar. A descriptive survey design was employed. Purposive sampling was used to select the samples. A tool was developed and standardized through appropriate reliability and validity tests. Questionnaire and interview method were employed as data collection methods. Quantitative and qualitative techniques were used for data analysis. Results indicate that students' reading habit is very discouraging and many of the students do not have a good reading habit. Therefore, the major recommendation includes the strengthening of University libraries and the establishment of active reading clubs. The value and habit of reading must be inculcated among the students from the school levels.

Keywords: reading, reading habit, University, students.

Introduction

Reading means plucking out all the subtle threads of meaning from sentences, paragraphs and pages and weaving them into your own personality (Sterl A., 1953). According to Goodman (1970), reading is a complex process by which a reader reconstructs, to some degree, a message encoded by a writer in graphic language. People read materials, which might help them, to learn more about their day to day activities, occupations or about their hobbies. Students use reading to acquire knowledge which is related to scholastic success; indeed, young people view this as the primary motive for reading.

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Reading has been, thus, the passion of the greatest personalities of all times. Humans have been reading since ages and thus words of knowledge have been passed on, through generations. The reading habit influences the promotion of one's personal development, in particular and social progress, in general. Regular and systematic reading sharpens the intellect, refines the emotions, elevates the tastes and provides perspectives for one's living and, thereby, prepares a person for an effective participation in the social, religious, cultural and political life. Reading fires the imagination of the person and it adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom in mind. Reading also loads the mind with new software (Satija, 2002).

Because of all these important reasons, reading should be a habit. As Nssien (2008) points out, reading habit is the use of reading as a regular activity. It is the cultivation of an attitude and a possession of skills that make reading a pleasurable, regular and constant activity. Reading habit is identified as the single most important determinant of a student's success in education in our modern complex society.

In line with this, leading world nations pride themselves on their promotion of reading. They see a high level of literacy as a major source of their competitiveness and social maturity. The absence of a widespread culture of reading in a nation acts as a powerful barrier to development and international competitiveness. The economic, social and political health of a nation today depends on building literate citizens that are able to read widely and apply it practically for development (Kingsley, 2011). Canisius (2012) also notes that the cultivation of a reading culture, especially among the youth in tertiary institutions will boost their academic excellence and ultimately the growth in the prospects of their countries.

Although reading has all these significances, and to make it a habit is a good act for the development of a nation, the people of Africa are not good readers. In relation to this, Sangkaeo (1999) clearly states that "*we are not a reading society in Africa, but chatting society, the background of learning through culture; the cultural habit of people ... prefer to listening and chatting more than reading*" (p.2). Different factors affect the reading habits of the people. For instance, Abioye (2010b, p46) identifies globalization as one of the major challenges in effective reading. She argues further that the technology that has revolutionized communication resulting in globalization includes television, the internet, mobile phone and so on. Adenyinka (2007) also explains that inadequate book availability, lack of interesting children's literature, and watching television are identified as factors hindering pupils from developing reading habits. The increased influence of social media and other leisure time activities have made a significant impact on the reading habits.

The state of accessibility and availability for reading is very crucial in the context of African countries. The researcher could observe that students and lectures in Ethiopian higher institutions are losing interest. This set the motivation for conducting this study. My observations of reading habits and environments in Ethiopia, students' performance on in-class written or oral presentations, and home assignments demonstrate little reading experience. In addition, as Weller (2010) notes, a reading culture is at the heart of learning at higher education level and it allows students to capably interpret and draw conclusions from their reading. This implies that a reading

culture within tertiary education would enable students to read, write, and think more critically. Thus, the focus of the present study was to assess the reading habits of the students of University of Gondar (one of the highest institutions of Ethiopia). The focus of the study was on the level of reading, amount of time they spend on reading, availability of reading materials and the major factors hindering students from reading.

It is anticipated that being based on the findings, the students in higher education institutions in Ethiopia in general and University of Gondar students, in particular, can be helped in improving their reading habits depending upon the causes of their problems. By using this information, actions may be taken to improve the students' reading habits based on the causes of their problems and it can help the development of the country. Finally, since research on the reading habits in the Ethiopian context have been limited, this study is expected to serve as a springboard for further studies in the area.

Methodology

Research design

The main purpose of this study was to assess the reading habits of the University of Gondar students. Hence, a descriptive survey design was used as it enables the researchers to describe the current status of an area of study that is the reading habits of the students.

Sampling

In accordance with the study objectives, the present study recruited the third-year students of University of Gondar who have been attending their education in the academic year 2017/2018. First, second, fourth and fifth-year students were excluded from the research. As it is too difficult to manage to conduct this study on all universities of Ethiopia, the researcher has decided to undertake the study at one university. The university was purposely selected out of 41 universities. Therefore, using purposive sampling, University of Gondar was selected for the research purpose since the students in this university had the problem of reading habit as the researchers' experience of teaching in the university showed and, thereby, believed that they obtained rich data from the subjects. In addition, all the colleges under the university were included in the research.

On the other hand, simple random sampling is used to select the departments and students from those departments. As a result, the researchers selected 73 third-year students from the total of 6000 students and 7 departments. Moreover, the researcher selected 7 instructors from the selected departments, who have the experience of teaching Gondar University students. Therefore, the instructors were selected primarily for their willingness to participate in the study using purposive sampling. The researcher felt that they would get detailed information from the instructors about the reading habit of students and the factors hindering students from reading.

Data Collection

Questionnaire and interview methods were used to collect the information. The questionnaire survey was used to generate the data pertaining to an assessment of the reading habits of students. A modified questionnaire tagged 'Children's Reading Habits Scale' was used. The items in the instrument/questionnaire were adapted from Panigrahi and Panda (1996) Reading Interest Scale and Darko (2005) Reading Habits Pilot Survey. All the modifications in the questionnaire were made for the purpose of clarity and relevance to the reading habits of students. For this purpose, both open and close-ended types of questions were prepared and distributed among the students.

In addition to the questionnaire, the researchers used the interview as a method of data collection to triangulate and enrich the data that were obtained through a questionnaire. It helped the researchers to identify the reading habits of students. To this effect, two sets of interviews were designed and administered to the instructors and students. Accordingly, 12 students were selected from four departments. As Seliger and Shohamy (1989) pointed out, in a semi-structured interview there are specific core questions determined in advance from which the interviewer branches off to explore in-depth information, probing according to the way the interview proceeds, and allowing elaboration, within limits. The researcher took careful notes in all interviews. The interview process was varied in length from 25 minutes to 30 minutes. The interviews were informal and open-ended.

The interview schedule used for the study is checked for reliability and validity. To validate the interview items, the researcher used the following procedures: before the actual data collection, the questions were given to colleagues, who have the expertise on research. The validation, thus, was made to get some evidence on whether the content of the items was relevant in helping to answer the research questions, as well as to check the clarity of the questions. Wiersma (2000) maintains that the reliability of interviews can be endangered by conscious or unconscious bias the interviewer may induce in the procedures. This can be reflected in differential treatments of subjects (for example, with respect to the length of time given and asking questions out of sequence). Gray (2004) suggests that the use of more than one interviewer and using the same protocol for different interviews can minimize this bias.

The content and face validity of the questionnaire used to collect data from students and instructors was ascertained by the colleagues who validated the interview schedules. The researcher gained useful insights from these colleagues, especially about the content validity and clarity of questions and instructions in the questionnaire. Based on their comments, the researcher revised the contents of the questionnaires before they were used in the pilot study, while students' questionnaire originally consisted of a total of 13 items, was reduced to 12 items after it was learned from the validation team that two items were repetitive. In order to make questionnaire items generate the data needed for the study, it was also important to get some evidence of reliability. In this regard, the pilot study helped the researcher to check the internal consistency of the questions used in the questionnaires. Hence, in the case of the student questionnaire, the internal consistency reliability of items coined in Likert scale format was checked and found to be 0.80 Cronbach's alpha.

Data analysis

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques were employed. The data collected through questionnaire survey were analyzed quantitatively by using simple mean percentage. On the other hand, the data obtained through interview were analyzed in qualitative data analysis method. That is, the researcher followed the data analysis procedures of Ritchie and Spencer (1994). First, the researcher compiled the data that were obtained from the interview. Then, in order to familiarize with the obtained data, the researcher read the respondents' responses repeatedly. Second, by creating a thematic framework, a category system was employed. That is, the responses were categorized based on the research questions. Third, the researcher sorted out the quotes of respondents by giving more emphasis for keywords and phrases and made comparisons both within and between the cases. Fourth, lifting the quotes from their original context put similar ideas together by rearranging them under the newly developed thematic content. Finally, the data were mapped and interpreted in narrative form in order to make intellectual and philosophical sense. Finally, results obtained from such analyses were discussed.

Results and discussions

Reading Habits of Students

The results of the study are discussed as per the objectives. To identify the level of students' reading habits, the questionnaire and interviews of students, as well as instructors, were analyzed. There are various standards for measuring reading habits. Among them, one of the most common ones is the standard set by the American Library Association, which is preferred in this study: (1) Those who read less than five books per year are called *seldom readers*, (2) Those who totally read between six and twenty books per year are called *moderate readers*, (3) Those who totally read above twenty books per year are called *constant readers*. The reading level of the respondents was not promising (Table 1).

Table 1: Level of reading over the last one year (N=73)

Sl. No	Read Books	Response (%)
1	None	4.2
2	1-5	67.6
3	6-20	19.7
4	More than 20	8.4
Total		100

As it is clear from Table 1, about 67.6 % of the students are seldom readers; 19.7% of the students are moderate readers and 8.4% of the students are constant readers. This indicates that most of the students' reading habit is very poor.

Regarding the students' reading habit, the students' and the instructors' interviews also showed that the students' reading habit was very poor. For instance, when the

researcher asked one of the instructors that what can you say about your reading habit? One of the students responded: *“I have not a habit of reading for pleasure.”* Similarly, another student said, *“My reading habit is poor, so that I haven’t the experience of reading for a long time”*

In support of the student’s idea, one of the interviewees from the instructors was asked if his students had a good reading habit? The instructor responded that *“No. The students’ reading habit is not good that they haven’t participated actively when they are asked questions that need the students’ additional knowledge”*.

In support of this idea, Amberbir (2010) found that current Ethiopian reading habit was different from that of 1970, due to various reasons such as technology.

Table 2: Purpose of Reading (N=73)

Sl. No	Purpose of reading	Response (%)
1	To pass exams	56.3
2	For pleasure	4.2
3	For personal development	38
4	To pass time	1.4
Total		100

Table 2 shows the purpose of the students’ reading. This shows that 56.3 % of the students have the perception that reading is done only for passing the exams and that of 38 % were for personal development. The response further indicated that about 4.2 % read for pleasure and 1.4 % of them read for time pass.

Underlining the purpose of reading, one of the student participants said that *“I have been reading to pass examinations”*. Likewise, another student replied, *“I have been reading to score good grade”*.

Table 3: Preference of Reading based on significance (N=73)

Sl. No	Preference of reading	Response (%)
1	News Paper	7
2	Academic Books	77.4
3	Fiction	5.6
4	Religious Books	4.2
5	Magazines	2.8
6	Others	2.8
Total		100

It is evident from the Table3, that most of the students (77.4 %) felt reading academic books most significant and 7% of the participant’s thought reading newspapers are significant. This is followed by fiction 5.6% participants, religious books 4.2%, magazines 2.8% and others 2.8% participants in this order.

Time Spent on Reading

The present study tried to explore the amount of time spent on the reading. The result of the same indicates unpromising reflections as most of the students spent very tiny time for reading. Being the university students, these indications may make potential impacts on their academic and career aspects.

Table 4: Time Spent for Reading (N=73)

Sl. No	Time/Hours spent per day	Response (%)
1	Less than an hour	4.2
2	1-2 hours	19.7
3	2-3 hours	14
4	3-4 hours	4.2
5	4-5 hours	2.8
6	More than 5 hours	1.4
7	When get time	53.5
Total		100

The indication from Table 4 reveals that 4.2% participants spent less than an hour on reading per day. While 19.7% read for 1-2 hour and 53.5% of participants read when they get time; whereas, 2.8 % of the participants read 4 – 5 hours per day. Only 1.4% of participants read more than 5 hours per day. This shows that most of the students read when they get the time that the reading habit of the participants is not encouraging.

In line with this, one student from the interviewee responded, “*I haven’t a program to read*”. Similarly, another student says, “*I read when I have time*”

Likewise, one of the instructors explained, “*the reading habits of our students are not encouraging.*”

Availability of Reading Materials

Apart from own interest and motivation to read, some institutional factors like accessibility and availability also do matter in the reading habits of the students. The present study tried to explore those factors in detail.

Table 5: Time Spent for Reading (N=73)

Sl. No	Perception of Availability	Responses		Total
		Yes	No	
1	Do you feel that the resources in your library are adequate?	25.3	74.6	100
2	Are you satisfied with the present library services of your University?	19.7	80.2	100
3	Do you have opportunities to borrow books from your library?	30.9	69	100

Table 5 shows that 74.6% felt existing reading materials in their library are not adequate. 80.2% of participants indicate that they are not satisfied with the present services of the university library. 69% participants said that they do not have the opportunity of borrowing books from the university library.

In relation to this, one of the students responded interview question ‘to what extent are the reading materials in the libraries sufficient for the students?’ as follows “*There is lack of reading materials in the library*”

One of the instructors also responded, “*Since the university is new, there is scarcity of books in the libraries*”

Factors Hindering Students from Reading

There are multiple factors that hinder the reading level of the younger generation. A detailed exploration of the same would be helpful in creating better solutions.

Table 6: Factors Hindering Reading (N=73)

Sl. No	Factors Hindering reading levels	Frequency (%)
1	Playing Sports/games	4 (5.6)
2	Watching TV	9 (12.6)
3	Home Assignments	14 (19.7)
4	Non-availability of books	8 (11)
5	Absence of reading habits	15 (21)
6	Lack of time	3 (4)
7	Increasing price of books	4 (5.6)
8	Using social media like face book	6 (8.4)
9	Absence of models regarding to reading	2 (2.73)
10	Household jobs	3 (4.2)
11	Lack of early reading experience	2 (2.73)
12	The education system	3 (4.2)
Total		73 (100)

It is evident from the Table 6 that among the factors indicated as hindrances to the students’ reading habit, the absence of reading habits was rated higher with 21.1% of participants. This is followed by home assignments given by teachers with 19.7 % while watching TV as the next factor by 12.6 % of students. About 11.2 % students felt the non-availability of books as a difficulty. Using social media such as Facebook and Twitter are a hindrance identified by 8.4 % students. About 5.6 % students believed playing sports/ games and increasing price of books are the hindrances. 4.2 % of participants felt lack of time, household jobs and the education system as barriers. 4.2 % of the participants thought the absence of models regarding reading and lack of early reading experience were the hindrances.

Regarding the factors that affect the students’ reading habit, the students and instructors’ responses in their interviews have shown some serious implications.

When asked about the major constraint for reading, one of the students participated in the interview responded that ... *“Well! The main hindrance to reading for me is the absence of reading habits. This is due to the lack of models at home and school during my childhood.”* *“Home assignments given by teachers are also one of the factors that affect my reading,”* said one of the interviewed students.

The same question was asked to some of the lecturers to explore what the factors are hindering their students from reading. One of the lecturers responded that:

“The major factors hindering students from reading are lack of reading habit, watching TV, household jobs, the absence of models regarding reading and lack of early reading experience. Another instructor responded that the social media, absence of reading habit, lack of models and watching TV are the main factors that affect the students’ reading habit”

In connection with this, Abioye (2010b, p.46) identifies globalization as one of the major challenges in effective reading. She argues further that the technology that has revolutionized communication resulting in globalization includes television, the internet; mobile phones, etc. affected reading habits.

Conclusions and recommendations

The objective of the study was to assess the students’ reading habit, to find out the level of their reading habits, to investigate the amount of time the students spend in reading, to find out the availability of reading materials and to identify the major factors hindering students from reading. In order to achieve these objectives, data were gathered from the subjects. The subjects of the study were third-year University of Gondar students, who attended their education in 2017/2018. The data were gathered using the questionnaire and the interview. The data gathered by using the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively and the data gathered by using the interview were analyzed qualitatively. The major findings of the study were that the students’ reading habit was poor. The result also indicated that their poor reading habit was due to the absence of reading habits, home assignments, watching TV, non-availability of books, attraction to social media such as Facebook and Twitter, playing sports/ games, increase in the price of books, lack of time, household jobs, the education system, absence of models regarding to reading and lack of early reading experience.

The reflections from the study show that student’s reading level and habits are not very promising, more than that, they are discouraging in the context of academic spheres. Many of the students do not have good reading habits. Only a few students have a good reading habit and these students also read for an academic purpose and not for personal development. Most of the students prefer to read academic books and newspapers, while some of them read fictions, and a few among them have the interest to read religious books and magazines. The time spent on the reading is worrisome. On the number of hours an average student spends on reading daily, it was revealed that 53.5% read when they got time i.e. not a fixed time while 19.7% were reading for 1-2 hours. This shows that reading habits in this part are not good. The other result reveals that the students are not satisfied with their library services and have not obtained enough reference books. In addition, it is difficult to borrow books from the library.

Furthermore, the results reveal that the students used most of their time doing home assignments given by instructors. Watching TV and playing sports/ are the other factors identified as those hindering them from developing good reading habits. The results of the study are alarming. There must be developed adequate policy-level decisions to enhance the reading level of the students. The reading is not just improving their academic spheres of life, but it is enriching their personality too.

Based on the evidence generated from the present study, the researcher would like to put forward some crucial suggestions through which the reading habits of the students can be potentially improved. The major recommendations are as follows:

1. Different reading materials and reference books should be incorporated in the University library in order to make a fruitful reading.
2. The copies of leading newspapers and magazines should be procured in the University libraries in such a number as to meet the requirements of the students.
3. The University librarian should encourage the trainee teachers to regularly read more books, newspapers, magazines.
4. The University should provide internet facilities in the library.
5. The University can arrange reading- based conferences and discussions, which help trainee teachers to develop personal reading interests.
6. Reading clubs should be established in the University
7. The culture of reading must be inculcated among the students from the school levels.
8. The curriculum and syllabus must be framed in a way where there is enough opportunity to read books and other materials.

The adaptation of these recommendations can potentially influence the learning levels of the students. The impacts of the same can be evident in their performances in curricular and extra-curricular aspects of life.

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