Reading Habits of the College Students across Discipline

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Abstract

From last century, many researchers have devoted efforts to examine reading habits of students. The present study is a step forward in the process which aims to identify the reading preferences and tastes of the college students across disciplines. The scope of the study is limited to the degree college students of Kashmir covering the faculties of General Science, Business/ Commerce, Computer Science, Social Sciences and Humanities. The sample was selected through statistical sampling formula and stratified random sampling technique was used to select students. The questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. The results reveal that students of all faculties have positive attitudes towards reading in which General Science students enjoy the most and Social Sciences & Humanities students the least. The General Science students also rank first on spending time on reading. The college students, irrespective of subject differences, mostly prefer to read in English. In comparison, the Computer Science students read in English more than other faculties whereas Social Sciences & Humanities students lead in Urdu. The students of General Science and Social Sciences & Humanities mostly read for education whereas majority of Business & Commerce and Computer Science students read for information. The students of all faculties mostly like to read about their own discipline. In comparison, the students of Social Sciences & Humanities read literature, politics, religion more than others; General Science students lead in science & technology reading followed by Computer Science students and the students of Business & Commerce lead in business and games/sports. The students of all faculties mostly read print sources compared to electronic. However, the Computer Science students rank first in exploiting electronic sources followed by Business & Commerce students. The study concludes that the subject background is one of the factors responsible influencing the reading habits of students.

KEYWORDS:-Reading habits; Reading preferences; Reading tastes; Subject differences; College students.

INTRODUCTION

Reading has been 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 in 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 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. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to mind. "*A dumb person becomes a communicator and a lame climbs mountains of knowledge through reading*" is an old saying. Reading loads the mind with new software (Satija, 2002). The individual who reads well has at his command a means for widening his mental

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horizons and multiplying his opportunities of success. Reading is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth. Sir Richard Steele has logically quoted, *"Reading is to mind what exercise is to body"*.

The definition of *reading* has undergone through many changes. In the past, reading simply meant to extract visual information from any given codes or systems. However, thereafter, reading became much more complex and involved the understanding of a whole text composed of written signs. Smith & Robinson (1980) defined reading as "an active attempt on the part of reader to understand a writer's message". According to Toit (2001) "Reading is as a process of thinking, recalling and relating concepts under the functioning of written words." Devarajan (1989) defined reading as the art of interpreting printed and written words. Irvin (1998) describes the reading process as "*the interaction of what is in the head with what is on the page* within a particular context that causes students to *comprehend what they read.*" Thus, reading is the ability to recognise, and examine words or sentences and understand the information within. It is a cognitive process of understanding a written linguistic message and to examine and grasp the meaning of written or printed characters, words or sentences.

Reading Culture in Kashmir Valley

Kashmir valley has been a seat of learning since ages. Right from the very ancient times, Kashmir was a clearing house of spiritual knowledge, a laboratory of scientists and a place of thinking personalities as is evident from the ancient writings present on stone- slabs, copper plates and coins found in Kashmir (Iqbal, 2007). Kashmiri are proud of their literary glories of the past. They had produced masterpieces of history, poetry and philosophy. The *Rajataranini* speaks of many literary personalities who flourished in ancient Kashmir and who thought and wrote with ability on different branches of knowledge. The noteworthy among them are *Vasunanda, Candaka*, *Matrgupta* and *Vakpatiraja* (Roy, 2005). In modern literary world, the Kashmiri authors have been awarded for different literary works by many national agencies. The *Sahita Akademi* of India has given awards to 25 Kashmiri scholars like *Zinda Koul Masterji, Adul Rehman Rahi, Shafi Shaida* and *Sajood Sailani* for their praiseworthy contribution in literature (Khan, 2006). Presently, in spite of all odds, the students of Kashmir Valley achieve the greatest highest in literary world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From last century, many researchers have devoted efforts to examining learners' reading habits (Allen, 1986). With their endeavours, researchers have discovered that reading habits are associated with students' gender (Scales & Biggs, 1987; Scales & Rhee, 2001; Synder, 1981), age (Fusco, 1986), socio-economic status (Devarajan, 1989), educational background (Allen, 1986; Bank, 1986) academic performance (Lamme, 1976) employment status (Ogunrombi & Adio, 1995) and professional growth (Wood, Zalud, & Hoag, 1995).

In a study conducted in Sweden, Stenberg (2001) revealed that women read more than men and highly educated people read more than less educated. Mokhtari and Sheorey (1994) explored the reading behavior patterns of 158 ESL students and found that university ESL students' levels of education and English proficiency were

associated with their reading behavior patterns. Subjects in high English proficiency group spent more time reading academic materials than subjects in low English proficient group. On the contrary, Hafner, Palmer, and Tullos (1986) examined the differences in reading interests of good and poor 9th-grade readers and found no differences between good and poor readers in number of magazines or books read. On the reading purpose, Igun & Adogbeji (2007) reported that nearly two-thirds (61.5%) of postgraduate students are motivated for study & reading primarily by the desire for knowledge and skills, while (22.5%) study mainly to pass their examinations and tests and for self development. Cabral & Tavares (2002) reflected that students read for academic purposes (97.8%) almost as much as they use reading as a hobby (97.2%). In contrast, Hassell & Rodge (2007) depicted that 72% of the students are reading in their leisure time in which 22% read constantly and 50% read when they get a chance. However, 6% of the adolescents excavate that they do not read and the other 22% says they read only for school.

Sarjit Kaur & Thiyagarajah (1999) investigated the students reading habits in University Science Malaysia. The information gleaned from the questionnaire revealed that while many students prefer spending as much as 3-5 hours per week in reading yet the breakdown of the responses indicated that 69.8% of them spend this amount of time on literary works, 28.6% on newspapers and 25.4% on novels. Karim & Hasan (2007) identified that the students spend about 7 to 9 hours per week on average on reading. The distribution of eight types of reading material shows that majority (74%) of the students read newspaper everyday for at least a few times a week followed by academic books or text books (72%), web sites (70%) and magazines (39%) respectively. The available literature reveals that reading habits of college students have been studies from many dimensions. However, the impact of subject backgrounds on reading habits is an area of concern that is touched in the present study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study is to identify the reading habits of the college students across disciplines and to identify the impact of subject backgrounds on reading tastes and preferences of college students.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study is limited to the degree college students of Kashmir Valley covering the faculties of General Science, Social Sciences, Humanities, Business & Commerce and Computer Science. The total number of such colleges in Kashmir Valley is 20 in which 11 are falling in rural areas and 9 in urban area.

METHODOLOGY

The data was collected using the questionnaire method. Before drafting the questionnaire, the relevant literature was reviewed and analysed which provided some directions in drafting questionnaire. After the survey questionnaire was drafted, it was pre-tested with 30 students. The questionnaire was then modified according to

the result of the pre-test. Later, the following statistical formula was used to obtain sample of the student.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 Npq}{Ne^2 + Z^2 pq},$$ **Where,**

Z = **Probability given under 96.5% reliability**
N = **Population or universe**
E = **Sampling error**
pq = **Proportion of the total population (Rural: Urban)**

The total population of students in the academic colleges of Kashmir was 54191 in which 28,838 were studying in rural colleges and 25,353 in urban colleges. Further, to ensure an optimal sample size, the 96.5% confidence level was pre-assigned and a small sampling error (0.04) was fixed.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 Npq}{Ne^2 + Z^2 pq}$$

$$n = \frac{(2.1)^2 (54191)(0.54)(0.46)}{(54191)(0.04)^2 + (2.1)^2 (0.54)(0.46)}$$

$$n = \frac{59363.205}{87.800} = 676.11 = 676$$

The data was collected from various faculties through population allocation method. The students represent the faculties of General science (191), Social Sciences & Humanities (288), Business & Commerce (107) and Computer Science (90).

RESULTS

1. Attitudes towards Reading

Majority of students in all faculties enjoy reading a lot and a bit (Table 1) in which General Science students (75.92%) enjoy the most and Social Sciences & Humanities students the least (58.33%).

Table 1: Attitudes towards reading

I enjoy reading	General Science	Social Sciences & Humanities	Business & Commerce	Computer Science
A lot	101/191 (52.88)	112/288 (38.89)	51/107 (47.66)	40/90 (44.44)
A bit	44/191 (23.04)	56/288 (19.44)	27/107 (25.23)	21/90 (23.33)
Not much	24/191 (12.56)	63/288 (21.88)	17/107 (15.89)	15/90 (16.67)
Not at all	22/191 (11.52)	57/288 (19.79)	12/107 (11.21)	14/90 (15.56)

Note: Figures in parenthesis is percentage

2. Time Spent

As an average, the students of General Science spent more time on reading per day (2.15 hours) than students of other faculties followed by Computer Science students (1.94 hours) and Business & Commerce students (1.87 hours) respectively (Table 2).

Table 2: Time spend on reading per day

Time Spent	General Science (a)	Social Sciences & Humanities (b)	Business & Commerce	Computer Science (d)
Up to 1 hour	32/191 (16.75)	86/288 (29.86)	23/107 (21.50)	21/90 (23.33)
1-2 hours	54/191 (28.27)	98/288 (34.03)	41/107 (38.32)	28/90 (31.11)
2-3 hours	68/191 (35.60)	64/288 (22.22)	26/107 (24.30)	25/90 (27.78)
3-4 hours	23/191 (12.04)	29/288 (10.07)	14/107 (13.08)	12/90 (13.33)
>4 hours	14/191 (7.33)	11/288 (3.82)	3/107 (2.80)	4/90 (4.44)
Total Time Spend	$\sum(a)$= 410.5	$\sum(b)$= 500.5	$\sum(c)$= 200.5	$\sum(d)$= 175
Average Time Spend (hrs)	**Mean= 2.15**	**Mean= 1.74**	**Mean= 1.87**	**Mean= 1.94**

Note: Figures in parenthesis is percentage

3. Preferred Language

The Computer Science students read in English more than other faculties (85.56%) whereas Social Sciences & Humanities students read in Urdu (30.55%) and in other languages (10.42%) like Hindi, Panjabi and Persian as well (figure 1).
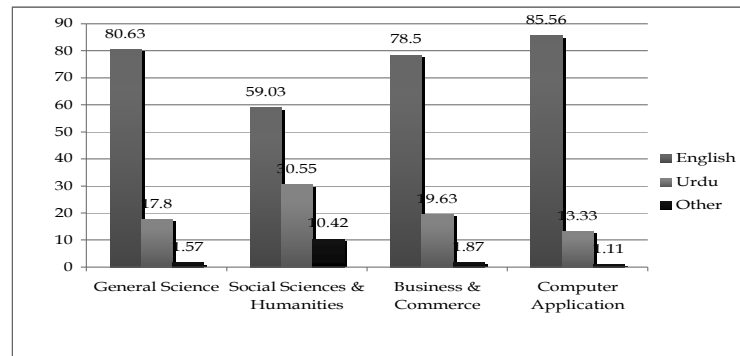

Fig. 1: Preferred language of reading

4. Reading Purpose

Majority of the students of General Science (46.07%) and Social Sciences & Humanities (44.79%) mostly read for education whereas majority of Business & Commerce students (45.79%) and Computer Science students (45.56%) read for information. However, the reading for pleasure is low in all faculties starting from Business & Commerce (8.41%), General Science (10.47%), Social Sciences & Humanities (12.15%) and Computer Science (14.44%). It discloses that the Computer Science students read more for pleasure than other faculties (Table 4).

Table 4: Primary purpose of reading

Reading Purpose	General Science	Social Sciences & Humanities	Business & Commerce	Computer Science
Education	88/191 (46.07)	129/288 (44.79)	45/107 (42.06)	32/90 (35.56)
Information	75/191 (39.27)	107/288 (37.15)	49/107 (45.79)	41/90 (45.56)
Recreation	20/191 (10.47)	35/288 (12.15)	9/107 (8.41)	13/90 (14.44)
Other	8/191 (4.19)	17/288 (5.90)	4/107 (3.74)	4/90 (4.44)

Note: The figures in parenthesis indicate percentage

5. Subjects of Interest

Table 5: Subject of Interest

Subject of Interest	General Science	Social Sciences & Humanities	Business & Commerce	Computer Science
Literature	31/191 (16.23)	65/288 (22.57)	13/107 (12.15)	15/90 (16.67)
Politics	12/191 (6.28)	51/288 (17.71)	12/107 (11.21)	12/90 (13.33)
Religion	56/191 (29.32)	101/288 (35.07)	20/107 (18.69)	18/90 (20.00)
Science & Technology	66/191 (34.55)	16/288 (5.56)	18/107 (16.82)	28/90 (31.11)
Games & Sports	12/191 (6.28)	20/288 (6.94)	12/107 (11.21)	8/90 (8.89)
Business	8/191 (4.19)	12/288 (4.17)	29/107 (27.10)	6/90 (6.67)
Others	6/191 (3.14)	23/288 (7.99)	3/107 (2.80)	3/90 (3.33)

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage

Majority of the students in all faculties mostly like to read about their own discipline (Table 5). While comparing the data, the results reveal that students of Social Sciences & Humanities read literature (22.57%), politics (17.71%) and religion (35.07%) more than others; General Science students lead in science &

technology (34.55%) followed by Computer Science students (31.11%) and the students of Business & Commerce lead in Business (27.10%) and games & sports (11.21%).

Reading Sources

The data (figure 2) shows that the Computer Science students lead in using e-resources as 48.89% of them use both print and e-sources and 17.78% use mostly e-sources for reading whereas Social Sciences & Humanities students make use of print sources more than others (70.49%) followed by General Science students (60.21%).
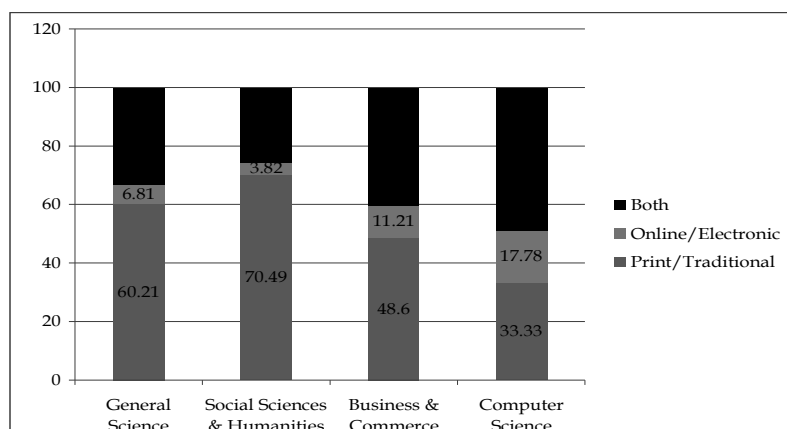

Fig. 2: Reading sources

FINDINGS & SUGGESTIONS

1. Majority of the students in all faculties have positive attitudes towards reading in which the students of General Science enjoy reading most of all. They also spend more time on reading than students of other faculties. The positive attitude of students towards reading is a good sign for the creation of reading society. The students should always spend its share on academic and non-academic reading without any fall.

2. The students do not read in their mother languages but in English language. The possible reasons are lack of qualitative reading material in these languages and lack of reading and writing skills in these languages. The possible solution is to translate qualitative reading materials from other languages to local languages. In this regard, the *Sahita Academy of India* can play a significant role. Moreover, the students should be trained to read and write in the local languages from the primary school level.

3. The students of General Science and Social Sciences & Humanities mostly read for education whereas majority of Business & Commerce and Computer Science students read for information. The students do not have positive attitudes towards recreational reading as majority of students read for education. This

could possibly be due to pressure from their parents and teachers to improve their academic performance. The steps should be taken to encourage them for recreational reading as well.

4. The students of all faculties like to read more about their own discipline. They should cross the boundaries and read on different branches of knowledge.

5. Majority of students read print sources compared to electronic sources irrespective of faculty differences. In order to promote the use of electronic sources among the students, the Internet facilities, workshops, short term training courses and awareness programmes in colleges can play a better role.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion can be drawn from the study that the subject background plays a significant role in reading habits of students like gender, age, income, social status, qualification, academic performance, employment status and professional growth etc.

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