

READING AND LIBRARY USAGE HABITS OF THE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Emphasis that reading has increasingly been the object of empirical and theoretical investigations for a long past. It has been studied from every possible dimension by researchers of different disciplines like Psychology, Sociology, Education, Media Studies and Library & Information Science. The study aims to investigate the reading and library usage habits of the college students in Kashmir Valley. The stratified random sampling technique was applied to select the students and questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. The results reveal that the college students have positive attitude towards reading and majority of them spend almost two hours on academic and non-academic reading daily. The students developed reading habits mostly through their self efforts followed up with the help of parents and teachers respectively. The college students prefer to read in morning, at home and in English. The results also depict that students mostly read for education followed by information. The preferred subject interest of students is Religion followed by Science & Technology and Literature respectively. The results further reveal that majority of the students exploit their personal collection followed by college library to satisfy their reading needs. The students face many problems in getting reading materials like restriction on borrowing in libraries, inadequate collection, price hike of reading materials and poor organisation of libraries.

KEYWORDS: Reading Habits, Reading Purpose, Library Use, College Students

Introduction

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 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. Reading loads the mind with new software (Satija, 2002). The individual who reads well has at his command a means for widening his mental horizons and for 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 and 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 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 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 reputed ancient Kashmiri scholars known worldwide are Vasunanda, Candaka, Kalidas, Kalhan, Bilhan, Mammata, Anand Vardhan, Vaman, Abhinav Gupta and many others (Roy, 2005). In modern literary world, the Kashmiri authors have been awarded for different literary works by many national agencies. The Sahitya Academy of India has given awards to twenty five (25) Kashmiri scholars like Zinda Koul Masterji, Adul Rehman Rahi, Shafi Shaida and Sajood Sailani for their praiseworthy contribution in literature (Khan, 2006). Presently, the students of the Kashmir Valley not only crack the highest competitive exams at national level but also top in them, all due to their unique literary traits.

Today in the era of knowledge based society, libraries have been functioning as the nerves and veins of reading culture. A reading culture cannot survive without a well developed library system. The Kashmir Valley has a grid of academic and public libraries. In Kashmir Valley, there are 03 Special Public Libraries, 06 District Public Libraries, 26 Tehsil Libraries, 06 Block Libraries, 17 Border Block Libraries, 02 Reading Room Libraries and 04 Serine Libraries (Public Libraries, 2008). Besides, every institution from a high school level has a library of its own. These public and academic libraries serve the reading society in general and academic community in particular. The student population is the major portion of the academic community. Therefore, the study has investigated the reading tastes of these students and problems faced by them on different fronts.

Review of Literature

Reading has increasingly been the object of empirical and theoretical investigations since a long past. Kendrick (1999) discovers that over half (56%) of the middle grade boys do not enjoy reading. Yilmaz (2000) finds that the majority of the students (77.8%) don't have reading habits whereas the smallest ratio (6.5%) belongs to the heavy readers. Hastings and Henry (2006) reveal that more than half of respondents (56%) spend less than an hour a day on reading and 13% says that they do not read at all. Cabral and Tavares (2002) study concerning the students' reading habits reflects that students read for academic purposes (97.8%) almost as much as they use reading as a hobby (97.2%). Igun and Adogbeji (2007) report that nearly two-thirds (61.5%) of postgraduate students are motivated for reading primarily by the desire for knowledge and skills, while (22.5%) study mainly to pass their examinations and tests and for self development.

The study of [Hassell and Rodge \(2007\)](#) depict that 72% of the students are reading in their leisure time in which 22% read constantly and 50% read when they get a chance to read. [Blackwood \(1991\)](#) indicates that students are reading about 2.5 hours each week for pleasure during academic session and slightly more during vacations. [Tella and Akande \(2007\)](#) disclose that the majority of the students (53.3%) spend between 1-2 hours per day on reading in Botswana. [The Department of Education, Hong Kong \(2001\)](#) points out that the students are spending two or more hours on reading in a week. [Sheorey and Mokhtari \(1994\)](#) results reveal that students read an average of 4.75 hours per week. [Karim and Hasan \(2007\)](#) identify that the students spend about 7 to 9 hours per week on average to read. [Sarjit Kaur and Thiyagarajah \(1999\)](#) reveal that while many students prefer spending as much as 3-5 hours per week in reading yet the breakdown of the responses indicate that 69.8% of them spend this amount of time on literary works, 28.6% on newspapers and 25.4% on novels. [Devarajan \(1989\)](#) reports that irrespective of the socio-economic background, the majority is interested in reading literature (51.96%) especially novels followed by Science (34.66%).

[Clark and Foster \(2005\)](#) report that 83.9% of pupils admit that their mother teaches them to read, followed by teacher (72.2%) and father (65.0%). Their mother (42.5%), teacher (38.5%) and father (32.4%) are also the most frequently cited reading partners. The mother (57.4%), father (42.1%) and friend (39.9%) are the top three people with whom pupils discuss their reading. In contrast, [Kendrick \(1999\)](#) reports that 86% of the middle grade boys complain that parents do not read with them. [De Boer and Dall Mann \(1960\)](#) opined that it is the task of the teacher to bring the child and book together. They further insist that the techniques of improving a child's voluntary reading should in general be those of enticement and persuasion rather than those of coercion. [Shokeen \(2005\)](#) is of the opinion that it is the duty of parents and librarians to promote a love for reading among students. However, all parties concerned- parents, teachers and librarians, should work together to infuse a habit of reading in children at the young age when the mind is most flexible and keep it burning in later part of life.

The scholars all over the world studied the library usage habits and identified a number of problems faced by readers. [The Department of Education, Hong Kong \(2001\)](#) and [Devarajan \(1989\)](#) results depict that most of the students borrow reading materials from their academic libraries than public libraries. [Hassell and Rodge \(2007\)](#) report that the students get reading material from the school library (71%), the public library (53%), the classroom (53%) and bookstores (43%). The study conducted by [Yilmaz \(2000\)](#) reveals that almost 63.9% of the students do not use the public libraries and the ratio of the non-users together with the little users reaches to 77%. [Tella and Akande \(2007\)](#) results reflect that 60% of the students find inadequate collection in libraries, 68% don't have opportunity to borrow books from their school libraries and 56% are not satisfied with the library services. Findings of [The Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, India \(1972\)](#) came up with poor picture of the school libraries regarding collection, organization and fund allocation. Provision of library with reading room facility, adequate grant and supply of free information sources is recommended for the school libraries to develop reading culture among students.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of the present study is to assess the reading habits of the 21st century college students of the Kashmir Valley. Specially, the study aims at identifying the:

1. attitudes of students towards reading;
2. amount of time students spend in reading;
3. favourite time, place and language of reading;
4. subject interest of reading;
5. sources of reading;
6. use of libraries; and,
7. problems faced in getting reading materials.

Scope of the study

The present study is limited to the academic 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, in-depth interviews were conducted with some college students, 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 samples of the students.

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

Where,

Z = The probability given under 96.5% reliability

N = The 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.

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

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

$$n = \frac{4.41 (54191) (0.2484)}{54191 (0.0016) + 4.41 (0.2484)} = \frac{59363.205}{86.705 + 1.095}$$

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

The data was collected with respect to three demographics of the students i.e. gender, region and faculty through population allocation method.

Attitudes Towards Reading

The first question posed to students is regarding their attitude towards reading. The data reveals (Table 1) that 44.97% of the students enjoy reading a lot, 21.89% enjoy it a bit, 17.60% don't enjoy it too much and 15.53% don't enjoy it at all.

Table 1: Attitudes Towards Reading

| Reading Enjoyment | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|---------|------------|
| A lot | 304/676 | 44.97 |
| A bit | 148/676 | 21.89 |
| Not much | 119/676 | 17.60 |
| Not at all | 105/676 | 15.53 |

Time Spent

The data reveals that most of the college students (32.69%) spend 1-2 hours on reading per day, followed by 2-3 hours (27.07%). Overall, the data reveals that 83.73% of the students spend 1-3 hours on reading per day and only 16.27% more than 3 hours. The average time (mean) students spend on reading is 1:90 (i.e. 1:54) hours daily (Table 2).

Table 2: Time Spend on Reading Daily

| Time Spent | Total | Percentage |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|
| Up to 1 hour | 162/676 | 23.96 |
| 1-2 hours | 221/676 | 32.69 |
| 2-3 hours | 183/676 | 27.07 |
| 3-4 hours | 78/676 | 11.54 |
| >4 hours | 32/676 | 4.73 |
| Total Time Spend (hrs) | (T)= 1287 | |
| Average Time Spend (hrs) | Mean= 1.90 | |

Inculcating Reading Habit

The data shows that students develop the reading habits mostly through their self efforts (36.24%) followed by parents (28.48%) and teachers (13.17%) respectively (Figure 1).

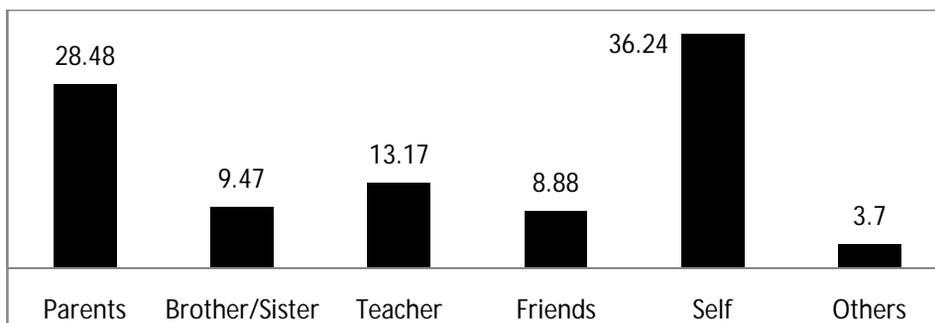


Figure 1: Inculcating Reading Habit (N=676)

Preferred Time

The data depicts that the majority of the students prefer to read in the morning (44.23%) followed by late night (27.81%).

Table 3: Preferred Time

| Preferred Time | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|---------|------------|
| Morning | 299/676 | 44.23 |
| Evening | 149/676 | 22.04 |
| Afternoon | 40/676 | 5.92 |
| Late night | 188/676 | 27.81 |

Favourite Place

It is clear from the data (Figure 2) that home is the most prominent place for reading as majority of students (75.44%) prefer to read at home and only 10.95% students prefer to read in library.

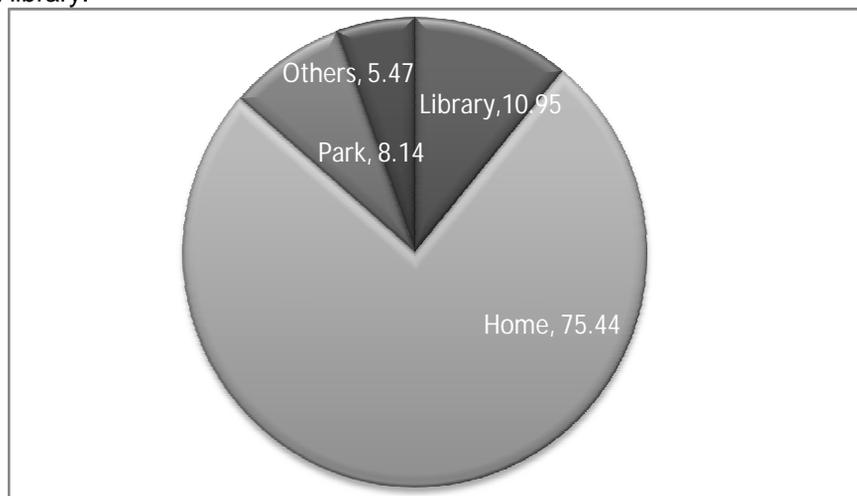


Figure 2: Favourite Place (N=676)

Preferred Language

It is depicted from the data that almost 95% of the college students prefer to read in English and Urdu only, in which 71.75% of students read in English and 22.93% in Urdu. Only 5.32% of them prefer to read in other languages like Persian, Hindi, Panjabi and Kashmiri respectively.

Table 4: Preferred Language

| Preferred Language | Total | Percentage |
|--------------------|---------|------------|
| English | 485/676 | 71.75 |
| Urdu | 155/676 | 22.93 |
| Other | 36/676 | 5.33 |

Reading Purpose

The results reveal that the students mostly read for education (43.49%) followed by information (40.23%) and very less number (11.39%) read for recreation.

Table 5: Purpose of Reading

| Primary purpose of Reading | Total | Percentage |
|----------------------------|---------|------------|
| Education | 294/676 | 43.49 |
| Information | 272/676 | 40.23 |
| Recreation | 77/676 | 11.39 |
| Other | 33/676 | 4.88 |

Subject of Interest

The data (fig. 3) depicts that students mostly read about Religion (28.85%), Science & Technology (18.93%), Literature (18.34%) and Politics (12.87%) and are least interested in Business (8.14%) and Games & Sports (7.69%).

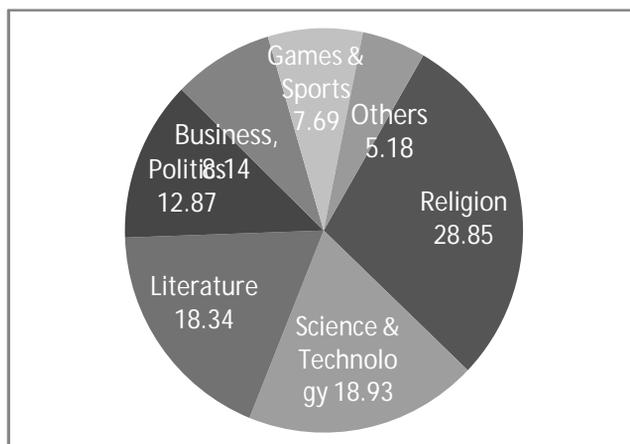


Figure 3: Subject of Interest (N=676)

Sources of Reading Material

The analysis reveals that the students mainly depend on their personal collection (49.11%) followed by the college library (29.29%) and Internet (13.76%) for getting reading materials. The students also borrow reading materials from others like friends, senior students etc. However, it is pathetic situation here that less than 1% of students primarily depend upon public libraries for getting reading materials.

Table 6: Sources of Reading Material

| Sources of Reading Material | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|---------|------------|
| College Library | 198/676 | 29.29 |
| Public Library | 5/676 | 0.73 |
| Internet/WWW | 93/676 | 13.76 |
| Personal Collection | 332/676 | 49.11 |
| Others | 48/676 | 7.10 |

Use of College Library

The data reveals that the students mostly use college library once in a week (32.25%) followed by 2/3 times a week (20.56%), once in a month (17.60%) and 2/3 times a month (13.46%) respectively. The data also depicts that almost 10% of the students don't use the college library at all and only 6.36% are daily users of college libraries (Table 7).

Table 7: Use of College Library

| Use of College Library | Total | Percentage |
|------------------------|---------|------------|
| Every day | 43/676 | 6.36 |
| 2/3 times/ week | 139/676 | 20.56 |
| Once in a week | 218/676 | 32.25 |
| 2/3 times/ month | 91/676 | 13.46 |
| Once in a month | 119/676 | 17.60 |
| Never | 66/676 | 9.76 |

Use of Public Libraries

The data presents a very grim picture about students' use of public libraries. The figures reveal that only 6.21% students are users of public libraries whereas 93.79% are non users (Table 8).

Table 8: Use of Public Libraries

| I use public libraries | Total | Percentage |
|------------------------|---------|------------|
| Yes | 42/676 | 6.21 |
| No | 634/676 | 93.79 |

Problems faced in Print/Traditional Environment

Students highlight bundle of problems in getting reading materials of their choice in print environment. The findings reveals that the biggest problem faced by students is the restrictions on borrowing reading materials in libraries (35.36%), followed by inadequate library collection (31.36%), price hike of reading materials (28.99%), poor organisation of libraries (28.85%), public libraries are far away (27.81%), inadequate personal collection (22.93%) and lack of time to access libraries (20.41%). The other problems faced by students are: limited opening hours of libraries, unhelpful attitude of library staff, closed access system, selected days to access libraries, inadequate and unprofessional library staff, inadequate library space, lack of reading room facility in libraries etc. (Figure 4).

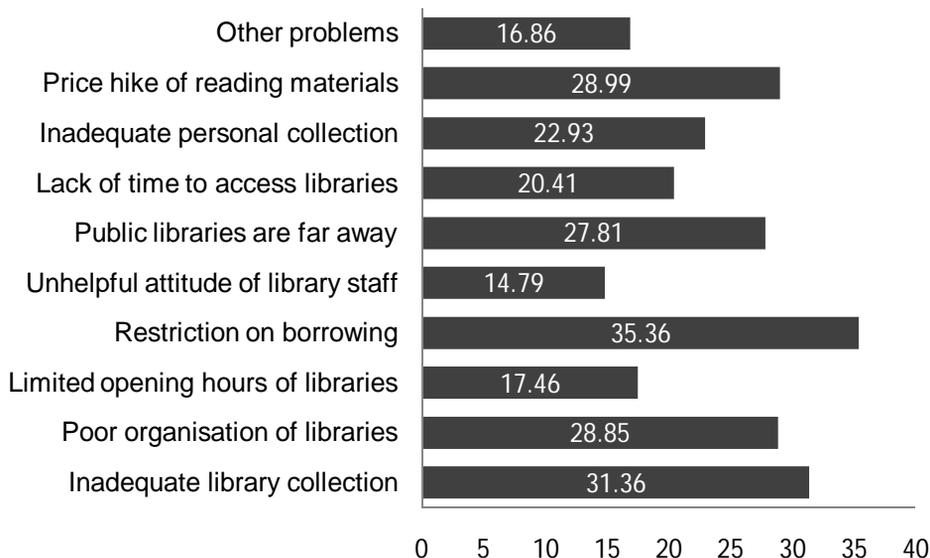


Figure 4: Problems Faced in Print/Traditional Environment (N=676)

Discussion

The results reveal that majority of the college students (66.86%) have positive attitude towards reading and spend on an average 1.90 (i.e. 1:54) hours on academic and non-academic reading daily. It is positive indicator; however, the students should develop a time table to spend their time on different activities related to print and electronic media like watching television, listening music, playing video games etc; and should always spend its share on academic and non-academic reading without any fall to keep their reading habit alive. The students develop their reading habits mainly through self efforts followed by the motivation of parents and teachers respectively. It is clear that parents, teachers and librarians do not encourage students to read up to expectations, as their active participation could promote students interests in reading. It is the primary duty of parents to infuse reading habits in their children and give them the best start on the road of success. Reading books and rhymes aloud in early age; creating a mini reading corner with reading materials like picture books at later stage; visiting libraries and bookshops at regular intervals with the young children; and providing books as gifts and prizes on different occasions to them can be helpful in creating reading habits in children. After parents, children spend most of their time with teachers. Teachers need to motivate and encourage students to read widely not merely for passing examinations. The role of librarians cannot be ignored in building a healthy tradition for reading culture. They have to play a crucial role to create the reading environment in which all components of reading culture come together. Hence, it is their primary duty to attract students, expose them to joys and benefits of reading and develop pleasant atmosphere and positive attitudes towards reading in them.

The students mostly read in morning, at home and in English. The students do not read in their mother/local languages. The possible reasons are lack of qualitative reading materials, 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 Sahitya Academy of India can play a significant role. Moreover, the students should be trained to read and write in the mother/local language from the primary school level. The study also confirms that the students do not have positive attitudes towards recreational reading, as majority of students read for education and information. This could possibly be due to the pressure from their parents and teachers to improve their academic performance. The steps should be taken to encourage them for recreational reading as well. Reading is a basic skill for lifelong learning and lifelong readings can be established through leisure reading. It should serve as a connecting link between students and reading material.

The students mostly depend on their personal collection followed by college library for getting reading materials of their choice. It is further revealed that the students do not have positive habit of reading in libraries. The provision of reading room facility in the libraries with all necessary infrastructural; sanitation, ventilation and other facilities can attract students towards libraries for reading. The college authorities should also give Best Library User Award and Best Reader Award to the student who utilises library collection most of all and spend a good amount of time on reading in libraries/reading room respectively. Moreover, the students do not have healthy habits of using college libraries as most of the students use library once in a week. The reason is that most of the libraries distribute the number of days in a week among the students of different years (e.g. 1st year, 2nd year and 3rd year) and provide access to their collection only two days a week. This practice should be immediately stopped and library collection should be made accessible to all students on all working days. It will definitely increase the number of library users and use of library collection. Further, they face a bundle of problems in getting reading materials of their choice in libraries. The biggest problems faced by all students are restriction on borrowing, inadequate library collection, price hike of reading materials and poor organisation of libraries. To overcome these problems, libraries need to identify the areas of improvement for providing qualitative services. For proper organisation of libraries and optimum utilisation of their collection, the library professionals should switch to library automation and open access system.

Moreover, the marketing of library collection through library catalogue, online public access catalogue (OPAC), list of new arrivals, displaying of book jackets, etc. can be helpful to attract students towards libraries to use their collection. Provision of adequate grant to libraries can be helpful in building a well balanced and adequate collection in libraries so that the libraries will become able to cater the diverse needs of academic community in general and student community in particular. The college libraries should also subscribe the adequate copies of local and national newspapers and magazines in order to meet the day to day needs of students. The restriction on borrowing is one of the great hurdles in exploiting the library collection. This practice should be stopped immediately for optimum utilisation of library collection. However, students should not keep the library items unnecessary at home; it will also decrease the use of library collection. The services of trained library professionals are very essential for proper organisation and maximum exploitation of the library resources. However, it is observed that in developing countries like India that adequate professional manpower is not provided to libraries. Therefore, this practice should be discontinued and well qualified and adequate staff should be posted in libraries for generating qualitative services. The library professionals should realise that the library is a service institution and library users

are their vital consumers. They must behave in a proper way with their clientele and should feel proud to help them.

The public libraries of Kashmir Valley have very less number of users. The students, who can be counted on finger tips, are their occasional users. The need is to attract people especially new generation towards public libraries through different awareness programmes. Public libraries in the rural areas should be established with adequate facilities in terms of space, collection and staff. Moreover, the mobile library services should be extended to the villages to enhance reading culture in these areas. Hence this invites urgent attention of the concerned authorities. The government can play the biggest role in strengthening library systems in the state in general and valley in particular. The government should enact the Public Library Legislation in the state and develop the existing public library system in order to provide the best possible library services to users.

Conclusion

In nutshell, the present study confirms that the college students have positive attitude towards reading and always spend some time on reading for different purposes. However, they face many problems in inculcating, developing and keeping alive their reading habits. The concerned players associated with reading culture have to play active role in building a healthy reading society. The governments should also take steps to establish more libraries, modernize the existing libraries, update their collection, employ the trained library professionals and provide the financial support in every possible manner to develop a reading culture in present multimedia society.

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