

THE READING HABITS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MACEDONIA

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Abstract: Reading is one of the four main language skills and as such it is taught and practiced since an early age. After learning how to read as a main skill, students are also taught by parents and teachers to convert reading to a habit which will help them develop a much needed rich language, better personality, better academic performance, self-confidence in knowledge and many other aspects. That is the stage of transition, where reading from a permanent language function and skill becomes an individual habit. When it comes to individual terms reading becomes a very important element in creating a developed and well-built personality. Reading books, newspapers, magazine or other materials are all helpful and important in building a sustainable reading habit. It is crucially important to have a well developed reading habit when you are a student. It is also researched about the issue that more reading means better academic performance even though that depends from other factors too. The aim of this study is to give a general picture of the reading habits of university students in North- Western Macedonia. It is geographically limited because the universities the students attend are the University of Tetovo, University Cyril and Methodius, South East European University, and University American College Skopje. The method adopted in the study is a survey based questionnaire consisted of thirteen questions where four are data about the age, gender, the university and the year of studies, while nine others are specific close ended questions about reading. The total number of students who took part in the survey is 149, and the questionnaire was distributed to them online, following random sampling. The participants are from both ethnic background, Macedonians and Albanians. The results show whether students enjoy reading, their frequency of reading books, the genres they mostly prefer to read, the reasons that affect their reading habits and similar questions related to reading. The answers show that students mostly read to gain knowledge and for personal satisfaction, while they choose social media and busy schedule at school as the reasons which affect their reading habits.

Keywords: reading, students, habit, university, language

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is not only one of the four language skills but it is a very important element in the aspect of vocabulary enrichment, personality building and better academic performance. It is the base of creating and developing a well-prepared character. People read for pleasure, knowledge, necessity, information, studies etc.

READING AS A LANGUAGE SKILL AND ITS IMPORTANCE BEYOND IT

Reading, according to Florence et al., (2017), "... boosts the quality of life, reinforces and merges people together in a unifying force" (106). Moreover, Braunger and Lewis (2006), believe that reading is a collection of many things much further beyond the skill within the language. They define reading as a process which is active, cognitive and affective. Syahputra (2016) considers reading as "one of the best receptive skills in language learning concerning to get better knowledge" and as an exciting experience which leads to new experiences. Scholars and linguists give different viewpoints and definitions when it comes to reading, not only as a skill but beyond that too. Reading shapes the mind, gives broader and enriched vocabulary, helps in character creation, widens the mental horizons and provides other benefits. However, when it comes to its scholarly proven importance, Noor (2011) believes that reading is viewed by higher institutions as the most important academic skill. From the basic tool of education, Noor claims that reading is everything related to personal satisfaction, self-discovery, it is art, source of information and most important an enjoyable source of knowledge for everyone. After passing all the stages, reading becomes a habit. It is the nature of reading as a habit where the study focuses on. Researchers believe that reading habits of people depend on their age, gender, job and lifestyle. For example, Hassell & Rodge (2007) show that female read for pleasure contrary to males. According to Blaha and Bennet (1993) as cited in Erdem (2015), reading is a "habit is a characteristic behavioral pattern", which usually enter our life slowly and as time passes, if we don't quit those habits, they become needs. Reading as a habit in this research is used in the terms of reading outside of the duties for studies or school. Florence et al., state that reading is a mechanic process involving the brain and other organs, which if is frequently carried out becomes a habit (2017). The educated elite, who work different kind of jobs finds necessary to read books and materials that have nothing to do with the work they do during the day. They need to relax through reading materials which avoid fatigue and stress. This is a great way which leads towards successful brain calmness outside of the daily routines (Ogbodo, 2010). Besides all of these important characteristics of reading, there is also another one which should be taken into consideration by students. Reading has been confirmed to help in achieving a better academic performance by students. A study of this type, by Owusu-Acheaw, reveals that most

of the students in that study claim they have seen improved academic performance after reading more books. According to those who have read at least a novel in the last semester, reading also helps them express themselves better.

READING IN THE ERA OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

According to many studies conducted in different countries students are less and less interested to read. This is due to different factors, but technology and social networking make a huge impact here. Technology has highly affected the decrease of reading habits. Akarsu and Dariyemez, argue that the role of technology has become even greater in people's life, and has interfered in the reading process too. This digital age has brought digital reading too and this makes people one step closer to reading, and spending less money on printed books. But, do people really read more because books are almost free and newspapers are on the palm of our hands every morning? No. Studies show people use technology and social networking for other reasons instead of reading books. In a study conducted in the universities of Ankara and Erciyes, turns out that 29 % out of 326 students, read one book a month. Most of them choose the reason of being informed, followed by personal development, and leaving relaxation in the very end as a choice (Erdem, 2015). From the results of another study conducted in Zaria, Nigeria, students' reading habits are negatively affected by the use of social networking. Out of 200 undergraduates, 72 (36 %) answered that social networking distracts them from reading. Moreover, another study reveals that "most of the students do not see social media and its components as a tool for enhancing reading for education" (Aforo, 2014).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Reading has become less liked by young generations due to other internal and external factors nowadays. However, even though is not in the focus of the study, technology has affected other generations too. Students, as the focus group of this study seem to read only news and information online on social media and technology, things that are not of academic help. Technology has had a huge impact in decreasing the level of readers for academic purpose. They do not see the importance of academic reading in the development of their outstanding performance at school. Parents and teachers complain about these changes and the lack of motivation to read, but in fact if the students are already in their college studies and haven't developed a habit of reading, it will be a big challenge to make them start reading now.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to show the reading habits of university students from different universities in Macedonia. Reading habits include general reading, not only books. The answers reveal the reasons what keeps the students away from reading. Social networking, talking to friends, busy school schedule are just few of the chosen reasons by participants in the survey.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study adapted a survey research method. Random sampling procedure was followed. The 149 students participants are studying at the University of Tetovo, University Cyril and Methodius (Skopje), South East European University (Tetovo), University American College Skopje and others. The questionnaire was shared online via a closed Facebook group, where students who study at the University of Tetovo (Faculty of Economy) were asked to share the link with students and acquaintances from other respective universities mentioned above.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

What are the reading habits of college students in Macedonia?

What are the reasons that distract their reading habits?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Initially, out of 149 participants in the survey 47 of them, 31.5% respectively were male, and 102, or 63.5% were women. Regarding the university they attend, 37% of the total study at UT, 31% at UKIM, followed by 19% who are students at SEEU, 8% of UACS and only 5% who attend other universities. Participants were also asked to write their study program, and 85(57%) of them study Economy, 28 (18.8%) study Sciences. The school of languages is represented by 12 students (8.1%); law school by 7 (4.7%), and other study programs are represented by 11.4% of the total. Twenty two participants are first year students, 47 are in their second year of studies, 53 in their third and 27 on their fourth year of studies. The following tables show the results of the questionnaire in frequency and percentage.

Enjoying reading books	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	130	87.2
No	19	12.8

Table 1: Do you enjoy reading books?

The table above shows the percentages of participants in the question whether they enjoy reading books. As mentioned previously, some studies have shown that women read more than men. This is also proved in this study where out of the 130 participants who said they enjoyed reading books, 102 were females and this makes the majority in this case. Different people, especially depending on their age, prefer different types of book genre to read. The results of this survey show that most of the participants, respectively 49% of them read romantic books, which of course is closely connected to their age. Psychology is the preference of 32.2% of them, followed by economy which was chosen by 21.5%. Comparing to the same age students in Turkey, the study of Erdem (2014) shows that the three first preferences by Turkish students in Ankara and Erciyes university are History (53,7%), Romantic (38%) and other genres.

Favorite genre	Frequency	Percentage
Romantic	73	49
Psychology	48	32.2
Economy	32	21.5
Professional	29	19.5
History	28	18.8
Religious	19	12.8
Politics	18	12.1
Poetry	17	11.4

Table 2: What genre you prefer to read?

Last time I read a book	Frequency	Percentage
Last week	51	34.2
Last month	42	27.5
Within the last three months	26	17.4
Don't remember	31	20.8

Table 3: When is the last time you read a book?

Earlier in the study habits were defined as something that starts to be a routine and repeated often. Unfortunately, the results of this survey show that students in Macedonia mostly read one book a month, which is chosen by 65 of the participants or 43.6% of them respectively. This is lower than the results of a similar study conducted in Nigeria, where most of the students read once a week, whereas some of them (41%) read novels every day (Florence et.al, 2017).

The frequency of reading a book	Frequency	Percentage
Once a month	65	43.6
Once in two or three months	30	20.1
Once a year	42	28.2
Never	12	8.1

Table 4: How often you read a book?

Newspapers	Online	Printed	Percentage (online)	Percentage(printed)
Yes	125	26	83.9	17.5
No	24	123	16.1	82.5

Table 5: Do you read online/ printed newspapers?

Newspapers are also very important in creating reading habits, because they offer information and also, according to Nagashetti “provide improvement to our life style, thinking and character” (2015). Unfortunately, the number of printed newspapers falls year by year because of different external reasons. According to statistics online, Newspaper Association in the US reports that newspapers’ circulation has fallen for 8% from 2016 (Pew Research Center). According to the data in table 5, the vast majority of the participants who took part in the survey, respectively 125 of them read online newspapers, while only 26 of them read printed newspapers. This is a sign that people are more and more becoming addicted to online news reading and avoid buying printed newspapers.

The reason for reading books	Frequency	Percentage
Personal satisfaction	52	34.9
Obligation at school	30	20.1
General knowledge	62	41.6
Because parents push me	5	3.4

Table 6: What is the reason for reading books?

Reading habits are undoubtedly developed and learned from earlier age. Mudzielwana (2014) strongly believes that a child does not become literate on his own. He states that “The parents must bestow love for learning in the child and guide him to persevere on his own” (253). Parents play the most important part in guiding and practicing their child to read and love reading later. Teachers are also a great shaper in those habits. If parents and teachers are successful in shaping and watering the love towards reading, and developing good reading habits the child will grow to be a well prepared learner in the future. If not, when a person is already a student is too hard to make him love reading. However, students who study Literature at Ataturk University, believe that they could probably develop better reading habits through parental guidance and encouragement (Akarsu & Deriyemez). The results of our study show that personal satisfaction is the main reason students read, as it was chosen by 52 of the participants, or 34.9% of them, followed by obligation at school which was chosen by 20.1% of the total. Most of them, 41.6% chose gaining knowledge as reason for reading, leaving the reason of pushy parents to only 3.4%.

The changes in reading habits	Frequency	Percentage
My reading habits are better	83	55.7
My reading habits are the same	50	33.6
My reading habits are getting worse	16	10.7

Table 7: Have your reading habits changed after starting studies at university?

Reading habits should get better by the time students start their studies because of the value reading represents. How have reading habits changed after enrolling at the university was one of the questions in the survey and the results showed that 55.7% see their reading habits as improved, followed by 33.6% who don't see any change, and 10.7 % who believe their reading habits have become worse after starting college studies. Similarly, 50% of the students of Ankara University, (Erdem, 2014) stand on the opinion that their studies have improved their reading contrary to 24% who believe their reading habits have been deteriorated after coming to university.

Reason that effect reading habits	Frequency	Percentage
busy schedule at school	51	34.2
preparation for exams	31	20.8
social networks (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram)	66	44.3
time spent with friends	19	12.8
I simply don't want to read	11	7.4
watching TV	13	8.7
Other	23	15.4

Table 8: Choose the reasons that negatively affect in your reading habits

The last question is probably one of the most important questions of the survey. Many studies have already shown the reasons that deteriorate the reading habits of young students, but this question makes students accept themselves where the problem stands. Students spend at least 15 minutes per visit on social networking sites, whereas they check those sites several times a day. (Shehu & Shehu). According to Akarsu, 65.8 % spend 1-3 hours daily online (88). Erdem on the other hand, also proves this through her survey results with the students of Ankara and Erciye University, where 35.2 % choose spending time on the computer and internet as one of the reasons to not have enough time to read. While, the results in the table show that social networks are the number one reason which keeps students away from reading as it was chosen by 66 of them. 51 participants chose busy school schedule as a reason, followed by 31 students who believe preparation for exams leaves them behind with reading. 19 of the total number spent too much time with friends, 13 of them watch TV instead of reading, whereas 23 out of 149 think there are other reasons. However there is also a small group of 11 very honest participants who claim they simply don't to read and there are no other obstacles which stop the development of this habit.

CONCLUSION

Going back to the research questions, the results of the study reveal that the college students in Macedonia don't have good reading habits. A solid number of them enjoy reading, and prefer some romantic, historic or economic books but that is not enough comparing to their age and the need to develop as intellectuals. They claim they read one book a month but this may vary. The reasons which deteriorate students' reading habits are mostly the use of social networks, busy schedule at school, time spent with friends or simply the lack of will to read. The study also shows that the students in Macedonia don't read printed newspapers, and also they believe their reading habits have become better after enrolling at university. But, this raises the question, if they read one book a month now, in improved reading habits, how much have they read before that? At this point, it could be said that there is a need for a further and more detailed research. There should be more specific questions about their habits, like the approximate number of books read in the last year or for instance their opinion on how reading affects their academic performance. Last, but not least a larger number of students included in the survey would give more reliable results.

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