

Reading Habits Of Undergraduate Students in Different Colleges of Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh - A Study



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ABSTRACT

Reading is the most important skill to master while learning English as a second or foreign language. It is a tool which helps one acquire a language and it is also the vehicle for obtaining ideas that cannot be verbally transmitted. However, reading as a practice and an art has tended to diminish in recent times. The general expectation of the students' reading ability has not been met. This study examined the reading habits of undergraduates of various colleges in Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh. A total number of two hundred undergraduates were randomly selected. A questionnaire was administered to the selected students. This study revealed that many students spend little time reading any printed material due to the influence of advanced technology. A few recommendations for improved reading among the students have been made based on the findings.

Key words: reading skills, technology, learning

Introduction

Reading skills are important throughout one's lifespan, particularly as one responds to new demands and challenges in various jobs. Reading for pleasure or recreational purposes has been found to improve reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary and the development of grammar. Lack of literacy skills including reading, causes problems for living, working and survival in general.

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on reading instruction in higher education. In an effort to improve the quality of instruction, quite a large amount of research has been conducted to break down

and understand the complex process of reading. The reading habit is an essential and important aspect for creating the literate society in this world. It shapes the personality of an individual. It also helps the person to think and create new ideas. At present, due to the influence of mass media, the habit of reading books, magazines and journals, etc., has come down drastically. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop the reading habit among the individuals in society.

The Significance of Reading

The ability to read is generally recognized as one of the most important skills that a person can have. Reading is a tool of the

inquisitive mind; it is the vehicle for obtaining ideas that cannot be verbally transmitted. Reading is an important activity in the process of learning. It has progressively been gaining importance in the history of human beings. Human beings are collectively involved in the regulation of society. Therefore, reading has become an essential aspect of its functioning. Knowledge explosion and revolution in communication and technology have led to the belief that the production and distribution of reading material is indispensable.

Today, an abundance of diversified reading material is available throughout the world. The reasons behind this are not difficult to comprehend. The process of material production, the modern way of life, the complexity of structural and functional aspects of present societies and various other changes are responsible for this. The present generation is exposed to an over abundance of reading material. But it is necessary to direct the youth to select the right kind of material thereby indirectly enhance their reading skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the reading habits of the undergraduate students in various colleges in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. This was done by analyzing the responses collected from two hundred students. These reveal the developing and expanding areas of reading habits. They also preview how students see themselves as readers. Further, it gave a snapshot of

the students' opinions concerning reading habits. It also gave them some practical suggestions to improve their reading habits.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

- To investigate the reading habits of the students at the undergraduate level.
- To propose remedial measures to improve the reading habits of the students.

The present work was done to study the reading habits of the students who are studying in Arts and Science Colleges in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

Scope of the Study

- To find out whether the students have cultivated the habit of reading at the undergraduate level.
- To evaluate the level of reading by analyzing the different reading materials used by these students.

Review of Related Literature

Reading significantly contributes to the successful career development. It is also the ability to respond to change. The importance of reading has resulted in a large volume of research work carried out to understand the nature of the reading habits of individuals. With the growing amount of digital information available and the increasing amount of time that people spend reading electronic media, the digital environment has begun to affect people's reading habits.

Like other habits this too develops over a period of time. Motivation and the ability to read are only two aspects of a complex series of factors contributing to the habit of reading. "Reading is an effortful activity that often involves choice, motivation is crucial to reading engagement." (Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks & Perencevich, 2004, 2009)

Research published by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) states, "The importance of reading as an avenue to improved reading has been stressed by theorists, researchers and practitioners alike, no matter what their perspectives." There are a few ideas more widely accepted than that "reading is learned through reading" (p.21).

Gessner (2003) states, "With today's rapid technological advances, the scientific information explosion, the need for critical thinking and the advent of evidence-based practice, the professional educator must promote lifelong learning" (p.20). He further points out, "A hallmark of professional behaviour is the personal commitment to the ongoing acquisition of new knowledge" (p.19). The ongoing way to acquire new knowledge is to develop the habit of reading, which "Develops a capacity for focused attention and growth" (National Endowment for Arts, 2004, p. 38).

Research findings in applied linguistics and reading research consistently show a strong correlation between reading proficiency and academic success at all ages, beginning right from the primary school all the way upto the university level.

Methodology

Reading helps overcome the inner conflicts of daily life. But the students in the modern society do not read enough. This in turn results in their inability to succeed in life. Therefore, a questionnaire was used to collect the responses from the students.

Analysis and Discussion

The reading habits of the students were analyzed by examining the type of materials used to enhance their knowledge.

A sound reading habit has its foundation in early training where the aspects of intelligence, linguistic competence, parents' educational back ground and motivation have all played an important part. Earlier studies have shown that parents and teachers influence the reading habits of their children. Some parents, in spite of being illiterate motivate their children to study. Many of the students understand the importance of reading and education and work hard to reach their goal. It was discovered that the reading material they liked best were newspapers, magazines, books on general knowledge, fiction, joke books etc. followed by some other reading materials found on the internet.

It was discovered that 49% of the students read the newspaper, 38% of the students read books on general knowledge, 24% read fiction, 17% read joke books and 12% read only magazines. The economic status of the students and the motivation of the parents has a direct bearing on their ability to read and write.

Students were questioned about the kind of magazines they preferred to read. The study shows that many of the students read three types of magazines. Out of 200 respondents, 24% (48) of the students read *India Today*, 24% (48) of them read *Cinema* and 24 % (47) of the students read any magazine available to them.

Another highlight of the study is giving importance to magazines like *Politics*, *Science*, *Technology* and other magazines. From the study it was found that many of the students, i.e. 50% (99) of them read books on general knowledge, 13% (26) read books on technology, 12 % (24) read books on science, 12% (23) read about sports, 8% (16) read about politics, 7% (14) read for information on business and 10% (20) of them read magazines on miscellaneous topics. These results reveal that many of the students are interested in improving their knowledge in different fields like sports, business and some do actually develop an interest in politics.

Students had to answer questions on what kind of books they read other than their subject books. The results showed that 33% of the students read all kinds of books, 41% read only short stories, 18% preferred novels and about 8% were interested only in short fiction. This implies that many students like to cultivate the habit of reading books for various purposes such as reading for pleasure, education or simply for relaxation.

It is interesting to note that the general attitude of the students towards reading habits was good; many of the students said

that, they gained knowledge through reading. As per the research, 95% (189) of the students felt that reading was a channel for gaining knowledge and for 92% (184) reading was an important activity. 81% (161) felt that it developed their imagination, for 80% (164) of the students, reading opened the doors of an unknown world. Some students, 76% (112) said that reading actually helped them understand their feelings and emotions better.

Findings

- Reading materials, especially books, should be a constant companion to all people, especially students. However, in this respect the findings of the survey were not very heartening, because only a small percentage of the students read books for more than two hours a day. The majority of the students read books only for one or two hours a day.
- Reading of newspapers requires less time and newspapers give news and information on current affairs. This is why a large majority of the respondents read newspapers regularly. Most of them read newspapers for one to two hours every day.
- The findings of the survey indicate that the library continues to be the place for students seeking information. Although many students favour the internet, or ask their teachers or friends when they need any information, many students visit the library for any information they require. This is indeed an encouraging trend.

- The internet and the television seem to be the two most popular alternatives to reading books, especially among young people. However, the internet, as this survey has shown, could be a good place to read books, magazines, blogs, etc.

Pedagogical Implications

Improving the reading habit of the students and turning them into lifelong learners is quite important before building a knowledge society. Reading is essential because it equips people with necessary knowledge and understanding, not only for building their own life but also for contributing positively to the socio-economic development of the nation.

- Visiting a library on a regular basis and people's reading habits are closely interlinked. That is why library facilities need to be developed to attract young people. At present, most libraries have internet facilities. If these could be strengthened even more, the younger generation will find another reason for visiting libraries. Besides, library collections should be easy to access so that people will not get frustrated or disheartened by not finding their required materials there.
- Academic institutions should regularly organize events like study circles, debate clubs, seminars, essay competitions, quiz competitions etc. to inspire students to gather knowledge and make their mark in these events. This is how the reading habits of students can improve.

- As students are more interested in the World Wide Web, blogging, social networking, etc., interesting and constructive reading materials should be made available online, too. Thus printed books, magazines and online books could complement each other to the readers' satisfaction.

Conclusion

Reading is inseparably linked to learning. And learning leads to an overall mental, professional, and human development. Reading not only gives people new ideas, information, and insight, it also helps them become more complete in every aspect. As Birkerts (2010) observed, "In a lifetime of reading we store impressions... according to private systems of distribution, keeping factual information on one plane, acquired psychological insight on another, ideas on a third, and so on." Therefore, reading is crucial for every human being as it benefits people in several ways. The reading habit has a great impact on every individual in the society.

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