

Gender Differences in Reading Habits of University Students: An Evidence from Pakistan

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Abstract:

This study aimed at exploring gender differences in reading habits of university students in Pakistan. The data was collected through a questionnaire from 1050 male and female students of three universities located in Punjab province. The results show that the reading habits of male and female students were somewhat different depending upon their objective, liking, timing of study and other factors. Female students exhibited comparatively more positive attitude towards reading as compared to their male counterparts. It is recommended that teachers at universities must play an active role in motivating, guiding and supervising students for developing positive reading habits especially among male students. Libraries of higher education institutions should be well equipped with a variety of printed and electronic reading materials, and must provide students with conducive reading environment.

Keywords: Reading preferences; Reading habits; Cultural differences; Language differences; Gender differences

I. Introduction

Reading, a lifelong habit, is the major source of access to the knowledge. It is taken as an implicit practice that supports an individual to achieve original power and develops one's critical thinking capability. Reading habit, thus, is considered as an essential means for the development of personal traits, mental abilities, getting knowledge, information and understanding of an individual (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). According to Özbay (2006), individual reading preferences differ in terms of interest, attention, aptitude and situation. Reading interest, curiosity or inclination seems to be differing with different age levels. Boys and girls have different reading habits and reading aptitudes; girls enjoy reading more than boys. Clark and Foster (2005) are of the view that girls prove to be more positive than boys towards reading. But in school years, boys read more for getting a good job in future while girls read for fun and for some break. Gender and background have an effect on reading abilities of students.

Scales and Rhee (2001) explain that students' gender, race, and educational background are interpreter of their reading habits and patterns. For constant and standard progress in educational process at university level, learners require to enhance their learning through reading habits so as to gain individual improvement in learning. It is apparent that convincing an individual to read something which he does not like to read would be damaging rather than constructive. Therefore, it is important to observe reading preferences of youth which are necessary to form their reading habits for future learning. In Pakistan, reading habits of university students are losing grounds. Conventional teachers are not capable to give confidence to their students about reading and do not highlight the importance of book reading other than course books at university level. There are many social aspects which cause decline in reading habits among students in Pakistan. According to Shah and Saleem (2010), poor reading habits of Pakistani people may be attributed to multiple factors (which are true for students as well) including low literacy rate, lack of reading orientation, meager purchasing capacity, poor education system, inappropriate library structure, unfavourable reading environment and library staff with low motivation. The situation requires a change in attitude and practice as far as reading habits of university students is concerned.

While reading habits of students in Pakistan were explored at school level (Hussain & Munshi, 2011; Rasheed, 2012), a limited number of studies has been undertaken by researchers to address the issue at university level. Of them two researches are important; Bajwa, Gujjar, Shaheen and Ramzan (2011) focused their investigation on comparing reading attitude of students from formal and non-formal education systems whereas Iqbal and Shehzadi's (2002) study was delimited to only female students of one university. In this context, there arises need to examine reading behavior and attitude of university students at larger scale. This study is an attempt to investigate gender differences in reading habits of university students in Pakistan, and determine students' inclination, approach and attitude towards reading.

II. Literature Review

Reading habit is essential and it can leave a positive impact on all age groups. Gaining knowledge is a good way, but it must be constructive knowledge, it must facilitate a man to get on in a profession, pass an examination, be good at conversation, or get hold of a status for learning (Kurtus, 2002). Fisher (1996) observes that childhood reading affects the next reading of a child. At early elementary years, usually students like to read their favourite books about which they have heard or which have been read by their parents. For such readers, at later elementary level, their family makes continuous efforts to provide them with further reading. At junior high school level, many students keep record of what they read; boys are interested in adventure, mysteries and biographies while girls take interest in magazines and teenage novels. During high school years, students become more sincere in their reading and turn away their interest towards classics and particular authors. At college and university level, they can understand an author's art of writing.

Table 1: Reader differences

Issues	Explanation
Intra-individual differences	It means difference in reading performance of a single reader that appears as a function of interest, situation, motivation or other factors.
Inter-individual differences	It means differences in reading comprehension abilities (e.g., attention, visualization, drawing inferences, reasoning).
Social class differences	This belongs to social status of the students like race, gender, ethnicity, language and economic conditions.
Cultural differences	It involves beliefs, values, and ways of organizing the tasks.
Language differences	Differences in communication practices, variety, accent, vocabulary, syntax, knowledge of rhetorical structures of language.
Developmental differences	Psychological components, age, development, integration, degree of independence and change of conditions.

Source: (Chair *et al.*, 2002)

A reader can be different in various ways in his reading. The sources of variations may be related to differences in various dimensions of individual development. As shown in Table 1, Chair *et al.* (2002) identify several kinds of reader differences that are associated with the individual, individual ability in relation to others, social class, culture, language and development.

Several research studies have been conducted to explore reading habits of students at different levels of education. The descriptive survey research, conducted by Pehlivan, Serin and Serin (2010), aimed at investigating reading habits and interests of student teachers in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The students' reading interests were found at medium level and significant variation was observed in terms of gender and socio-economic background. Comparison of study habits and academic performance of Pakistani British and white British students was made by Rana and Kausar (2011) and conclusion about study habits emerged in favour of white British students. The purpose of Shafi and Loan's (2010) survey study was to analyze gender variation and reading habits of the college students in Jammu and Kashmir, India. The results suggested that objective of male students' reading was information and female students read for more education.

Study habits of female university students in Pakistan were investigated by Iqbal and Shehzadi (2002) and female students were found to be lacking in healthy study habits and effective reading skills. Hussain and Munshi (2011) also probed into reading preferences of secondary school students in Pakistan and found their liking for reading books about religion, novels, and magazines and newspapers. Bajwa *et al.* (2011) investigated variation in the study habits of students belonging to formal and non-formal systems of education in Pakistan, and concluded that students from non-formal system were positioned better compared to formal system students. In a survey study involving middle school students in Pakistan, Rasheed (2012) examined the status of children's reading habits and role of library in creating positive study habits among them. The findings highlight the fact that children were inclined to read English printed material

related to local environment. The present study was an attempt to find out gender variation in reading habits of students at public universities of Pakistan.

III. Research Method

Following the descriptive survey method, this study aimed at exploring gender differences in reading habits of university students in Pakistan. The study was delimited to universities of Punjab province only. For data collection, three public universities of Punjab i.e. University of the Punjab Lahore, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, and the Islamia University of Bahawalpur were selected. From these universities, all the students of Master's programmes were included in the population of the study. The list of departments of each university was taken from its official website. One thousand and fifty students were selected randomly as the sample of this study. Distribution of sample can be seen in the table below:

Table 2: Distribution of Sample

University	Departments	Respondents from Each Department	Male	Female	Total Students
University of the Punjab, Lahore	48	10	240	240	480
Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan	28	10	140	140	280
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur	29	10	145	145	290
Total	105	30	525	525	1050

As the study was based on survey method, a questionnaire (validated through experts' judgment) was used as a tool to collect data from the sample. Apart from personal information, the questionnaire consisted of 13 questions (relating to different aspects of reading) with 4 to 6 options for answer. The researchers personally administered questionnaire to 1050 students and 1014 filled questionnaires with return rate of 96.57% were received. The return rate of questionnaires was increased due to persistent and repeated follow-up by researchers. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze the responses of students. Crosstabs was performed to look at the differences in male and female respondents' opinions about their reading habits. The results were interpreted in terms of percentage to make things easier to understand.

IV. Results

The study was focused on identifying differences in reading habits of students at public universities in Pakistan. The results of this research are organized along the major themes and are being presented in the following section:

Table 3: Major objective of reading/study

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
To increase knowledge	28.57%	28.6%	28.59%
To pass examinations	13.73%	13.3%	13.52%
To develop personality	5.13%	5.23%	5.18%
To do research	1.73%	1.33%	1.53%
Any other	0.9%	1.5%	1.2%

Table 3 shows the major objective of university students' reading. To increase knowledge was major objective for more than one fourth (28.59%) of the students whereas only 1.53% respondents pointed out doing research as their purpose of reading. The opinions of male and female students were almost same on this question.

Table 4: Thinking about reading

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
You like reading	34.93%	36.6%	35.77%
You don't like reading	11.13%	10.7%	10.92%
Wastage of time	.23%	0	.12%
Any other	3.8%	2.67%	3.24%

It is evident from Table 4 that more than one third (35.77%) the students liked to read and 11% expressed their disliking for reading. It is important to note that female students (36.6%) liked reading more than male students (34.93%) at university level.

Table 5: Feelings about reading

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Reading is interesting	3.3%	3.97%	3.64%
Reading gives knowledge	32.57%	30.8%	31.69%
Reading gives excitement	2.47%	2.73%	2.6%
Help getting a better job	11.73%	12.37%	12.05%

According to Table 5, when the students were asked how they found reading, one third (31.69%) respondents told that reading mainly gave them knowledge. As compared to female students (30.8%), more male students (32.57%) held this view about reading.

Table 6: Reading books other than course books

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Almost everyday	9.57%	9.7%	9.64%
Once in a week	21.47%	23.4%	22.44%
Once in a month	15.07%	14.03%	14.55%
Almost never	3.97%	2.77%	3.37%

Table 6 shows that nearly one fourth (22.44%) students used to read books other than their textbooks once in a week. More female students (23.4%) compared to male students (21.47%) told about reading books once in a week.

Table 7: Newspaper Reading

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Almost everyday	18.57%	15.2%	16.89%
Once in a week	19.47%	21.43%	20.45%
Once in a month	8.93%	9.63%	9.28%
Almost never	3.1%	3.67%	3.39%

Table 7 illustrates that one fifth (20.45%) of respondents read newspaper once in a week whereas students who read newspaper daily were 16.89%. More female students (21.43%) used to read newspaper as compared to male students (19.47%) on weekly basis. On the other hand, more males (18.57%) were into newspaper reading on daily basis in contrast to females (15.2%).

Table 8: Exchange of Books

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Friends	24.23%	22.63%	23.43%
Family members	1.97%	3.57%	2.77%
Class fellows	21.3%	21.03%	21.17%
Any other	2.5%	2.73%	2.62%

As depicted by Table 8, nearly on fourth (23.43%) university students exchanged books with their friends. More male students (24.23%) were involved in this exchange as compared to female students (22.63%). Apart from their friends, more than one fifth (21.17%) students also exchanged books with their class fellows.

Table 9: Changes felt after reading a book

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Change in thinking	22.67%	23.03%	22.85%
Change in life priorities	1.43%	1.63%	1.53%
Change in behavior	13.33%	12.43%	12.88%
Feel happy and elevated	1.33%	1.73%	1.53%
Feel knowledgeable	8.9%	8.67%	8.79%
Help guiding others	2.4%	2.43%	2.42%

Table 9 illustrates that more than one fifth (22.85%) respondents felt changes in their thinking after reading a book and 12.88% observed a change in their behavior. In

contrast to male students (22.67%), more female students (23.03%) witnessed change in their thought after reading.

Table 10: Time Spent on reading

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Daily	29.97%	28.97%	29.47%
Weekly	17.63%	15.73%	16.68%
Monthly	2.5%	5.2%	3.85%

Table 10 exhibits that almost 30% students spent time on reading every day whereas 16.68% respondents weekly spared time for reading activity. It emerged from the data that more males students compared to their female counterparts found time for reading on daily and weekly basis.

Table 11: Best way to study

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Individually	27.67%	28.83%	28.25%
In groups	21.03%	21.17%	21.1%
Any other	1.37%	1.03%	1.2%

Table 11 shows that 28.25% students were in favour of studying individually whereas 21.1% liked group study. Individual study was more favoured by female students (28.83%) than male students (27.67%).

Table 12: Best time for study

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Morning	22.17%	17.47%	19.82%
Noon	.47%	.2%	.34%
Afternoon	0.7%	0.23%	.47%
Evening	2.93%	4.5%	3.72%
Night	23.77%	27.47%	25.62%

According to Table 12, one fourth (25.62%) of students were of the view that the best time to study was night and morning was best time for 19.82% students. Female students (27.47%) extended support for the idea of studying at night more than male students (23.77%).

Table 13: Time spent on reading textbooks daily

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
None	6.4%	6.13%	6.27%
3 hours	40.4%	39.73%	40.07%
5 hours	1.63%	1.57%	1.6%
More than 5 hours	1.67%	2.47%	2.07%

Table 13 reveals that 40.07% of the respondents spent three hours daily on reading their textbooks. This amount of time was spent on reading textbooks by more male students (40.4%) as compared to female students (39.73%).

Table 14: Money spent on buying books monthly

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
100-200	9.87%	8.43%	9.15%
201-500	30.27%	32.1%	31.19%
501-1000	5.13%	4.6%	4.87%
1001-1500	1.6%	2.43%	2.02%
More than 1500	3.17%	2.33%	2.75%

According to table 14, 31.19% students spent Rs. 201-500 on monthly basis to purchase the books. As compared to male students (30.27%), more female students (32.1%) spent this amount of money on buying books for themselves.

Table 15: Reasons for not reading

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Teacher does not ask me.	4.1%	3.97%	4.04%
I don't like reading.	2.2%	1.97%	2.09%
Parents involve me in work.	4.83%	4.03%	4.43%
I have to do a lot of homework.	22.13%	20.63%	21.38%
I cannot find time at home.	16.83%	19.33%	18.08%

According to Table 15, when the students were asked why they did not read, 21.38% students replied that they had to do a lot of homework and 18.08% told that they did not get enough time to study at home. Compared to females (20.63%), excessive homework was an excuse for not reading for more male students (22.13%).

V. Discussion and Conclusions

Students are different from each other in their social, cultural, language and developmental aspects. Bus (2003) argues that reading habits develop from home. Home reading environment starts supporting a child from kindergarten and primary school level. The prime purpose of this study was to investigate gender differences in reading habits of university students in Pakistan. The results reveal the fact that reading habits of male and female students are somewhat different. These findings are consistent with the results of Frankenstein's (2009) study, who stated that boys and girls have different choices when it comes to reading. Shafi and Loan (2010) also found that gender was major factor impacting students' reading habits and female students were better than male students in reading culture.

It is also concluded from this study that female students exhibit comparatively more positive attitude towards reading as compared to their male counterparts. Analysis of students' responses clearly shows that females like reading more than males, and the main objective of their reading is to enhance their knowledge. In contrast to males, more female students read books other than their course books once in a week. As far as the purchase of books is concerned, females spend more money on monthly basis as compared to males. These results are in line with conclusions of several researchers (Clark & Foster, 2005; Hopper, 2005; Ross, 2002; Stenberg, 2001). Ross (2002), Stenberg (2001) and Hopper (2005) conclude that female students read more than their male counterparts. Clark and Foster (2005) also observe that girls' level of enjoyment in

reading is greater than that of boys, and boys are inclined to hold more undesirable attitudes towards reading as compared to girls.

Reading depends on situation. Boys and girls choose different material to read according to their age, mental level, classroom, home factors and individual differences. Choice of what and when to read develops with age. In Pakistan, the situation is different; students are hesitant in making a choice to read because material of their interest is not available everywhere at all time. It emerges from the empirical evidence that mostly male students exchange their books with their friends as compared to females. Both male and female students have felt changes in their thinking after reading a book. A remarkable number of students like to study individually as their preferred reading strategy. Female students do the reading mostly at night while male students like to read in the morning. Students spend minimum three hours daily on reading their text books. When male and female students were asked about excuse for not reading, male students said that they have to do a lot of work while the females told that they do not get enough time to study at home.

Although this study has limitation of including universities of Punjab province only, it generated authentic data that may give understanding about the reading and study habits of university students in Pakistan. Based on findings of this study, it is recommended that teachers at universities must play an active role in motivating, guiding and supervising students for developing positive reading habits especially among male students. Libraries of higher education institutions should be well equipped with a variety of printed and electronic reading materials, and must provide students with conducive reading environment.

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