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ESL UNDERGRADUATES READING HABITS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING

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Abstract:

The ability to read and comprehend English text is one of the four core language abilities, hence ESL students need to develop strong reading skills. Reading is quite difficult to learn because many students are still struggling with reading in English. This study seeks to comprehend the reading habits and attitudes of undergraduate English as a Second Language (ESL) students in Malaysia. This research aims to investigate the preferred English reading materials of ESL undergraduate students, the amount of time they spend time reading each day, and their attitudes toward reading English materials. The information for this study was gathered via a survey. This study utilised an adapted version of Smith's (1991) Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA) and Pandian's (1997) Reading Habit questionnaire. The data was analysed using SPSS statistics and descriptive statistics was used to determine the respondents' reading attitudes. The questionnaire was sent to 215 undergraduate ESL students currently enrolled in English proficiency courses. The study revealed that (i) ESL undergraduates enjoy reading English materials but still experience anxiety when doing so, and (ii) students enjoy reading as much as they enjoy visiting websites, such as social media sites. The paper will conclude by discussing the implications of the findings for the development of instructional materials within a reading context.

Keywords:

ESL, Reading Habits, Reading Attitudes, English Materials

Introduction

Reading may be an exciting journey of self-discovery and a means of gaining a deeper comprehension of one's own experiences. Reading provides experiences that help individuals widen their perspectives, discover their interests, cultivate and deepen them, and comprehend the world more thoroughly (Green, 2002). Essentially, it involves deciphering written and printed text. It is a potent type of conscious learning that influences the attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgments, and behaviours of readers, as well as the authenticity of the information they receive (Panigrahib & Panda, 1996; Eyre, 2005). Reading is regarded as one of the most essential language-learning abilities, and it is an indispensable tool for the lifelong education of all students (Pandian, 1997; Mokatsi, 2005). This viewpoint was supported by Krashen (1993), who asserted that reading improves a person's spelling, writing style, vocabulary, and grammar. As a result, the reader becomes a more effective communicator, and their language skill improves. In their study of adult readers, Kirsch and Guthrie (1984) discovered that reading has a major impact on career development, the ability to adjust to change, and work performance.

Numerous developments have occurred in the concept of reading. Historically, reading was used to interpret visual data from any given code or system (Lone, 2011). After that, however, reading became a process that required interpreting a complete text composed of printed symbols (Fisher, 2004). According to Smith and Robinson (1980), a reader's strategy for comprehending a writer's message is reading. Toit (2001) adds that reading can be a method for thinking, remembering, and relating concepts while utilising written language. Irvin (1998) defines the reading process as an interaction between the writer's thinking and the material on the page within a certain context for readers to comprehend what they read. Reading, according to Williams (1984), is the act of examining a text and comprehending what has been written. He continues by stating that comprehension is not a prerequisite for reading because everyone reads for different reasons. Thus, reading is defined as the ability to perceive, analyse, and comprehend the meaning of written or printed letters, words, or sentences (Lone, 2011).

There has been a lot of research done to find ways to improve the linguistic skills of ESL undergraduates. Pham (2021) claims that the regular reading habits of ESL undergraduates have enhanced their reading comprehension. As Pham (2021) noted, reading behaviour and reading comprehension are highly correlated. Akbar (2014) widened the scope of the subject by investigating the impact of reading habits on verbal communication. A person's reading habits are influenced by a variety of significant factors, including the amount of time spent reading, how frequently it was done, the books he chose to read, his attitude toward those books, the reason he read, and his reading practises, according to Risman et al. (2019). Additionally, readers will read gladly and with pleasure after they form a positive reading attitude, a good reading habit with a frequency of more than five times per week, and a preference for different book genres (Sakinah, 2018). Another definition was provided by Issa et al (2012). A person's reading habit evolves through time and becomes a part of who they are, according to his theory. Following this line of thought, Okwilagwe (1998) stressed that reading was a deliberate activity that a reader engaged in for a while before developing a desire for reading. According to the research of Fatiloro et al. (2017), a person's reading habits are determined by their reading preferences.

Literature review

An increasing number of empirical and theoretical studies are being conducted on reading. Numerous academic fields, including Library and Information Science (LIS), education, social science, and most recently information systems, have conducted studies on reading. Reading-related findings have a huge impact on how libraries function, how well they can teach youngsters to read, and how to make websites and computer systems more functional and user-friendly. In his study of reading patterns, Ross (2002) discovered that "heavy readers" were more likely to be female than male, younger than older, and have a higher education level than the general population (Book Industry Study Group, 1984; Cole and Gold, 1979).

The reading habits and attitudes of college and university students have been studied. Blackwood et al. (1991) investigated the reading interests of 333 college seniors arriving at a small, public liberal arts university in the United States in 1991. According to the findings, the majority of individuals read for enjoyment, predominantly newspapers, and read more during school breaks than during the school year. Male and female students reported spending around 2.5 hours per week reading for enjoyment during class hours, with a little increase during breaks. Sheorey and Mokhtari (1994) analysed the reading preferences of 85 students enrolled in development reading electives at a large Midwestern institution. They discovered that, on average, youngsters read 4.75 hours each week. Students who fared better on a test of reading comprehension report devoting somewhat more time to leisure reading. 75 percent of college students routinely read periodicals as a kind of leisure reading, according to Gallik (1999).

According to Pandian, around 80% of Malaysian university students are reluctant readers of both English and Malay materials (2000). Ethnicity, the family environment, reading models, gender, and the school environment are significant reading markers. Urban students are observed to read more than their rural counterparts. Pandian has created profiles of avid readers in English, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil, among other languages.

Moreover, the advent of the new digital world has aroused the curiosity of a great number of scholars. People, particularly young adults, spend more time reading electronic items as the quantity of digital information increases (Liu, 2005; Ramirez, 2003). A significant percentage of time spent reading on the Internet is spent scanning and surfing for information (Liu & Huang, 2008). On the other hand, the nature and goal of reading appear to diverge from traditional reading approaches that are brief, linear, and less structured (Zimmerman et al., 2001). Some academics stated that the expansion of electronic media may have a detrimental impact on the fact that individuals engage in less extensive reading and lack the ability to read deeply and maintain a prolonged interest in reading (Liu, 2005). Others would say that, when it comes to reading, printed documents are still preferred. Both Liu (2005) and Ramirez (2003) give evidence that Internet users print to engage in further reading. In addition, Liu demonstrates that age effects online reading behaviour. Additionally, younger folks may endure longer periods of reading on a screen.

Reading attitudes are a person's feelings towards reading, which affect whether they approach or avoid reading circumstances (Alexander and Filler, 1976). Appropriately, attitude and reading interest are related to feelings and the want to learn, or in this case, the desire to read.

Positive reading attitudes and experiences also contribute to improved academic performance. Recent studies have focused on identifying the characteristics that encourage positive reading

attitudes among secondary school pupils (Bintz, 1993; Walberg and Tsai, 1985). A good attitude toward reading is one of the most significant predictors of reading achievement, according to Walberg and Tsai (1985).

Partin (2002) examined the relationship between favourable teenage reading attitudes and family circumstances. The scores of the 40 students with the most positive reading attitudes varied from 92 to 125, and the scores of the student with the most negative reading attitudes ranged from 25 to 57. 34 of the students with positive attitudes recalled being frequently read to as children, while just six recalled being occasionally read to. Students' positive reading attitudes are highly connected with and promoted by the following literary environments: being read to as a child, parental involvement in the child's reading, the availability of books in the home, receiving books as gifts, and having a library card. Possessing reading-inclined pals with whom they may debate and propose books was also substantially related to good outlooks.

According to a 1984 survey done by Professor Atan Long, the interest in and reading habits of Malaysians are extremely poor. The library has low usage. Lack of time (59 percent), the presence of other, more important duties (11 percent), and the difficulty of obtaining reading material are stated as reasons for not reading (10 percent). Similar results are discovered by Pandian (1997), Frank Small and Associates (1996), and the Malaysian National Library (2006).

During the period of the movement control order (MCO), the demand for digital books increased, according to a recent news report on Malaysian National Library (MNL) (2020). Aidatul Hasnida Abdul Rani, senior deputy director of MNL Library System and Network Division, reported that approximately 40,000 of the library's digital books were borrowed in March 2022 alone, compared to an average of about 15,000 during the normal months. Membership registration totaled 22,982 members just during the MCO. She stated that the greatest membership registration occurred at the commencement of the MCO, when 6,069 registrations were made in one day (March 19). Aidatul Hasnida added that while there is a wide variety of reading material available depending on interests and informational needs, during the MCO, e-book borrowing tended to favour fiction-based reading materials. (The Star, 2020)

This study seeks to describe the reading habits and attitudes of Malaysian ESL undergraduates. The findings of this study will shed insight on these pupils' reading habits. Moreover, frequent reading will improve the academic performance of undergraduates.

The purpose of this study is to attempt to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1 : What are the types of English materials do ESL undergraduates read?
- RQ2 : How long do the ESL undergraduates spend their time reading in a day?
- RQ3 : What are the ESL undergraduates' attitudes toward reading English materials?

Methodology

The sample for this descriptive study was chosen by random sampling. The information was collected through a survey. The nature of the data analysis is descriptive. 215 ESL undergraduates from University Malaysia Sabah participated in this study. Due to their Band 1 to Band 3 MUET scores, these respondents are enrolled in university-level proficiency

courses. Among the respondents, 44 students were male (20.5%), while the remaining 171 students were female (79.5%).

Instrument

This study adopted the Smith's Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA) (1991). On a four-point Likert scale, respondents provided their responses (4 = "strongly agree," 1 = "strongly disagree"). Below are the three aspects of reading disposition.

- i. Reading activity and enjoyment (eight items) measured the degree to which the respondent reads for pleasure.
- ii. Anxiety and difficulty (five items) assessed the degree to which a reader experiences challenges or becomes frustrated.
- iii. Modality (two items) examined the respondent's preference for utilising sources other than reading when confronted with a learning problem.

Two questions were asked regarding reading habits:

- a. What are they reading?
- b. How many hours per day do they spend reading English-language materials?

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and statistics that measure the relationship between variables such as t-test. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used for data analysis purposes.

Findings and Discussions

Reading Habit

On the basis of the types of reading materials consumed and the average daily reading time, the findings about reading habits were analysed.

The distribution of newspapers, academic books, novels, websites, journals, magazines, and comic books among respondents is depicted in Figure 1. The overwhelming majority of students utilise websites (24.4 percent). This is followed by novels (15.8%), academic materials (15.1%), journals (12.4%), graphic novels (11.4%), amusement magazines (11.0%), and newspapers (9.9 percent).

According to the data, ESL undergraduates commonly employ websites in addition to textbooks and literature. This may assist to explain why, according to some previous studies, ESL undergraduates only read for academic goals and not for enjoyment or general knowledge. According to the conventional definition of reading, the tendency may have shifted toward a digital reading habit. This is certainly the fundamental reason why so much reading material is chosen from websites.

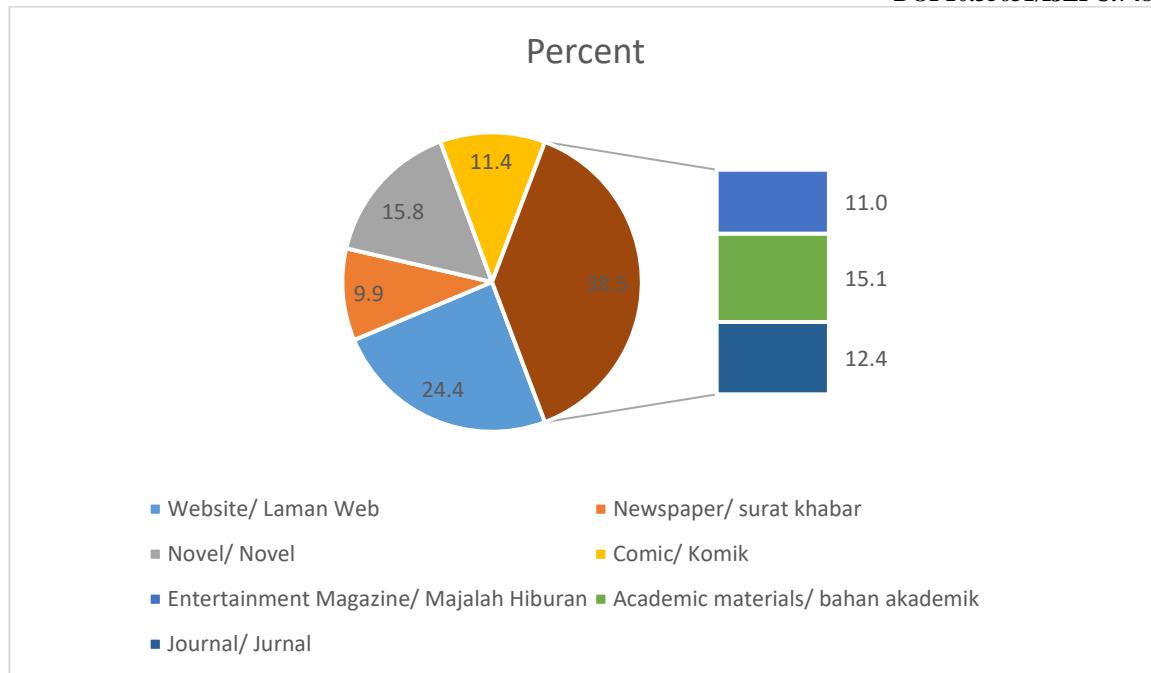


Figure 1: Types of Reading Materials

The hours per day that ESL undergraduates spend reading are depicted in Table 1. According to the statistics, ESL undergraduates spend a great amount of time reading. They read between three and ten hours per week on average. Students majoring in ESL spend seven to nine hours each week reading on average. This finding was partially predicted given the amount of reading necessary for academic performance across all academic pursuits. However, reading time should be focused on academic materials rather than news stories and fiction. Sheorey and Mokhtari (1994) discovered that the average weekly reading time for college students in the United States was 4.75 hours. This result is somewhat better. Consistent with Liu's (2005) observation that individuals read more in the digital age, a considerable amount of time may have been spent reading. This is due to the fact that the internet makes obtaining information easier, faster, and cheaper.

Time spent	No. of students	Percent
1 to 2 hours	93	43.3
Less than 1 hour	49	22.8
2 to 3 hours	39	18.1
3 to 4 hours	18	8.4
More than 4 hours	16	7.4
Grand Total	215	100

Table 1: Time Spent Reading in A Day

Reading Attitude

Reading attitude is a 15-item construct derived from the Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA) (Smith, 1991). The construct was divided into three categories: (i) Reading activity and enjoyment (eight items), (ii) anxiety and difficulty (five items), and (iii) modality (two items).

In Table 2, the descriptions of the three variables are shown. Before the descriptive analysis of the concept, the variables employed in the study were analysed for their reliability. The Cronbach alpha value is 0.72, which is adequate according to Bryman and Craemer's suggestion (2001).

Variables	Items
Reading activity and enjoyment	Reading is one of my favourites activities.
	I read when I have the time to enjoy it.
	I get a lot of enjoyment from reading.
	I spend a lot of my spare time reading.
	When I am at home I read a lot.
	I want to have more books of my own.
	I quickly forget what I have read even if I have just read it.
Anxiety and difficulty	I try very hard, but I just can't read very well.
	I get upset when I think about having to read.
	Encountering unfamiliar words is the hardest part of reading.
	When I read I usually get tired and sleepy.
	I often feel anxious when I have a lot of reading to do.
Modality	I need a lot of help in reading.
	Reading is one of the best ways for me to learn things.
	There are better ways to learn new things than by reading a book.

Table 2: Reading Attitude Variables

For the measurement of reading attitude, the study employed the Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA) from the work of Smith (1991) with three variables and respondents responding on a four-point Likert-type scale (4 = "strongly agree;" 1 = "strongly disagree"). The average score for enjoyment is relatively high (3.55), indicating that the majority of respondents feel that reading is a pleasurable pastime. However, the value of reading fun does not reduce the value of reading anxiety (mean value 3.29). This indicates that respondents concur that reading is challenging and causes reading anxiety. The modality variable has a mean value of 0.80, indicating that respondents do not believe there are alternative ways to acquire new knowledge than reading. With a mean value of 5.53, this suggests that the reading attitude of ESL undergraduates is exceptionally high. The descriptive statistics for the reading attitudes of ESL undergraduates are presented in Table 3.

Variables	<i>n</i>	Mean
Attitude Overall	215	5.53
Reading activity and enjoyment	215	3.55
Anxiety and difficulty	215	3.29
Modality	215	0.80

Table 3 :Descriptive Statistics of Reading Attitude

Conclusion

This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the reading preferences and attitudes of ESL undergraduate students in Malaysia toward English-language reading resources. The respondents for this study were selected from proficiency classes. The findings

indicate that Malaysian ESL undergraduates read websites, novels, and academic materials extensively. In addition, reading has become one of their favourite activities.

According to past surveys, Malaysian ESL undergraduates are believed to spend more time reading than the average adult. As a result of their participation in the academic process, which requires reading, undergraduates are expected to read more. As a result of this involvement, their reading material may have become less fantastical and more academic. On the other hand, the website's usefulness as a reading resource is increasing.

This study's findings should aid future research in related subjects in general and increase comprehension of the phenomenon of reading habits and attitudes in Malaysia in particular. Because this study can be utilised as a case study, the findings should provide a substantial contribution to the technique of future studies conducted with a different population level or demographic scope.

The study's findings should also assist the university administration, notably the computing and library departments, in examining service concerns pertaining to accommodating students' reading and studying habits. Given the substantial volume of reading on websites, for instance, the relevant authorities may choose to consider making more E-books available online or offline. The accessibility of an e-book or online article may encourage undergraduates to read more and for longer periods of time.

This investigation's execution is limited by a number of restrictions. Among these include the short sample size, the exclusive inclusion of ESL undergraduates in proficiency programmes, and the limited number of characteristics investigated. A larger study is necessary, as well as the inclusion of other variables, such as reading exposure, reading material accessibility, and variables directly related to reading in a digital context, for more precise results. Future research should focus more on the actual reading process using computers and wireless communication devices, the extraction of information and knowledge through non-linear reading, and the factors that influence the online reading pattern.

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