

Reading Habits among College Students of Kashmir across Genders

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

Reading has increasingly been the object of empirical and theoretical investigation since decades being studied from different dimension by subject specialists particularly Psychology, Sociology, Education, Media Studies and Library & Information Science. The present study aims to investigate the reading habits of the college students and their gender variability.

Design/Methodology/Approach

The survey method is employed with a questionnaire for data collection following stratified random sampling. The data is analysed using different statistical and quantitative techniques. The findings obtained are correlated with earlier studies. Besides Z-statistic test is applied for the testing of hypothesis.

Findings

The results reveal that the college students have positive attitude towards reading with females being more dominant. The students, irrespective of gender acquire reading habits mostly of their own and prefer to read in morning, at home and in English language. The results discover that male read for information and females for education more. It further reveals that the male students mostly read about Religion, Politics and Literature whereas majority of female prefer Religion, Science & Technology and Literature.

Research limitations/implications

Despite providing meaningful insights on reading habits across genders, the limitation of the study is its sample size and frame focussing college students. This makes it difficult to generalise the results across different sections of the society.

Originality/value

The study confirms that gender is the principle factor affecting reading habits of students and females are more pre-dominant than males in reading culture.

KEYWORDS

Reading Preferences, Reading Choices, Gender inconsistency, College Students, Kashmir

PAPER TYPE Research

INTRODUCTION

“A dumb person becomes a communicator and a lame climbs mountains of knowledge through reading”

Reading is the passion of the greatest personalities of all times since ages which helped to pass on knowledge through generations. Thus reading habit influences in the promotion of

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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 thereby prepares a person for an effective participation in the social, religious, cultural and political life. Reading fires the imagination of the person by adding 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 horizon and for multiplying his opportunities of success. Reading is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth.

The meaning of reading has undergone 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 & 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 as a process of thinking, recalling and relating concepts under the functioning of written words". **Devarajan (1989)** defines 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

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**). Kashmiris are proud of their literary glories of the past. They have produced masterpieces of History, Poetry and Philosophy. *Rajataranini* speaks of many literary personalities who flourished in ancient Kashmir and who thought and wrote with ability on different branches of knowledge. The noteworthy among them are *Vasunanda, Candaka, Matr Gupta* and *Vakpatiraja* (**Roy, 2005**). In modern literary world, the Kashmiri authors have been awarded for different literary works by many national agencies. *Sahitya Akademi* (India) has given awards to twenty five Kashmiri scholars namely *Zinda Koul Masterji, Adul Rehman Rahi, Shafi Shaida* and *Sajood Sailani* etc for their praiseworthy contribution to Literature (**Khan, 2006**). Presently, in spite

of all odds, the scholars of Kashmir Valley achieve the greatest heights in literary world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading has increasingly been the object of empirical and theoretical investigations since past. **Norvell (1950)** conducted the most comprehensive study on the reading interests of high school students over a period of twelve years. His research concentrated on the factors affecting reading choices of adolescents and reports that sex and age are the two principal factors affecting reading habits. **Ross (2002)** identifies females more heavy readers than males and younger rather than older. **Abram (2007)** finds that more women are avid readers than men. **Stenberg (2001)** reports that women read more than men and highly educated people read more than less educated. **Clark & Foster (2005)** reports that girls enjoy reading greater than boys and boys tend to hold more negative attitudes towards reading than girls. **McKenna, Kearn & Ellsworth (1995)** reveal that girls have more favourable attitudes than boys for both recreational and academic reading. **Hassell & Rodge (2007)** identifies that females more likely read for pleasure than males. **Moyes (2000)** finds boys less reading than girls as they spend their leisure time doing things such as sports.

The findings of the study conducted by **Hopper (2005)** in England depict that more girls have read than boys. **Kendrick (1999)** reports that over half of the middle grade boys do not enjoy reading and 86% of them compliant that parents do not read with them. **Blackwood (1991)** indicates that both male and female students are reading about 2.5 hours each week for pleasure during academic session and slightly more during vacations. **Sahai (1970)** conducted a study on newspapers and magazines reading interests of library users in Patna. The results reveal that more than 90% of the users read newspapers and magazines and the percentage of women is higher than the men. **Stuart (1952)** shows that newspaper reading is more widespread and more intensive among men whereas periodical reading is more widespread among women.

PROBLEM

It is clear from the literature review that a gap occurs at different gender level in reading culture, therefore the present study focuses on various indicators of reading habits in the local setting to find out nature of reading culture among biologically different students.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the study is to understand the reading habits of college students across genders particularly identifying respective preferences.

SCOPE

The present study pertains to the students of Kashmir Valley (covering General Science, Social Sciences, Humanities, Business & Commerce and Computer Science faculties) belonging to 20 degree colleges, out of them 11 fall in rural areas.

HYPOTHESIS

The main hypothesis framed for testing is:

H_0 = Male and female college students spend equal time on reading.

H_1 = Female students spend more time on reading than males.

METHODOLOGY

The data is collected through questionnaire method. However, interviews were conducted of some college students, which provided directions in drafting the questionnaire. After that, it was tested with 30 students. The questionnaire was later modified and administered among the sample .sample. The following statistical formula is used to obtain the sample.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 N p q}{N e^2 + Z^2 p q}$$

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 colleges recorded was 54,191, out of them 28,838 belonged to rural colleges and 25,353 to urban areas. Further, to ensure an optimal sample size, the 96.5% confidence level was pre-assigned and a small sampling error (0.04) was fixed.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 N p q}{N e^2 + Z^2 p q}$$

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

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

The sample size of the male and female categories is determined by population allocation method as:

$$n_i = n \frac{N_i}{N}$$

Where,

i = 1, 2, 3, 4.....

n = 676 (total Sample size)

N_i = Total number of students in the category

N = Total population.

Table 1: Sample: Gender wise Distribution

Category	No. of Students (Ni)	Proportion (Ni/N)	Sample Size ni=n(Ni/N)
Male	31,825	31825/54191=0.5873	676(0.5873)= 397
Female	22,366	22366/54191=0.4127	676(0.4127)=279
Total	54191	(100%)	676

RESULTS

Reading Delight

The results reveal that majority students (66.86%) enjoy reading, out of them females (74.20%) enjoy more than males (61.71%) (**Table 2**). **McKenna, Kearn & Ellsworth (1995)** and **Clark & Foster (2005)** also report similar results that female enjoys reading greater than their male counterparts and boys tend to hold more negative attitudes towards reading.

Table 2: Enjoyment of reading (Gender wise)

Enjoyment level	Total n=676	Male n=397	Female n=279
A lot	304 (44.97)	163 (41.06)	14 (50.54)
A bit	148 (21.89)	82 (20.65)	66 (23.66)
Not much	119 (17.60)	77 (19.40)	4 (15.05)
Not at all	105 (15.53)	75 (18.89)	3 (10.75)

Figures in parentheses indicate Percentage

Time Spent

The majority of the students (32.69%) spend 1-2 hours on reading per day. The average time (mean) students spend on reading is estimated 1.90 hours/day. The gender wise data shows that 40.55% males read more than 2 hours in a day compared to 47.32% female students. The average time male and female students spend on daily reading is 1.83 and 2.01 hours respectively (**Table 3**). The *Z-statistic* test is applied for the testing and verification of hypotheses. For a right tailed test, the tabulated value of Z at 5% level of significance ($\alpha=0.05$) is 1.645. The calculated value of Z is 2.022. Since, the calculated value of Z (2.022) is greater than the tabulated value (1.645) at 5% level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Thus, the inference drawn from the testing and verification of hypothesis is that female students spend more time on reading than male counterparts and hence verify the findings of present study. The result obtained is consistent with the studies of **Moyes (2000)**,

Stenberg (2001), Ross (2002), Hopper (2005) and Abram (2007) who also show record the trend that girls read more than boys.

Table 3: Time spent on reading per day (Gender Wise)

Time Spent	Total (t) n=676	Male (m) n=397	Female (f) n= 279
Up to 1 hour	162 (23.96)	101 (25.44)	61 (21.86)
1-2 hours	221 (32.69)	135 (34.01)	86 (30.82)
2-3 hours	183 (27.07)	104 (26.20)	79 (28.32)
3-4 hours	78 (11.54)	44 (11.08)	34 (12.19)
>4 hours	32 (4.73)	13 (3.27)	19 (6.81)
Total Time Spend (hrs)	Σ (t)= 1287	Σ (m)= 725.5	Σ (f)= 561
Average Time Spend (hrs)	Mean= 1.90	Mean= 1.83	Mean= 2.01

Figures in parentheses indicate Percentage

Reading Habit Inculcation

It is clear that students develop reading habits through self efforts and interest (36.24%) followed by instruction or assistance of parents (28.48%) and teachers (13.17%) respectively (**Table 4**). The gender data indicate the same trend with a slight variation. **Clark & Foster (2005)** report that mother helps to develop (83.9%) reading habit in children followed by their teacher (72.2%) and father (65.0%).

Table 4: Mechanism of inculcating reading habit (Gender Wise)

Agent	Total n=676	Male n=397	Female n=279
Parents	193 (28.55)	113 (28.46)	80 (28.67)
Brother/Sister	64 (9.47)	28 (7.05)	36 (12.90)
Teacher	89 (13.17)	58(14.61)	31 (11.11)
Friends	60 (8.88)	39 (9.82)	21 (7.53)
Self	245 (36.24)	145 (36.52)	100 (35.84)
Others	25 (3.70)	14 (3.53)	11 (3.94)

Figures in parentheses indicate Percentage

Preferred Reading Time

It is evident that the students mostly prefer to read in the morning (44.23%) compared to late night (27.81%) and evening (22.04%). The gender analysis shows morning as the favourite time for reading by both categories. However, male students (30.48%) prefer reading during late night than females (24.01%) whereas females (27.60%) prefer to read in evening more than male counterparts (18.14%). (Table 5)

Table 5: Preferred times for reading (Gender wise)

Preferred Time	Total n=676	Male n=397	Female n=297
Morning	299 (44.23)	176 (44.33)	123 (44.09)
Evening	149 (22.04)	72 (18.14)	77 (27.60)
Afternoon	40 (5.92)	28 (7.05)	12 (4.30)
Late night	18 (27.81)	121 (30.48)	67 (24.01)

Figures in parentheses indicate Percentage

Favourite Reading Place

The home forms the most preferable place for reading by majority of students (75.44%) followed by library (10.95%) and park/field (8.14%) (Table 6). **Majid & Tan (2007)** also disclose that most of children (64%) in Singapore prefer to read at home. The trend continues when the data is categorised on the basis of gender with slight variation as females (80.29%) prefer to read in home more than male students (72.04%) whereas males prefer to read in library and park/field more than females.

Table 6: Favourite Location for reading (Gender wise)

Favourite Location	Total N=676	Male n=397	Female n=297
Library	74 (10.95)	47 (11.84)	27 (9.68)
Home	510 (75.44)	286 (72.04)	224 (80.29)
Park/Field	55 (8.14)	39 (9.82)	16 (5.73)
Other place	37 (5.47)	25 (6.30)	12 (4.30)

Figures in parentheses indicate Percentage

Preferred Language

Majority of students prefer English language (71.75%) followed by Urdu (22.93%) and only a small number (5.32%) prefer to read in other languages like Persian, Hindi, Panjabi and Kashmiri respectively. The gender analysis shows that male students read more than females in English language (73.04% versus 69.89%) whereas females read more than males in Urdu (24.73% versus 21.66%) (**Table 7**).

Table 7: Preferred language of reading (Gender wise)

Preferred Language	Total N=676	Male n=397	Female n=279
English	485 (71.75)	290(73.05)	195 (69.89)
Urdu	155 (22.93)	86(21.66)	69 (24.73)
Other	36 (5.33)	21(5.29)	15 (5.38)

Figures in parentheses indicate Percentage

Reading Purpose

Education remains the key factor for reading (43.49%) followed by information seeking (40.23%) and recreation (11.39%) (**Table 8**). **Cabral & Tavares (2002)** reflect a reverse trend that students read for academic purpose (97.8%) almost as much as they use reading as a hobby (97.2%).

Igun & Adogbeji (2007) also shows the reverse trend reporting 61.5% 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 gender wise data reveals that males mostly read for information (42.57%) and females for education (47.67%). The data further indicates that male students read more for recreation (12.09%) as compared to females (10.39%). The findings of **Hassell & Rodge (2007)** show the reverse trend and identify females more likely read for pleasure than males (78% versus 64%).

Table 8: Primary purpose of reading (Gender wise)

Primary purpose	Total N= 676	Male n=397	Female n=279
Education	294 (43.49)	161 (40.55)	133 (47.67)
Information	272 (40.24)	169 (42.57)	103 (36.92)
Recreation	77 (11.39)	48 (12.09)	29 (10.39)
Other	33 (4.88)	19 (4.79)	14 (5.02)

Figures in parentheses indicate Percentage

Subject of Interest

The subject interest among students is mostly to read about Religion (28.85%) followed by Science & Technology (18.93%), Literature (18.34%) and Politics (12.87%). The national survey of Pakistan by **Gilani Research Foundation (2009)** on reading habits also reports that more than 25% of Pakistanis have liking to read informative religious books. But **Devarajan (1989)** reveals that the majority of students are interested in reading Literature (51.96%) followed by Science (34.66%). However, comparing the two studies, it is evident that the two subjects among the top three in both the studies are Science and Literature although in the present study of Religion is indicated as the leading choice among students. The classification of data on the basis of gender reveals that the male students mainly read about Religion (25.44%), Politics (17.38%) and Literature (16.62%) whereas 33.69% of the females read religious literature followed by Science & Technology (22.58%) and Literature (20.78%). The findings further disclose that female students read more about religion (33.69% versus 25.44%) than males and the male students read more on Politics than female counterparts (17.38% versus 6.45%). A study in West by **Scales and Rhee (1987)** found that more females than males like to read about religion especially Bible.

Table 9: Subject of interest (Gender wise)

Subject of Interest	Total n= 676	Male n= 397	Female n=279
Literature	124 (18.34)	66 (16.62)	58 (20.79)
Politics	87 (12.87)	69 (17.38)	18 (6.45)
Religion	195 (28.85)	101 (25.44)	94 (33.69)
Science & Technology	128 (18.93)	65(16.37)	63 (22.58)
Games & Sports	52 (7.69)	37 (9.32)	15 (5.38)
Business	55 (8.14)	41 (10.33)	14 (5.02)
Others	35 (5.18)	18 (4.53)	17/279 (6.09)

Figures in parentheses indicate Percentage

DISCUSSION

The findings show that females enjoy reading more than males and spend more time on reading than male counterparts. The variation may be for various factors. The prominent being that female students hardly take part in outdoor activities like games and spend most of their time indoors in culturally different Kashmir. In contrast, males spend more time on outdoor activities like playing games, attending market work etc. The male students should reframe their time management schedule to justify their daily activities so that their reading and knowledge acquiring pattern does not disturb. They need to evolve up with an academic and non-academic reading platform without any fall. The study confirms that the parents and teachers are the most active players in developing the reading habits among students. Librarians must join hands to develop reading culture in children. The role of librarians cannot be ignored in building a healthy tradition for reading culture. They have to create the reading environment in which all components of reading culture can 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. They should serve as a connecting link between students and reading material. They must organise book day, librarians' day, teachers' day, library week, book week and writers' day in libraries to develop reading culture among students.

The morning and the late night is the preferred reading time of students. Reading not only needs silence but calm and quite atmosphere as well, it is possibly the basic reason that the students mostly prefer to read in the morning and late night. The students, irrespective of gender differences, don't have healthy habits 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. Moreover, the librarians must develop a noise free atmosphere in libraries to attract more students towards reading during day time.

The students of both the categories do not have positive attitudes towards recreational reading as majority of students read for education. This could be possibly due to 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 reading can be established through leisure reading. The male and female students read about different branches of knowledge like Religion, Science & Technology, Politics and Literature with slight variations. In comparison, female students read more about Literature than males whereas males read more about Politics than females. The factors responsible for different reading choices are that male students are more actively involved in Politics of Kashmir than female counterparts. The students also show interest in other subjects, so it is duty of the *Document/Book Selection Committee* to build a balanced collection of quality material in libraries to satisfy the reading needs of all.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that sex is the principle factor affecting reading habits of students as reading tastes and preferences between genders differ quite drastically. In comparison, females proved to be more dominant than males in reading culture.

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