



**Reading Habits Among Students and Their Effect on their Academic Performance:
A Study of Students of a Public School in Al Ain City in the UAE**

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore the reading habits among students and their effects on their academic performance. The study was conducted in a school in a remote area in Al Ain city, in the UAE. The study used the qualitative approach and data was collected. Interviews with six students were used to present the results of findings. The findings showed that most of the interviewees acknowledged the importance of reading, they read scientific books as well as stories and novels. Only one student said that he read for the sake of passing examination. The study assured that the reading habit has a significant influence on academic performance. There is also a relationship between the reading habit and the academic performance of students. The study recommended that students should be encouraged by their teachers to use the library for reading and to assign extra reading for students.

ملخص البحث

هدفت الدراسة إلى استكشاف عادات القراءة لدى الطلاب وتأثيرها على أداؤهم الأكاديمي. أجريت الدراسة في مدرسة حكومية في مدينة العين بدولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. ولقد استخدمت الدراسة المنهج النوعي وتم جمع البيانات. وتم أيضاً استخدام المقابلات مع ستة طلاب لعرض نتائج الدراسة، وقد أظهرت النتائج أن معظم المستجوبين أقرروا بأهمية القراءة وقراءة الكتب العلمية والقصص والروايات. هنالك طالب واحد فقط ذكر بأنه قرأ من أجل اجتياز الامتحان. وكذلك أكدت الدراسة أن لعادات القراءة تأثير كبير على الأداء الأكاديمي للطلاب، كما توجد علاقة وثيقة ما بين عادة القراءة والأداء الأكاديمي للطلاب. أيضاً أوصت الدراسة بضرورة تشجيع المعلمين لطلابهم على استخدام المكتبة للقراءة وتخصيص قراءة إضافية للطلاب.

Keywords: Reading Habit, Academic Performance, Library, Students, Extra Reading

Introduction

Reading habits form a pattern of study which tends to be consistent on the part of students in order to understand the school subjects and pass examinations. Reading habits can help to determine the academic achievement of students. Reading and academic achievement are interconnected, and they influence each other. Because students usually come from different environments, they differ in their patterns of reading habits. For example, we can find students who have good reading habits, while others have poor reading habits. Academic achievement means how much knowledge the person has acquired from school (Bashir & Mattoo, 2012).

For a creative education, students need to develop good reading habits. A reading habit means that students read regularly especially in their free time. Reading can lead to a better understanding of one's own experiences and it can be an exciting journey to self-discovery. "Reading habit is best formed at a young age in school, but once it is formed it can last for all one's lifetime (Green, 2001).

Reading and academic achievement are interrelated. If a student has good reading habits he/she can perform better whether in school subjects or in any other situations. It is the reading habits which can help the student to obtain meaningful and useful knowledge. Good reading habits can help students to succeed and excel in life (Bashir & Mattoo, 2012).

According to Palani (2012), a reading habit is a fundamental aspect for creating a literate society. It helps to shape the personality of the individual and develop logical reasoning, thinking skill and critical thinking. Palani (2012) thinks that effective reading is important for effective learning and because reading is interrelated with academic achievement we can say that educational success requires effective reading habits. Active reading habits can help students to develop their comprehension skills which can lead to improving the students' academic achievement.

A person might wonder and say that before the invention of the television, people found enough time to read. They used to spend their free time in reading books, stories, magazines and newspapers. There are many schools and teachers who assign extra reading for their students. Palani (2012) added that, nowadays, the reading habit has lost its importance and influence

because both young and old people are glued to the television or the other means of entertainment. The trend now is to encourage students to read their textbooks to pass their exams and that's all the interest of the educational system.

Statement of the Problem

The problem that most students have is the lack of good reading habits, and this contributes significantly to their poor performance in examinations. For an outstanding performance, students need to form good reading and study habits. Recently, mass media have taken people away from reading. They do not show any interest in reading books; magazines, journals, or other literature types, (Palani, 2012). It might be said that the modest results of examinations are due to the poor reading habits among the majority of students.

In addition, the new technological gadgets such as smart phones, tablets and many other innovations have contributed to the decline of the reading habit among students. Nowadays, many students prefer to watch movies on TV, listening to audio-CDs, watching video-CDs, among others (Issa, 2012). Equally, parents and teachers complain that the new generation of students do not exert any effort to develop any good reading habits. Their reading is bad, and their writing is even worse. The new inventions have captured their interest and they neglected reading. They are really gadget-obsessed individuals.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the research paper is to measure the reading habits of students and how they affect their academic performance. The specific objectives are as follows:

- I. To explore the reading habits among students.
- II. To examine the effect of reading habits on students' academic performance.
- III. To explore why students engage in reading.
- IV. To explore the relationship between reading habits and academic achievement.

Research questions

The objectives were achieved based on finding answers to the following research questions:

1. What reading habits are there among students?
2. Do reading habits have any impact on students' academic performance?
3. Why do students engage in reading?

4. Is there any relationship between reading habits and students' academic achievement?

Literature Review

Reading according to Dadzie is the ability to read words in a text or a document and understand them and then benefit from the knowledge acquired for personal growth (Dadzie, 2008). This suggests making meaning out of the information either in the life of the person. People usually read for different reasons, for instance, they read for learning new information, pleasure and for attaining knowledge.

Palani believes that reading is the process of identifying symbols and connecting suitable meaning with them. It requires a kind of identification and comprehension. Indeed, comprehension skills help the student to understand the meaning of new vocabulary in context and in isolation (Palani, 2012). He also thinks that reading is a method of thinking, judging, imagining, reasoning, evaluating and problem solving.

Reading is a fundamental means for knowledge transfer and the habit of reading is an academic activity that boosts skills in reading strategies. If a student wants to know about the world that he lives in, he can do so through reading books, magazines, newspapers and other means of information and knowledge. Once the student has been taught to read and has developed the desire to read books, he can discover the treasure of human experiences and knowledge. Students who miss the chance of reading books in their early life, they will find it hard to acquire good reading habits in their later life (Deavers, 2000). Reading is an intellectual action that needs to be formed as a habit since childhood. Reading habits are crucial in enabling a person to achieve practical efficiency. "Laws die but books never." Books are really the most practical means through which knowledge can be transmitted from one generation to another (Issa et al, 2012).

Singh (2011) examined the academic achievement and study habits of high school students. The study was carried out on 100 high school students randomly from two high schools. The result shows that girls and boys differ significantly in their study habits and academic achievement.

Bhan and Gupta (2010), however, examined study habits and academic achievement among students who belonged to scheduled caste and non-scheduled caste group. The results showed that gender does not have an important effect on the study habits and academic achievement of students.

If this activity is done regularly, automatically, a reading habit can be achieved. Furthermore, Tampubolon (1990:41) confirms that in building the habit of reading, the person needs longer time because the interest and motivation have role in it.

In addition, Reid (2007:2) announces that habits are emotional regulators or comforters. The one's thinking and behavior follow the grooves in his/her minds. So, it can be stated that the reading habit is a behavior to read which is done regularly to understand information and get entertainment from the written material. It can be said that reading can be obtained from fiction, non-fiction, books, magazines, and newspapers. Reading is so useful for getting knowledge and this can help students to better their academic achievement.

Higginbotham (1999), examined the reading interests of middle school students in a metropolitan, public school located in a southeastern state Atlanta, Georgia. The result of that study revealed differences in interest by gender, which are consistent with many society's stereotypes. Females reported a stronger interest in romance, friendship, animal stories, adventure and historical fiction, while males showed stronger preference for sports and science. Furthermore, males preferred non-fiction more than the females.

Gallo (2007) said "Books yield their best to you, if you read them at the age at which each particular masterpiece can ideally be chewed and digested". In fact, there is little knowledge about students' daily readings and how these readings affect their academic achievement. The daily readings of students can include reading for different purposes such as reading for pleasure or for information (Issa. et al, 2012). Many students believe that reading becomes an underlying element of studying, and much information learned through studying is primarily attained through reading. Therefore, students' everyday readings may influence their studying skills and as a result their academic performance. Mostly, there is a strong link between the good study habits that the students can develop and their academic performance and achievement, (Issa et al, 2012).

Guthrie, Benneth & McGough, (2007) believe that reading is the act of getting meaning from printed or written words. Reading is the basis for learning and it is the most influential skill in individuals' everyday life. (Issa et al 2012) add that reading is mostly associated with books as if written words provide form a complete picture of the act of reading. It means that through reading, a person can construct knowledge, enjoy stories and discover what the others disbelieve or believe in. The person can develop ideas or beliefs of his or her own. Therefore, reading provides us with the key to all types of information that are primary for our day-to-day survival and growth.

If a person practices reading regularly without thinking of it, then we can say that his reading habit has been formed. This happens because the habit is formed unconsciously, and he does it repeatedly until it becomes part of his daily routine. In fact, many students do not fall in the category of those with good reading habits and their poor reading habits might be considered responsible for their poor performance in examinations at school (Issa et al, 2012).

Perhaps, because of the absence of good reading habits, students' academic performance in their examinations has been regarded as a big source of worry and concern for all stakeholders in the educational system (Issa et al, 2012). Having useless programmes in schools today has not supported the process of developing good reading practices. Therefore, the enthusiasm to engage students in reading practices voluntarily, pleasurably and extensively is approximately absent among the majority of students in the schooling system today (Issa et al, 2012).

The Vygotskyian perspective stated that children learn skills through adult-child interaction (Senechal and Cornell 1993). Vygotsky stressed the significant influence of parents in reading for their children. Cook-Cottone (2004), Dodici and Pertson (2003) and Rashid (2005) stated that children take their reading seriously when they are motivated and praised for reading well at home. According to Smith et al. (2007), parental involvement in instilling the habit of reading in their children both at home and at school is crucial. Parental involvement in the reading of their children has positive results at schools (Fan and Chen 2001; Dearing et al. 2006). When parents are involved, they encourage and motivate their children to work harder, the child gets motivated and he works hard and achieve academically (Melhuish et al. 2001).

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative approach and data was collected. This research has four questions:

1. What reading habits are there among students?
2. Do reading habits have any impact on students' academic performance?
3. Why do students engage in reading?
4. Is there any relationship between reading habits and students' academic achievement?

This research design helps answer the two main questions of the study. For example, the interviews help to clarify their reading habits and their effect on their academic performance and provide suggestions to improve these habits in the future. Also, using direct observation can help in providing realistic information about the participants reading habits.

Moreover, the qualitative approach was selected because it enables the researcher to describe the lived experiences of reading habits for several students.

Sampling

Population

The target population of this study was students in a public school in a city, in the UAE. The target school has the three cycles: 1, 2 and 3.

Population of Students: 300 students

Sample

The population of the students was (300). The actual sample of students was (7) students which was a little bit more than (1%). The researchers interviewed the seven students. The criteria for selecting the students were availability and accessibility. Therefore, this was considered a convenient sample.

Due to the limited number of participants, the results of the focus group do not allow a generalization, but they provide interesting insights into the opinions and attitudes of students toward the habit of buying, borrowing, and reading books.

Instruments

This study used a qualitative method research design. Therefore, a semi-structured interview was used to collect data and answer the research questions. Interviews helped to explore and interpret the issue of reading habits among students and their effect on academic performance in depth and answered the questions of the study. In order to conduct the interview, the researcher asked some students to volunteer. Seven students responded, and they were interviewed. The participants were informed that their personal information will not be mentioned in the study, and the researchers will follow the same confidentiality processes in dealing with the data. To keep their personalities anonymous, the students were represented by (S.1 & S.2 & S.3 & S.4 & S.5 & S.6 & S.7). Furthermore, the researcher used the direct observation method where he used to observe the students and register notes about their frequent visits the school library and their readings in general.

Validity

A review of related literature provided a base to write the interview questions, as a result, cross-referencing with literature was the first step to guarantee validity. Actually, the information was supported by evidence and statements made by famous researchers in the field such as Palani, Vygotsky and many others. After having the first interview, a team of two teacher from the school answered this version of the interview to insure face validity. The interview questions were adjusted according to their feedback when there was an agreement of (85%) or more on the comments. Finally, an AQIO volunteered to review the interview questions for the last time before conducting it.

Data Analysis

For qualitative data analysis, Miles and Huberman (2004) four steps were used. These included skimming reading data to get a general sense of the issues. A careful reading and coding were the second step. The codes were then organized into categories and themes. This step importantly minimized the number of codes. For each theme, the researcher looked at raw data or "quotes" to support the analysis. Finally, the researcher wrote a narrative about each theme given attention to drawing conclusion for each theme and for all the themes in this part.

Reading Habits among Students and its Effect on Academic Performance:

Survey method with the use of questionnaire was used for data collection. Copies of questionnaire were administered on students of Koforidua Polytechnic during lecture hours with the assistance of trained research personnel during the second semesters of the 2013/2014 academic year. Twenty percent (20%) of the entire Koforidua Polytechnic student population of 5261 was sampled for the study through systematic simple random sampling technique. The sample size is supported by Babbie, (2005). He believed for a population of 1000 and above, a sample size of 10 -20% is acceptable. To improve the Reliability and validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on similar but smaller sample group from neighbouring Accra Polytechnic during the second semester of the 2013/2014 academic year. Observed errors, corrections and re-wordings discovered were affected and incorporated into the main instrument

From the total of one thousand and fifty-two copies of questionnaire distributed, one thousand copies were filled and returned, representing a response rate of 95.0%.

Table 1: Population of study

Schools	Total number	Sample Size	No Retrieved Per School	Percentage Retrieved Per Sch.
SBMS	4284	856	832	83.2
SAST	787	157	145	14.5
SOE	190	38	23	2.3
Total	5261	1052	1000	100

Field Data, 2013

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

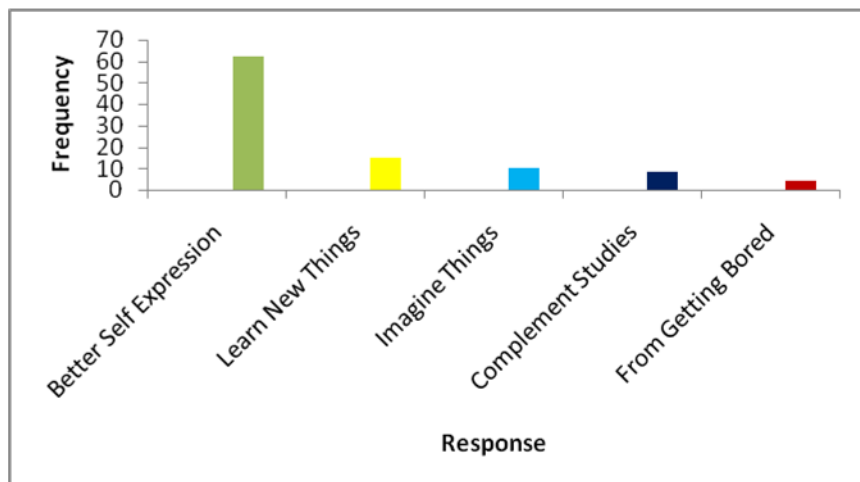


Figure 1: Importance of Reading Novel or Fiction

From Figure 1 out of the total respondents of 1000, 62.5% indicated better self-expression as the importance of reading novel or fiction, 14.9% indicated to learn new things, 10.1% expressed that it is for imagination of things, 8.5% were of the view, it complements their studies, 4.0% were also of the opinion that it keeps them from getting bored. The indication was that most of the respondents had the view that reading a novel or fiction enables them to express themselves well. This finding concurs with that of Palani (2012), who argues that reading habit is an essential and important aspect of creating the literate society, because it shapes the personality of an individual and helps him/her to develop the proper thinking methods and create new ideas. This finding also agrees with the assertion of Issa et al (2012) that there is no doubt that through reading, the individual is able to build or fix things, enjoy stories, discover what others believe and develop ideas or beliefs of their own and also enables them find the key to all forms of information necessary for the day-to-day survival and growth of the individual in the society, be it academic or socio-cultural.

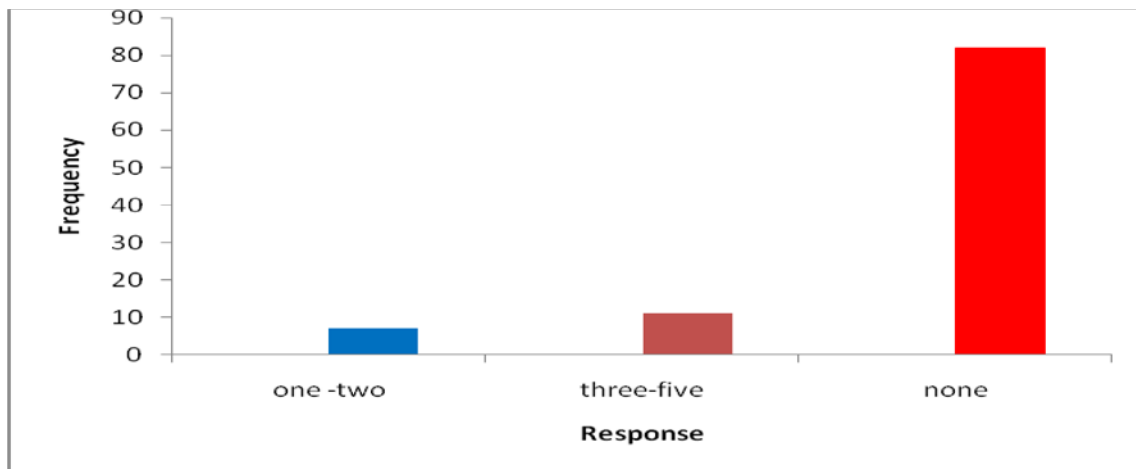


Figure 2: Number of Novels or Fiction Read

As shown in the Figure 2, 7.0% of the respondents indicated they read one to two novels or fiction books during the academic year, while, 11.1% indicated they read three to five novels or fiction materials in the academic year. On the other hand, 81.9 % of the respondents indicated they had neither read any fiction nor novels within the same period. The finding suggested that a high percentage of the respondents neither read novels nor fiction in the last academic year. The study confirms Palani (2012) assertion that due to the influence of the mass media, People do not show much interest in reading books, magazines and Journals among others.

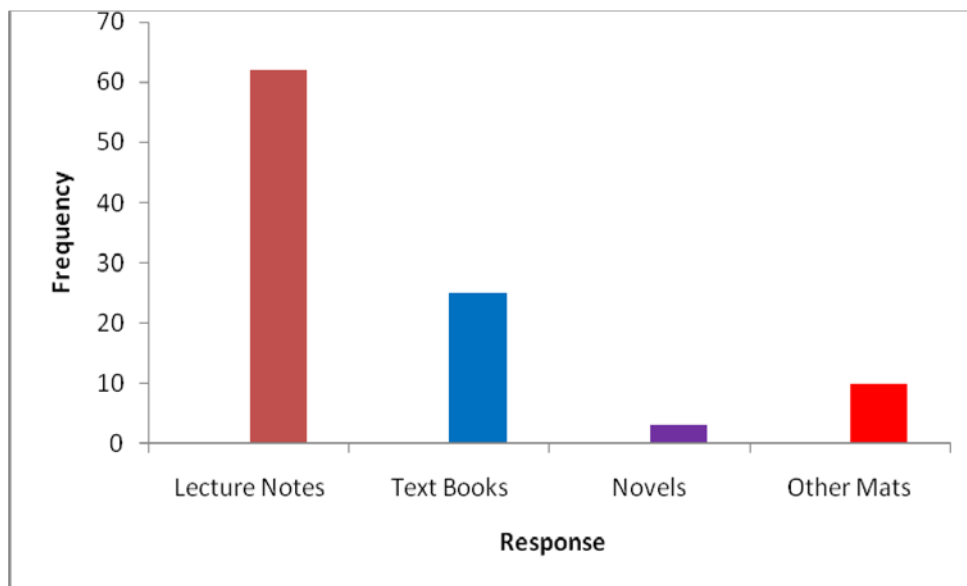


Figure 3: Materials Read at Library

From Figure 3, out of the total respondents of 1000, 62.0 % were of the opinion that they read lecture notes when they visit the library facility, 25.0% indicated they read textbooks, 3.0% said they read novels, and 10.0% expressed that they read other materials when they visited the library. The deduction was that most of the respondents read lecture notes when they visited the library. This finding is in contrast to that of Ogbodo (2010) that students should be encouraged to read magazines instead of reading lecture notes and textbooks all the time. This is because students, who read magazines at intervals learn to relax, cool their brain and avoid mental fatigue.

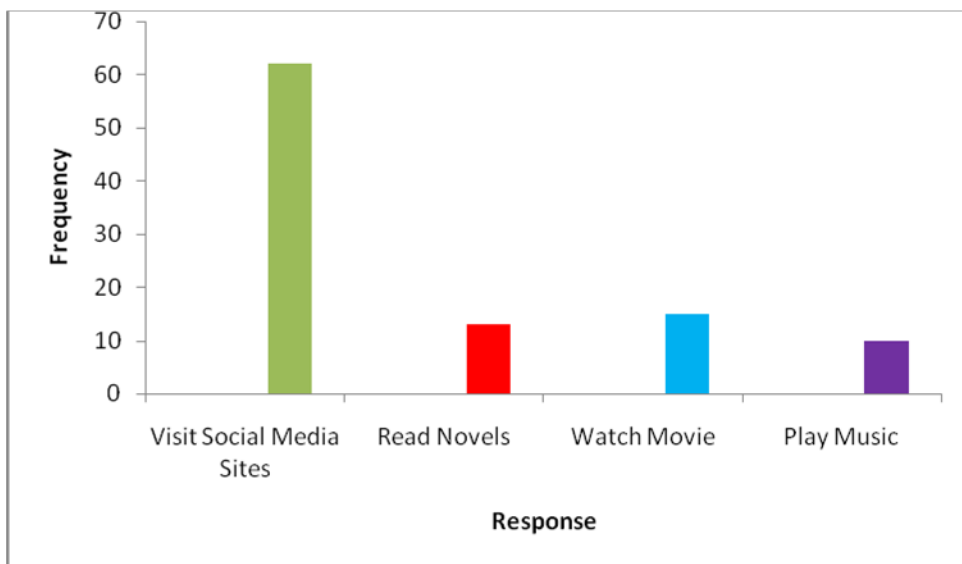


Figure 4: Leisure Time

Responding to the question on leisure time, 62.0% of the respondents indicated “visit social media sites”, 13.0 % respondents indicated they read novel, and 15.0% of the respondents watch movie, while 10.0% of the respondents indicated that they play music during their leisure time. The findings suggest that majority of the respondents use their leisure time to visit social media sites in preference to reading. A follow up question to find out whether the respondents were aware of novels or fictions available in the library revealed that 42.8% of the respondents were aware, as against 46.8% who were not aware, but 10.4% of the respondents on the other hand said they could not recollect any information about the existence of novels or fiction in the library. The latter category of students may be those that do not visit the library or attend orientation. However, the library should attempt to make sure that students

are aware of the holdings of the library by giving them continuous publicity on the holdings of the library.

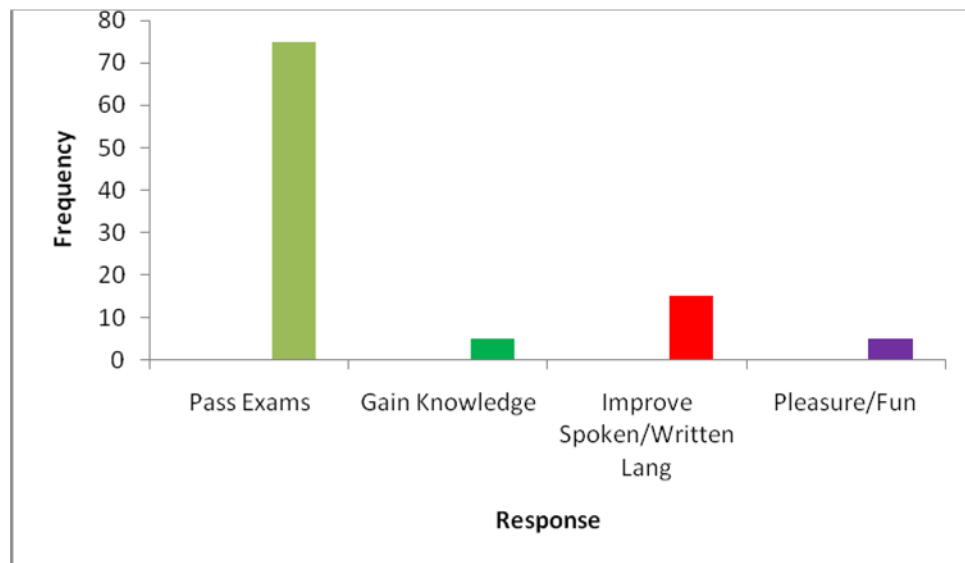


Figure 5: Engagement in Reading

From Figure 5, out of the total respondents of 1000, 75.0% were of the view that they only read to pass examination and when quizzed on why they engaged in reading, 5.0 % indicated that they read to gain knowledge, 15.0% were of the opinion that reading helps improve spoken and written English, while 5.0 % indicated they did that for pleasure and fun. The inference was that most of the respondents engaged in reading mainly to pass their exams. This revelation confirms the findings in Figure 3 where majority of the respondents read lecture notes when they visit the library.

This implies that such students do not enjoy reading voluntarily, a situation that can have a negative influence on their academic performance. Again, many students may not be able to broaden their minds because reading books, fiction and journals broaden individuals' perception and knowledge.

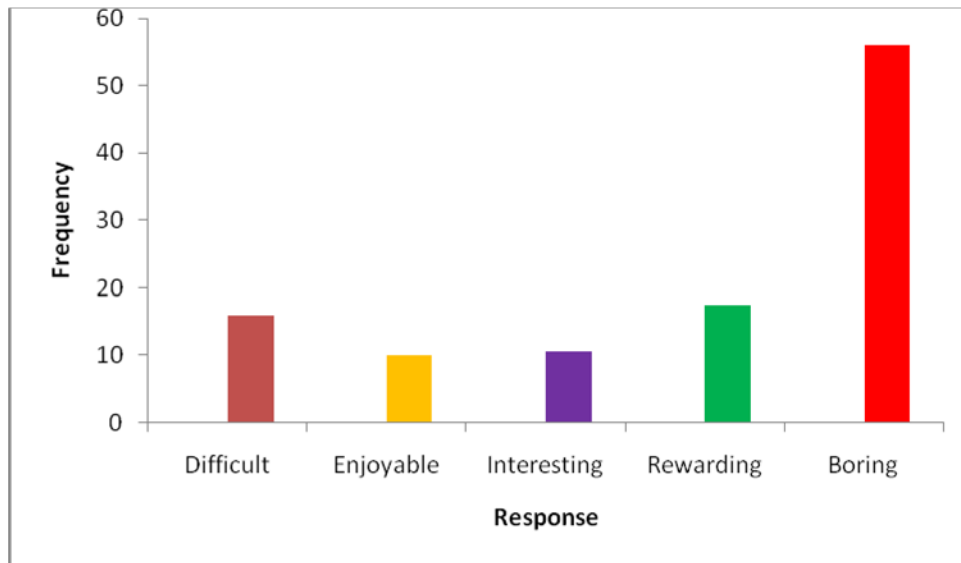


Figure 6: Perception about Reading

When a total of 1000 respondents were asked about their perception on reading, 10.9% were of the view that reading is difficult, 10.1% were of the belief that it is enjoyable, 10.5% were of the opinion that it is interesting, 12.5% indicated it is rewarding but 56.0% indicated reading is boring. The deduction was that most of the respondents consider reading as a boring activity. This may confirm the revelation in Figure 2 where 81.9% of the respondents had not even read a novel within the two preceding semesters.

The study confirms (Deavers 2000) assertion that once the child has been taught to read and has developed the love for books, he can explore for himself the wealth of human experiences and knowledge through reading. Thus, children who miss the opportunity of getting in touch with books in their early stages in life, find it hard to acquire good reading habits in their later years. The above table indicates that respondents have not developed love for reading and explains why reading is boring to them.

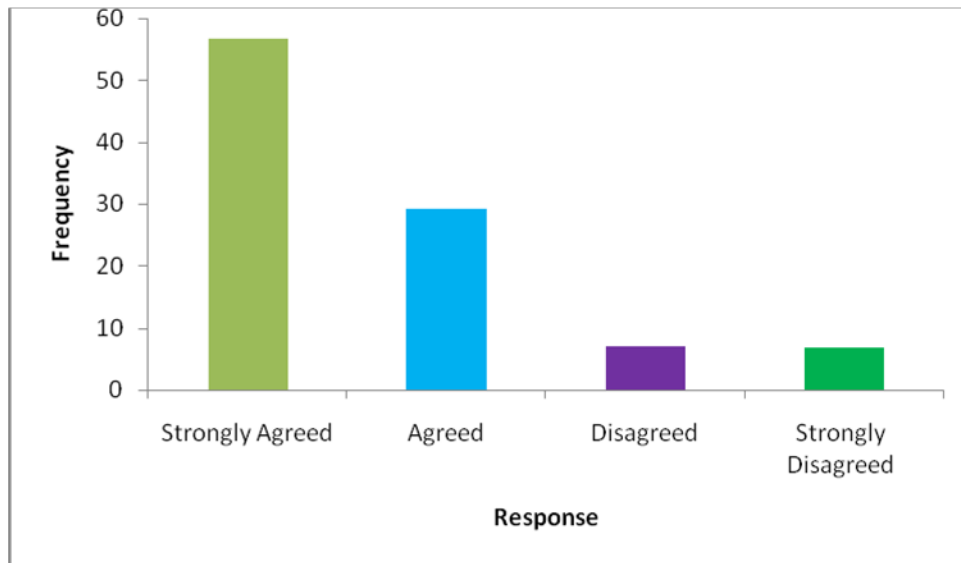


Figure 7: Influence of Reading on Academic Performance

From Figure 7, out of the total respondents of 1000, 56.7% indicated they strongly agreed that reading had an influence on academic performance, 29.3% agreed, 7.1% disagreed, while 6.9% strongly disagreed that reading had influence on academic performance. The inference was that most 86.0% of the respondents at least agreed that reading had influence on academic performance of students. To confirm the information obtained, a follow up question was asked, whether good reading habits had a relationship with academic performance, 55.4% of the respondents said ‘yes’ but 35.2% said ‘no’ as against 9.4% who were uncertain whether there was any link between good reading habits and academic performance. From the study, the majority response indicated that students with good reading habits are able to understand questions easily and better express themselves as opposed to those who do not have good reading habits or did no reading at all. This finding agrees with Issa et al (2012) that engaging in reading continuously considerably influences ones studying skills and subsequent academic performance.

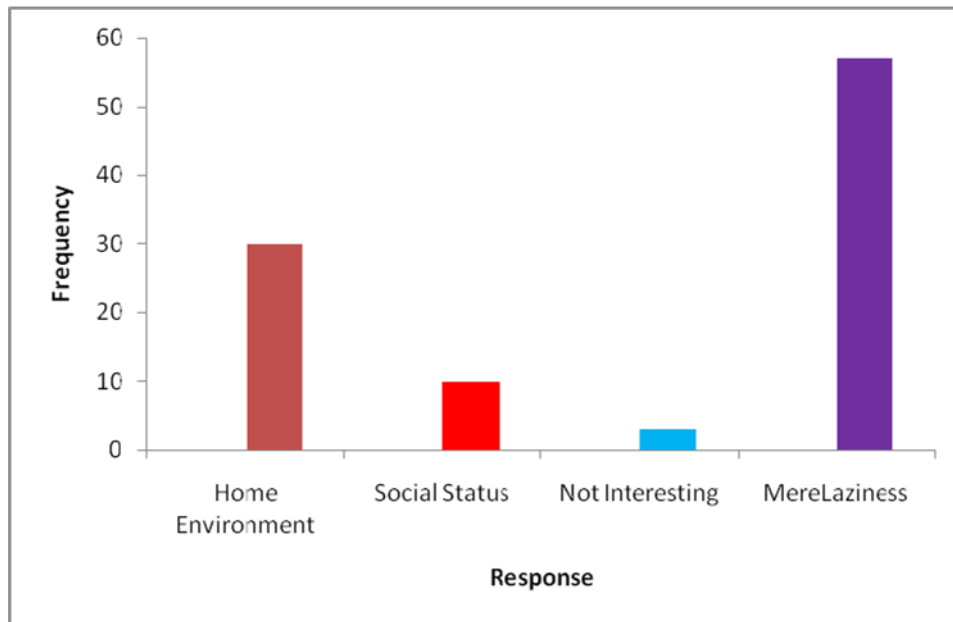


Figure 8: Hindrance to Reading Habits

When respondents were asked whether there was any hindrance to reading habits, 30.0% indicated home environment, 10.0% indicated social status of parents, 3.0% expressed that they are not interested in reading while 57.0% indicated that the hindrance to reading was mere laziness. The study indicated the need for parents to encourage their children to develop the habit of reading from infancy so that it will be a part and parcel of them. Thus, when they grow up, they will not depart from it.

Results of the Study

A qualitative study was conducted by the researcher (2020) to discover the reading habits among students and their effect on academic performance in a public school in a city, in the UAE. The data of the study was gathered from seven students through a series of in-depth interviews and structured observations at the selected school. Also, direct observation was used to strengthen the research results where the researcher could observe participants and register significant notes about their reading habits.

The results of this qualitative study showed that students could establish good reading habits with the passage of time. They said the encouragement of their parents as well as their teachers play a vivid role in instilling such reading habits in them. They also agreed that good reading

habits affect their academic performance. The participants said that their reading habits widened the horizon of their knowledge and helped to improve their academic performance and necessarily achievement. They also said that their performance improved in all subjects and they score higher as a result of establishing effective reading habits.

Discussion:

The study examined the reading habits among students in a public school in a city, in the UAE. In addition, he was keen to know the extent to which reading habits help students to raise their academic achievement. The researcher's assumptions were that:

1. Students read different kinds of books in their spare time on a regular basis.
2. The habit of reading that the students have already settled helps them in improving their academic achievement.

The results showed that good study habits can help students achieve better at school in the different subjects as reading books and magazine widens the horizon of the reader's knowledge and makes him feel more confident of his knowledge.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- A) Faculty staff should encourage students to visit the library and read not only lecture notes, but novels and fiction as well, and further borrow some from the library. The onus therefore lies with the library to always stock its house with novels and fiction.
- B) It is further recommended that course like communication skills should be made mandatory for all first-year students to read at least two novels or fiction in each semester and, non-scoring courses for all level 200 and 300 students for a semester but students need to pass that course before he or she can graduate. This will go a long way to inculcate reading habits into the students.
- C) It is becoming quite a major issue in many academic institutions that students tend to depend on lecture notes rather than visiting the library for information. As a result, management of academic institutions should caution faculty staff to prepare only handout for students and they will complement it by further research in the library.

- D) Again, it is recommended that faculty staff should engage students in several assignments and presentations, and these should form a greater part of the assessment process of students. Currently, examination takes 70% and assignments take only 30%. When this trend is reversed, it will help students to acquire more skills in searching for information than adopting the “chew and pour” syndrome.
- E) Finally, it is recommended that parents should help their children cultivate the reading skills when they are young, so that it becomes part and parcel of their life. Today, there are many community libraries where children can be encouraged to go and read novels and fiction. When this is done, it will help them express themselves well and write good English which will eventually lead to better academic performance soon.

Conclusion

The study revealed that most of the respondents acknowledged the importance of reading and stated that reading helped them to express themselves better. However, the study also showed that 81.9% had not read a novel or fiction within the two preceding semesters and only 18% mentioned that they had read a novel or fiction within the same period. The study further confirmed that 75.0% respondents were engaged in reading just to pass their examinations. It was also asserted in the study that 62.0% of the participants visited the library to read lecture notes, 25.0% to read textbooks and only 3.0% visited the library to read novels or scientific fiction books. The study also revealed that most of the participants believed that reading habits had an effect on their academic performance and that there was a direct relationship between reading habits and academic performance. Furthermore, the study showed that laziness is one of the basic hindrances to reading among the participants.

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