

EXPLORING READING HABITS AND ATTITUDES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Reading in the 21st century is not limited to print based as new information and communication technology (ICT) media with the advancement of electronic gadgets offering numerous accessible online in electronic format. Therefore, reading habits have changed. This study explores reading habits and attitudes among undergraduate students at public universities in south Malaysia. 130 respondents were chosen across different faculties majoring in Business Management, Information Management, Computer Science and Mathematics, Accountancy, and Engineering. The survey was designed in the form of a structured questionnaire and adapted from the Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA). Findings stated that students' reading habits on the spending of reading time is 1-2 hours per day and students are most likely to choose a book as their main reading, however, novels/comics and social media are included as the top three reading materials. It also shows students have a positive reading attitude with a mean score above 3.00, as they read to obtain the latest news and agree reading is the best to learn new things despite having reading anxiety. For the peer influence, 60 % agreed they exchange material with peers and the majority find the library as a place to complete assignments rather than use it as a place for leisurely reading.

Keywords: Reading Behavior, Reading Habits, Reading Attitude, Reading, Reading Culture

Introduction

Reading is an ability and a crucial aspect of literacy skills, and it serves as a foundational skill that is necessary for individuals to maintain competence in their daily lives (Samsuddin et al., 2021). Furthermore, reading is essential for an individual to enrich knowledge as it is a basic skill that helps people learn new things, increase their language, improve their critical thinking skills, and grow intellectually. Alsaeedi (2021) asserts that reading is the most effective method for an individual to strengthen their critical thinking skills, acquire new and diverse perspectives, understand themselves and the world, and evaluate future events and circumstances. Reading not only encompasses decoding words but also

involves understanding and interpreting the information conveyed in the text (AlMutuari,2018). Thus, individuals are expected to not only be able to read but also to be able to talk and write about what they've read (Kueng, 2022). Additionally, reading can foster individuals' creativity and imagination and enable them to delve into many fictitious realms and broaden their perspectives, which also leads to intellectual and emotional growth (Baba&Affendi,2021). Cultivating reading abilities is vital to fostering individuals' intellectual and personal development as it boosts cognitive skills and effective verbal communication (Alsaeedi et al., 2021). Dayang Azimah (2021) stated the best way to live well is to read as more reading leads to more knowledge and exposes a lot of things around the world.

Problem Statement

Reading in the 21st century is not limited to print based. New information and communication technology (ICT) media with the advancement of electronic gadgets offer numerous accessible reading materials in electronic format. Therefore, reading habits have changed. The development of reading abilities typically begins in childhood, with parents having a major influence on how proficient their kids are readers. However, many adults still experience difficulties with reading, which makes them avoid reading (Annable, 2017). According to Montesdeoca (2021) the greatest challenge encountered by students is learning to interpret what they read, stated by Valdez (2021) reading involves various processes and resources in which the cognitive and linguistic are involved. In recent years, a phenomenon of decline in reading behavior has been a worldwide issue including in Malaysia (Bashir & Mattoo,2012; Mohd Fauzan,2021). Figure 1 shown and reported by Rebecca Rajendram (2023) “For the reading domain, which is the biggest in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Malaysia scored 388, a drop of 27 from 415 points in 2018, with less than 50% of our students reaching the minimum level (Level 2) for the domain” which almost no students scored at Level 5 or higher in reading.

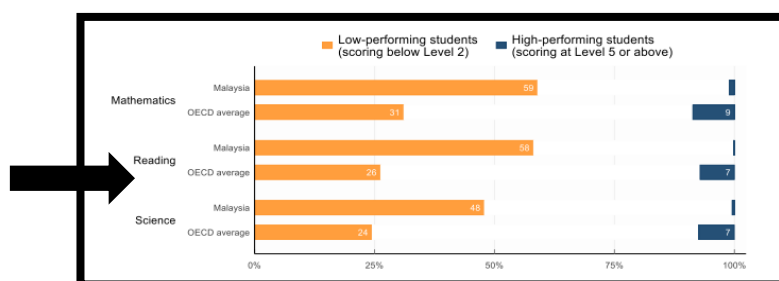


Figure1: PISA 2022 Top performers and low-performing students in mathematics, reading, and science (Rebecca Rajendram, 2023)

The consequences of poor reading can hinder students' inability to understand and analyze complex texts, leading to learning difficulties. Hassan et al., (2021) mentioned studies conducted in Malaysia have mixed findings as some researchers found positive others highlighted poor reading habits. However, research on reading habits among Malaysian students is still quite sparse (Effie&Hanita,2024). Hence, this study explores reading habits and attitudes among undergraduate students at public universities in South Malaysia. Therefore, the outcome of this study will answer the following question:

What are the reading habits of undergraduate students?

What is the reading attitude of undergraduate students?

What is the relationship between attitude and anxiety, modality, peer, and environment among undergraduate students?

Literature Review

Reading is a comprehensive and cognitive activity that enables learners to effortlessly comprehend the information they encounter daily. Reading involves not only the basic skills of recognizing letters and words and speaking or writing them correctly but also, more significantly, the ability to comprehend the meanings conveyed by this arrangement (Muhamad et al., 2020). In Malaysia context, since 1983 Malaysian government focused on *membaca, menulis, dan mengira (3M)* as an educational base (Dewi, 2011). Since then, a few interventions by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to improve reading among school students, including introducing *Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca(NILAM)* and Literacy and Numeracy Screening (LINUS) (Chew, 2016; Saleng et al., 2022). Further, the National Library of Malaysia has intensified various activities and programs about reading and knowledge, which have been implemented nationwide, covering various target groups including higher institutions such as *Jom Baca Bersama 10 Minit* to boost students' reading habits. Reading plays a crucial role in the academic success of teenagers in Malaysia as it equips them with the necessary skills to comprehend complex texts, analyze information critically, and communicate effectively helping them develop a broader understanding of the world. Reading habits cultivate students' abilities in thinking, valuing, adaptability, and creativity (Vuong, et al., 2021). Students' reading habits can be understood by looking at their reading frequency, time, content, and motivation (Dayang Azimah,2021). Shah (2020) stated there is a positive correlation between reading habits and academic performance. Hasan (2021) proved ESL learners attain positive reading habits (Mean=3.680), however appeared that students' reading time was insufficient. Baba and Affandi (2020) revealed frequency of more than 30% of respondents read academics daily or at least once a week, while 41.3% of respondents admitted reading leisurely reading in daily and for academic reading materials, 90 % of respondents preferred websites compared to 48.8% rely on a textbook. Ward (2013) stated reading is a behavior and attitudes (cognitive/personal factors) influence behavior. Rafi et al. (2021) concluded reading attitudes refer to how a person views, engages, and approaches reading activities. Nonetheless, Al Faruq (2019) stated that 62.1% of EFL Indonesian undergraduates feel upset when they are unable to understand reading in English. Rahmat et al. (2020) revealed that encountering unfamiliar terms and being unable to understand their meaning are the main causes of reading anxiety among 25 social science students in Malaysian public universities especially in academic reading. A study by Tanjung et al. (2017) found that 96.25% of Borneo University students agree that the institution also offers reading material for hobbies and interests while 67.5% agreed that visiting the library is one of the techniques to develop reading habits. Celik(2019) found that 69% of Tishk International University students prefer to buy books, 41% of students are rarely involved with peers in reading activities, and only 2% use libraries to read while 64% use them for assignment purposes.

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore reading habits and attitudes among undergraduate students. 130 respondents from one of the branches across different faculties in public universities in South Malaysia were chosen. The instrument (refer to Table 1) used is a survey adapted from Smith (1991) and Mohini Mohamed et al. (2011). Apart from Section A (Demographic profile), the other section was categorized into five (5) variables namely (i) Attitude (four items); (ii) Anxiety and difficulty (three items); (iii) Modality (two items); (iv) Peer Influence (five items) and Environment (seven items) based on a five-point Likert-type scale (5 = "strongly agree"; 1 = "strongly disagree"). Reading habits were analyzed through types of materials and the amount time spent per day.

Table 1: Distribution of Items in the Survey

Section	Variable	Item
B	Attitude	4
C	Anxiety	3
D	Modality	2
E	Peer Influence	5
F	Environment (Library)	7

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used for data analysis purposes. Data were analyzed using Pearson Correlation and Descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation to describe the general data of the study. With reference to Table 2, the SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach Alpha of .738 showing internal reliability for the instrument. Data for the normality test were examined based on Kolmogorov-Smirnov, it is evident that the p value is $0.200 > 0.05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that the residual values are considered a normal distribution.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	Item
.738	21

Finding & Discussion

Demographic Profile

In this study, it can be seen in Table 3, that among the total participants, 65 % (n=84) were female and 35% (n=46) were male. 94% (n=123) were Diploma level and 5% (n=7) were degree student's level.

Table 3: Demographic analysis of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	84	65%
Male	46	35%
Level of Education		
Diploma	123	94%
Degree	7	5%

Reading habits

Findings on reading habits were analyzed through type of materials and time spent on reading per day. Table 4 shows that 34.6% (n=45) students favored books as their types of material followed by 25.4% (n=33) favored novel/comic, others (social media, etc.) types of material 23.8% (n=31), and the least popular is magazine was 8.5% (n=11) and journal were 7.7% (n=10). The results also show that a total of 43.1% (n=56) of respondents spent between one to two hours per day followed by 29.2% (n=38) spending less than one hour, 23.1% (n=30) respondents spending two to three hours reading while only 4.6% (n=6) spend more than 4 hours to read per day. This result is expected due to academic activities that require a significant amount of reading time to achieve academic success (Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013).

Table 4: Reading habits

Type of Materials	Frequency	Percentage
Book	45	34.6
Novel/Comic	33	25.4%
Magazine	11	8.5%
Journal	10	7.7%
Others (social media etc.)	31	23.8%
Time Spent (per day)		
<1 hour	38	29.2%
1 to 2 hours	56	43.1%
2 to 3 hours	30	23.1%
>4 hours	6	4.6%

Reading Attitudes

A Likert scale was used to evaluate the reading constructs where scale 5 means most agreeable and scale 1 means least agreeable. For each question under each construct, the score is expressed as a percentage as well as the mean value. Any mean value greater than 3 is considered agreeable while less than 3 is not agreeable to the respondents.

Table 5: Average Means Value of Reading Attitude

Variable	Mean Value
Attitude	3.99
Anxiety	3.68
Modality	4.36
Peer Influence	3.36
Environment (Library)	3.90

Table 6: Percentage of Items

Item	Percentage
<i>Attitude</i>	
Reading is one of my favourite activities.	80
I ensure reading material that I read give latest information	83.8
I prefer reading tabloid magazine during my leisure	56.9
I want to have more reading material of my own	76.1
<i>Anxiety</i>	
I get upset when I think about having read	40
Encountering unfamiliar word is the hardest part of reading	76.9
I often feel anxious when I have a lot reading to do	63.1
<i>Modality</i>	
Reading is one of the best ways for me to learn things	88.4
There are better ways to learn things than by reading a book	82.3
<i>Peer Influence</i>	

I read when my colleague also read	59.2
I often exchange reading material or information with my colleagues	60
I often give or receive reading material as gift or present	40.8
I and my colleagues often take turn to buy reading material	27.7
I and my colleague always encourage each other to read	54.6
<hr/>	
<i>Environment (Library)</i>	
I am most comfortable read in library	66.2
Library is a good place to study or do my work	86.1
I often arrange to meet my friends in the library	69.2
I rather buy reading material than borrow from the library	62.3
I try to read almost every day	57.7
I am willing to pay for the information that I need	63.8
Library is the place for me to obtain the latest information	70.7
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Attitude. Table 6 shows the mean average of several constructs that are associated with students reading attitudes while Table 6 shows the percentage of agreeable responses by combining ordinal scores 4 and 5. Findings on the reading attitude of students are the second highest of the overall variable with a mean of 3.99. A majority of respondents (83.8%) ensure that reading material gives them the latest information as 80% of respondents make reading one of their favorite activities. 76.1% of respondents want to have their material and only 56.1% of respondents prefer to read tabloid magazines during leisure.

Anxiety. The mean score for anxiety is 3.68, which ranks as the third highest among the five variables in this section. As the results show, encountering unfamiliar words was reported by a significant majority of respondents (76.9%) as the greatest challenge in reading. This finding aligns with previous research by Djafri and Wimbari, (2018) who identified unfamiliar words as a major source of foreign language reading anxiety. The survey also revealed that 63.1% of respondents experienced anxiety when confronted with an extensive amount of reading material. As mentioned by Alkan and Ozkan (2023), fear or anxiety of reading can occur during a reading lesson or exam or individual reflexes against the act of reading. A total of 40% of respondents experienced upset when contemplating the act of reading in this study. According to Ahmed's (2016) study, it was discovered that English as a Second Language (ESL) students have an unfavorable perspective towards reading, leading to heightened levels of anxiety and difficulties in the reading process. Moreover, the level of engagement in reading is contingent upon students' enthusiasm towards reading and it's associated with the reading material. When students can relate to what they are reading, it makes them more interested in the subject and more likely to try to understand it (Malik, 2019).

Modality. The average mean result for the modality with the highest score is 4.36. 88.4% of respondents rated reading as one of the best ways to learn, whereas 82.3% of respondents indicated that there are better ways to learn than by reading a book. Therefore, Rahmasari and Virdaus (2022) stated reading holds paramount significance among the four abilities involved in the learning process as reading is an essential skill that encompasses various aspects necessary for academic success. However, Edward et al. (2022) found the modality variable for Malaysian ESL undergraduates has a mean value

of 0.80, indicating that respondents do not believe there are alternative ways to acquire new knowledge than reading.

Peer Influence. Findings on peer influence are generally low with a mean of 3.36. A significant proportion (60%) of participants indicated that they often exchange reading material or information with colleagues. 59.2% of respondents engage in reading activities when their peers are also reading, and 54.6% of respondents encourage reading among themselves. Revealed by Mansor et al. (2013) discovered that peers with similar interests had a significant impact since peer influence can play a crucial role in addressing the issue of 'reading aversion'. Specifically, 40.8% reported frequently engaging in the act of exchanging reading material as gifts. However, a comparatively lower percentage of respondents, specifically 27.2%, indicated they take turns buying reading material with peers. According to Mohamed et al. (2012), although students may engage in the practice of sharing reading materials, books have not been regarded as a particularly esteemed possession to be presented as a gift.

Environment (Library). The result shows the mean score for the environment is 3.90. The highest percentage of 86.1% of respondents indicate that the library is an advantageous environment for studying or engaging in work-related activities, whereas 70.7% of respondents agreed that the library is placed to obtain the latest information. 69.2 of respondents agreed library is a place to meet friends, and 66.2% of respondents showed they are comfortable reading in the library. In line with the Sare et al. (2020) study, participants expressed a positive perception of the academic library, considering it to be a productive and valuable space. This perception was based on the belief that the physical presence of books in the library created an environment conducive to studying and focusing on their work. Consequently, participants indicated that they intended to recommend the library to their friends as a good place for academic activity. In terms of paying for the information needed, 63.8% of respondents were willing to pay, and 62.3% of respondents would rather buy material than borrow it from the library. Le et al. (2019) stated that even though students with good financial backgrounds are ready to spend their own money on reading material, investments in buying books still depend more on personal interest. With the lowest percentage mere to 57.7%, respondents rated they make an effort to engage in daily reading. Kumara and Sampath (2019) found that students have a strong inclination towards engaging in daily reading, as it is associated with heightened cognitive abilities and better reading proficiency throughout their lives.

Analysis of relationships

Table 7: Relationship between the reading attitude variable

Variable	Attitude	
	Pearson Correlation (<i>r value</i>)	Sig. (2 tailed) (<i>p value</i>)
Anxiety	.306	.000
Modality	.377	.000
Peer Influence	.514	.000
Environment (Library)	.528	.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data were also analyzed to see the existence of any relationship between the reading attitude variable by using Pearson correlations. Analysis in Table 7 shows that there is a significant positive correlation between attitude and anxiety ($r = 0.306$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that as anxiety levels increase, attitude becomes more positive. Nevertheless, the strength

of this relationship may be deemed weak due to the correlation coefficient is <0.50 for the anxiety variable toward reading attitude. Found that the relationship between reading anxiety and attitude seems to be below moderate. Baki (2017) revealed that reading attitude and reading anxiety are two affective aspects that have an impact on an individual's behaviors. However, the study found that although reading anxiety positively predicts attitude toward reading, this relationship was not statistically significant. According to Edward et al. (2023), there exists a negative correlation between these two variables. Samsuddin and Aspura (2021) found that reading anxiety was moderate in reading attitudes, as they had initially expected.

The result shows the relationship between modality and attitude is a significant positive correlation between modality and attitude ($r = 0.377$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that as modality increases, attitude becomes more positive. Yet, the strength of this relationship may be deemed weak due to the correlation coefficient is <0.50 . Rizqa (2022) has dropped the modality variable to be included in the study. In Sahib's (2022) perspective, respondents highlighted reading as one of the best ways for them to learn things, closely tied to a positive attitude toward reading. Undoubtedly, reading has traditionally been recognized as a highly potential means of acquiring new knowledge. Samsuddin et al. (2019) found statistically significant correlations ($r = 0.260$, $p < 0.05$) between attitude and education level among rural communities in Malaysia, this suggests that these communities have alternative means of acquiring knowledge other book reading. These alternative methods include engaging in informal conversations and exchanging ideas with friends through various social activities such as gathering at coffee shops, participating in sports, attending communal events, and socializing in public spaces like markets or clinics, even though they come from various educational levels (Samsuddin et al., 2018).

The relationship between peer influence and attitude, it indicates there is a significant positive correlation between peer influence and attitude ($r = 0.514$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that as peer influence increases, attitude becomes more positive. This finding implies that there exists a moderate positive correlation between peer influence variables and reading attitudes. Merga (2014) found that peers have a moderately significant relationship towards reading, but there was no statistically significant relationship between adolescents' attitudes and perceived peer group attitudes toward book reading. This suggests that while peers may have some influence on reading attitudes, it may not be a significant factor. Yigit and Durukan (2022) discovered that the method of peer-assisted had a high level of positive effect on the reading of 6th-grade female students in Turkey. However, this method was not effective in ensuring the retention of their reading attitude achievement. This finding supports the view that students' reading attitudes may weaken as they get older, as suggested by (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Hayes, 2000).

Similarly, there is a significant positive correlation between environment and attitude ($r = 0.528$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that as the environment(library) becomes more positive, attitude also becomes more positive. This finding implies that there exists a moderate positive correlation between peer environment(library) and reading attitude as Garnar and Tonyan's (2021) respondents stated the library was more than a place of learning as he has a deep love of reading and explained that the library has been a regular fixture since childhood. In their study, Volentine and Tenopir (2013) found that a mere 5 out of 941 respondents reported little or no engagement with scholarly articles. Most participants indicated that libraries serve as their primary means of accessing and acquiring reading materials for academic purposes, even though approximately 39% of respondents purchased their materials. Hence, numerous respondents viewed the library as a central part of the university environment.

Conclusion

Through this study, even though Malaysia has access to plenty of information however it does not seem to be a popular habit. Although the average spending of reading time among students is 10 hours per week in this study, it is still not satisfactory as it is for academic purposes. Whereas the Malaysian government aims its citizens to spend more than 10 hours a week reading. In addition, students have a preference for books as their reading material due to the scholarly content. Consequently, novels/comics and social media remain the top three choices, surpassing journals. Even though reading is not the main favorite activity, students still read to obtain information. Encountering unknown terms while reading might cause students to experience reading anxiety. However, they still believe that they can learn new things through reading. Despite the strong correlation between student reading attitude and peers, students are unfortunately reluctant to spend money to purchase reading material alternately. Students prefer to stay at the library primarily to complete assignments and study, rather than use it as a place for leisurely reading. They find the library to be a pleasant environment for focused academic work. Although there have been numerous studies conducted on reading-related topics, research examining the reading attitudes and habits of undergraduate students is limited and primarily focuses on English as a second language (ESL) reading comprehension. It is recommended for future research studies on the patterns of students reading in digital format focusing on the comparison of different program backgrounds or age groups correlated with academic performance.

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