

## READING HABITS OF UNDERGRADUATES IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Reading is inseparably linked to learning. And learning leads to an overall mental, professional, and human development. Reading not only gives people new ideas, information, and insights, it also helps them to become more complete in every aspect. The study investigated the reading habits of undergraduates in private universities in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the research were to find out the reading habits of the undergraduates and the problems militating against reading among the undergraduates. In carrying out this study, two research questions were raised. Descriptive survey design was utilized for the study. The sample of the study comprised 500 undergraduates from the four private universities in the Delta State namely Western Delta University, Oghara, Michael Cecilia Ibru University, Ughelli, Edwin Clark University, Kaigbodo and Admiralty University, Ibusa. The sample was drawn using accidental sampling technique irrespective of their level of study, gender or course of study. The instruments used for this study was a self-designed questionnaire with the title Reading Habits of Undergraduates Questionnaire (RHUQ). 500 copies of the questionnaire were administered randomly to undergraduates in four private universities and 452 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and found usable. Data were analysed using frequencies and percentages. Finding from this study showed that the reading habits of undergraduates are low. The finding also revealed that distraction from the social media/Internet, lack of interest in reading, distraction from friends and non-availability of books were the reason for the decline in undergraduates reading habits. The study recommended among others that National University Commission should as a matter of urgency inculcate reading as a subject in the curriculum of universities in Nigeria and the General Studies Unit of every university should find a way of handling it as a core course. Also, Undergraduates should explore the use of e-books especially through the internet as this would afford them the opportunity of reading books which may not be available in the university library.*

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**Keywords:** Reading Habits, Private Universities, Social networking

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**Introduction**

Reading is considered essential for the overall development of a human being. However, with the advent of modern digital technologies, especially the growing popularity of social networking on the web, mobile phones, televisions, and other means of entertainment, the reading habit of the general public, especially the younger generation, is undergoing a decline (Akanda, Hoq & Hasan, 2013). The ability to read in life is critical to success in life. It is therefore a skill that has to be inculcated in an individual from childhood. The habit of reading is an essential life skill which enables one to be abreast of information as information is life. It is not limited to increase in knowledge but it also builds maturity and character, sharpens thinking, and widens awareness in social, economic, political, and environmental issues. Reading is not a process that is inculcated by chance, as it takes efforts and hard work. Inculcating a reading habit pays off handsomely in individuals' lives either directly or indirectly. (Oribabor, 2014).

Reading has a significant impact on all areas of academic learning. Reading has been described as a process that requires the use of complex thought processes to interpret printed symbols as meaningful units and comprehend them as a thought unit in order to understand a printed message. It is an exercise which involves the organs of sight and the thinking faculty working together to interpret a printed message so as to understand it. Reading skills keep one informed and current about happenings in different fields and careers and thus, are strongly related to economic success and educational achievement of undergraduates in tertiary institutions (Collins & Cheek, 1999).

Poor reading skills at an early age can lead to an overall dislike of school and can increase the risk of dropout. Struggling readers also tend to feel more negatively toward reading in school, making it difficult for school reading programs to be effective for these students. Reading is an important gateway to personal development and to social, economic and civic life (Lyons, 2012). It is generally accepted as a way for reaching new information and assumed to be consistent with the comprehension capabilities of individuals (Özbay, 2016). According to Oribabor (2014), it is saddening to note that in Nigeria reading culture is deficient. This is because the general orientation has placed priority on other less important things. For instance, majority of the youth believe that reading does not bring quick money. People believe that education and reading is a long term project which does not yield immediate dividend but, if at all, future money. Youths find it difficult to wait

for a long time to make fortune; and because they want immediate money through machiavellian means, they venture into politics, business, internet fraud that brings money quickly. With these, reading culture does not mean anything to many students nowadays. An examination of reading shows its significance. Reading involves series of systems like eye to eye movement, tracing, moving along with hands while reading. A poor reading habit therefore does not only affect proficiency in the English language and other subjects, it possibly affects the coordination of some body parts (Oribabor, 2014).

In other words, every literate person is expected to develop the rudiments of reading and the culture of reading always so as to add quality to life (Holte, 1998). In simple terms, reading is the mental and complex psychological process of decoding symbols to fashion and deriving meaning from the written text. It is a means of language acquisition, communication, exchange of information, and ideas. The symbols involved in the reading process are typically visual (written or printed), but in some instances, they can be decoded in a particular format like braille. The importance of reading to humans overall cannot be overstressed, primarily as information and messages are now being disseminated through the printed materials (Toker & Aminou, 2019).

Reading means different things to different people; hence people engage in reading for different reasons. To a lot of people, especially students, reading is done mainly to pass examinations and not because of the knowledge to be gained. Some read for pleasure and relaxation while a few are likely to read for self-improvement in life. Aina, Ogungbemi, and Adigun (2011) found out that 40% of adult Nigerians never read a non-fiction book after they completed school. The authors revealed that an average Nigerian reads less than a book in a year; many Nigerians graduated from the high school with poor reading skills. This is quite disturbing because if graduates have poor reading skills, one can imagine what the situation would be amongst secondary school students or primary school pupils.

Toker and Aminou (2019) investigated reading habits of the university students in Nigeria and the findings indicated that there were some linguistic factors responsible for the decline in reading habits among the students such as the adverse impact of the internet, the lack of interest, television addiction, and the lack of books which made reading difficult. The authors concluded by reiterating the importance of reading not just for the individual but the nation at large. Nwokocha (2014) conducted a study on reading among secondary school students and reported that more of the boarding students read regularly because they have scheduled time for reading in their curriculum, they

sometimes use and borrow library books while day students read occasionally especially during examination as they were more involved in non-academic social chores. The author further revealed that more boarding students were above average than the day students in their academic performances and most of the students affirmed that reading has positive influence on their academic performance. However, environmental influence, parental and teachers influence, peer pressure and school curriculum were some of the factors militating against better reading habits according to the author. Based on the militating factors, parents and teachers alike are encouraged to train the mind of their wards and students towards reading and reduce their home and school chores.

Oribabor, (2014) conducted a research on students' reading culture and assessed the factors influencing their reading culture and the findings showed that students reading habit was poor and a number of factors were responsible for students' poor reading culture which include that many teachers do not pay attention to the teaching of oral English. Onuoha and Unegbu (2013) investigated the reading habits and library use patterns of students in the department of Information Resources Management, Babcock University, Nigeria and found out that majority of the respondents spend more than an hour reading every day and the purpose of reading was found to be mainly for entertainment. The author also revealed students of IRM engage in reading activities both for entertainment and education purposes although most reading activities took place outside the university library. Olubunmi (2018) investigated the reading habits amongst university undergraduates and how this has impacted their level of intelligence or academics. The author reported a high perception of reading among the university undergraduates and the respondents agreed with the proposition that there exists a relationship between reading and their academic performance. This implied that for one to perform excellently well in any activity be it academic, business, job among others, he/she must be involved in deep, extensive and continuous reading to enable him/her pass exams, update his/her knowledge and be abreast with the innovations in the society.

### **Statement of Problem**

Undergraduates' inherent ability to read is one of the critical determinants of his/her academic success or failure. For undergraduates to excel in life, not only in the field of academics but in life in general, they must acquire the habit of reading to perform well in their intellectual activities. However, one of the major challenges confronting the educational system in Nigeria is the abysmal failure of undergraduates in examinations (Toker &

Aminou, 2019). This abysmal failure can be conceived to be linked with the absence of reading habit among undergraduates. Although there are many reasons why people read, but observations and researches have shown that there is a low reading habit among undergraduates in recent times, especially in developing countries. The foregoing reasons prompted the researchers to investigate on the reading habits of undergraduates in private universities in Delta State, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the reading habits of undergraduates in private universities in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific purposes are to:

1. find out the reading habits of undergraduates in private universities in Delta State.
2. to determine the reason for the decline in undergraduates reading habits in private universities in Delta State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the reading habits of undergraduates in universities in Delta State, Nigeria?
2. What are the reasons for the decline in undergraduates reading habits in private universities in Delta State, Nigeria?

### **Methodology**

The study employed the descriptive survey design. The population for the study was undergraduates in the private universities in Delta State. They include Western Delta University, Oghara, Michael Cecilia Ibru University, Ughelli, Edwin Clark University, Kaigbodo and Admiralty University, Ibusa. The sample of the study comprised 500 undergraduates from the four private universities in the Delta State mentioned earlier. The sample was drawn using accidental sampling technique irrespective of their level of study, gender or course of study. The instruments used for this study was a self-designed questionnaire with the title “Reading Habits of Undergraduates Questionnaire” (RHUQ). 500 copies of the questionnaire were administered randomly to undergraduates in the four private universities and 452 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and found usable. Frequencies and percentage were used to analyse the data.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** What are the reading habits of undergraduates in private universities in Delta State, Nigeria?

**Table 1: Reading Habits of Undergraduate**

Reading Habits	SA		A		D		SD	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I spend less than an hour reading every day.	69	15.2	115	25.4	204	45.1	64	14.1
Read more than an hour a day.	111	24.5	42	9.2	100	22.1	199	44.0
Read on a weekly basis.	51	11.2	101	22.3	149	32.9	151	33.4
Enjoy reading a lot	179	39.6	41	9.0	200	44.2	32	7.0
Read to pass examination.	321	71.0	-	-	100	22.1	31	6.8
Spend my free period reading.	72	15.9	81	17.9	210	46.4	89	19.6
Not easily distracted by friends when it is time to read.	32	7.0	104	23.0	118	26.1	198	43.8
Always do my reading in the library.	201	44.4	51	11.2	151	33.4	49	10.8
Always read other materials to get more information on the topic taught.	91	20.1	111	24.5	50	11.0	200	44.2
Prefer to read electronic materials instead of the ones in print format.	301	66.5	20	4.9	100	22.1	31	6.8
Read in a quiet place.	212	46.9	40	8.8	150	33.1	50	11.0
Read choice courses i.e. courses that i like best.	194	42.9	45	9.9	150	33.1	63	13.9
Read to upgrade knowledge.	63	13.9	121	26.7	201	44.6	67	14.8
I read for leisure.	81	17.9	104	23.0	67	14.8	200	44.2
Always have group discussions with my colleagues after reading.	201	44.4	31	6.8	110	24.3	110	24.3
<b>Read my books every day.</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>40.7</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>30.0</b>

Table 1 shows the reading habits of undergraduates in private universities in Delta State, Nigeria. The finding shows that majority of the items listed in the table had low responses. It is interesting to see that 204 (45.1%) and 64 (14.1%) of the undergraduates spend less than an hour reading every day. Also, 200 (44.2%) and 32 (7.0%) indicated that they do not read. This implies that there is a downward trend in the reading habit of undergraduates. This may be as a result of the fact that they are addicted to social media to the detriment of their academics.

**Research Question 2:** What are the reasons for the decline in undergraduates reading habits in private universities in Delta State?

**Table 2: Reason for the Decline in Undergraduates Reading Habits**

<b>Reason for the Decline in Undergraduates Reading Habits</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Distraction from friends	60	13.3
Distraction from the social media/Internet	222	49.1
Lack of interest	100	22.1
Non-availability of books	30	6.6
<b>All of the above</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>8.8</b>

Table 2 shows the reason for the decline in undergraduates reading habits in private universities in Delta State. The finding reveals that majority of the respondents 222 (49.1%) identified usage of the social media/ internet and lack of interest towards reading 100 (22.1%) to be the most significant factors that prevent them from engaging in reading. This may be due to the fact that undergraduates are drifting to its use in order to satisfy their information needs.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The finding of the study shows that reading habits of undergraduates in private universities in Delta State are low responses because majority of the undergraduates spend less than an hour reading every day and some indicated that they do not read. This implies that there is a downward trend in the reading habits of undergraduates. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Oribabor (2014) which revealed that students' reading culture or reading habit was poor. The author noted that in Nigeria, reading culture is deficient because most undergraduates believe that reading does not bring quick money, they believe that education and reading is a long term project which does not yield immediate dividend but, if at all, it is future money. The finding reveals that majority of the respondents identified usage of the social media/internet and lack of interest towards reading to be the most significant factors that prevent them from engaging in reading. This may be due to the fact that undergraduates are drifting to its use in order to satisfy their information needs. This finding supports the finding of Willingham (2010) who stated that undergraduates who make use of social media sites for extended periods of time or multi task have an increased risk of not being able to achieve the educational outcomes of their courses. The finding also agrees with the finding of Toker and Aminou (2019) which indicated that the adverse impact of the internet, the lack of interest, television addiction, and the lack of books made reading difficult for the undergraduates of selected students of Economics Department at the Nile University of Nigeria.

## Conclusion

The study concluded that undergraduates' reading habits in private universities was low. This clearly indicated that there is a downward trend in their reading habits. It is sad to note that some of the undergraduate indicated that they spend less than an hour reading every day and that they don't enjoy reading. Distraction from the social media/Internet, lack of interest in reading, distraction from friends and non-availability of books were some of reason for the decline in undergraduates reading habits.

## Recommendations

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

1. The National University Commission should as a matter of urgency inculcate reading as a subject in the curriculum of universities in Nigeria. The General Studies Unit should find a way of handling this as a core course.
2. Government should ensure the provision of well-equipped library in order to attract students to come to the library to read. This can be achieved by making available relevant information technologies that will enable the use of social media for educational purpose.
3. University lecturers should establish reading club, so as to enhance good reading habits among undergraduates.
4. Undergraduates should explore the use of e-books especially through the internet as this would afford them the opportunity of reading books which may not be available in the university bookstore or library.
5. Since reading materials play a critical role in improving students' reading habits, book companies/educational publishers should provide more learning opportunities over the internet and commercial software products to help students form a solid, robust online reading habit.

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