

## Factors Affecting Reading Interests of Distance Learners

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### Abstract

Reading is not only limited to students in boundary wall institutions, where all individuals cannot access easily. People belongs to poor family backgrounds cannot reach to these institutions for learning and reading while reading is for all, for the better understanding of life. Reading has its value being a source of knowledge and every individual has a right to get knowledge. Book reading does not mean to read only course related books which students are bound to attend classes in boundary wall institutions for passing exams. It has various reading materials like magazine, story books, comic books, newspaper and general knowledge for broadening students' minds at all levels. Distance learner plan to increase their knowledge of these things at home or nearest to home places without the restrictions of boundary wall. Young students' engagement in reading is valuable in their future success. All distance learners in Bahawalpur region in year 2017 were the population of this study. Students participating in distance learning workshops were contacted. The students who were willing to participate in survey were selected as sample. Hence convenient sampling technique was used. Total 1100 students participated in the survey conducted in this regard. Data was collected through a questionnaire and correlation between facilities and reading interest was measured. It is found that students' interest is correlated with fathers' reading interest and available books at home or nearest place to their home. It is recommended that students may be provided with reading material at nearest place and parents should also show interest in reading so that children may follow them accordingly.

**Keywords:** reading interest, book reading, distance learner, reading environment, campus library.

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## **Introduction**

Pakistan is a developing country having poor literacy rate. The Government of Pakistan presented education plan 2011-2012 to improve the quality of education. Government has shown interest in field of education because reading capabilities of young Pakistanis seem quite low while compared with other countries. It becomes a great hindrance in young generation's future and a serious issue which need to be solved and addressed at all levels. Comprehension in reading of children is below according to their grade level that makes Pakistan far behind in race of reading in world (Annual survey of education Research as cited by Ministry of Finance, 2012, p.148). According to Doiron (2005) school has its role in building reading interest in students. Teachers are reading motivator and school library is a place to perform various reading activities. At initial level child is attached with parents and home environment. So, it's a chief responsibility of parents to create reading interest in their children by stimulating with availability of books according to the interest and need of child at home without the restriction of boundary wall institution. Vinay (2009) claimed the reason of students falling in lack of reading interest is due to lack of good literature and uniformity of books.

According to general observation that choices and interests of young girls and boys can't be same. It varies individual to individual based on gender, age, social and environmental background. Reading abilities and interests in students may be increased by the parental guideline and encouragement, motivation by teachers, inculcation of desirable hobbies and interests, constant use of dictionary, daily newspaper and book reading of parents and visiting libraries.

As it is observed that students' reading interest vary due to different reasons the researchers were interested in finding the interest of distance learners in different reading materials and the factors affecting reading interest of distance learners. Sun (2003) argues that reading at distance learning requires interfaces among teacher and students as supports in their level of thinking and empower their knowledge at their work and home place. In this way students poses strong positive attitude towards reading through distance learning system.

Yorke (2004) argues that over the past few years, distance learner extended way of education intensely due to its emerging trend and need of students. Likewise, distance learn is able to acquire education without daily attendance, teacher student interaction because most of educational activities performed outside the institution for instance, home reading

and paperwork make them capable to achieve the needs of their reading interest. Certainly, this is not conforming by formal education.

Wagner (2002) suggests that distance learner need only guidelines properly by their tutors to manage their times and selection of materials for reading. Students must be encouraged and appreciated for selecting good reading material at home for passing exams and grooming personality by parents and teachers. Distance learners are independent in their reading, so they need to read the text, write it for understanding, recite it again, relate it with previous knowledge and review it so that the book reading made easy for better understanding.

Poornima and Adithya (2015) pose that reading is like an electronic device that cultivates the mind of reader with the software of knowledge and it is a long-term habit. Initially, it develops with students' interest in early ages. It is the prominent source to open the gateway of knowledge library in mind. This activity of reading is observed as interest of distance learners in book reading when it is carried out again and again. Reading interest is often measured in rappsots of the amount of how much material is being read. The regularity rate of reading and the time consumed on reading is another measure. The main preferences of distance education are to provide knowledge and skill. It is inculcated by reading books. To maintain interest in reading among distance learners is not an easy task. It requires to launch rural library programs, a small library in each rural area and introduce mobile libraries to promote the reading interest.

Macintyre and Macdonald (2011) disclose that in Scotland, a lot of online literature available about syllabus of distance learner which is according to the need of distance learner so the students of distance education can get satisfaction of knowledge by online reading. The greater part of online literature designed to cover the instructional need of on distance learner of remote areas. The mission of open university is the provision of support to remote students as to be open access books to all students, regardless of their situation.

Online systems have the potential to enable their reader to achieve their target by giving access to a wider range of services for all in all areas to remote students and students elsewhere. These include administrative and operational systems governing applicant enquiries and course choice as well as access to Open Library Services and online teaching systems.

Farid et al. (2018) observed that almost more than 1000 institutions in almost 50 countries are getting reward from the pattern of online learning by reading according to the interest of students. E-learning

appear as mainstream for education due to the easy access irrespective of time and place. This worth of distance education made it valuable globe among universities to take benefits like cost effectiveness, access to the remote learners etc.

The researchers went through different researches like Kleeck, Stahl, and Baur (2008) argued responsible parents and teachers both parties in highlighting the importance of reading among different age group children. They must create interesting environment of reading for their success in life. Book reading should be an essential part of our lives to overcome difficulties and to score achievements in educational field. Reuveni (2006) criticize the low standards of publication and delivery of newspapers due to which value of book reading is being worst affecting. Book publicity is the main concern of publishers to protect their personal interests. They must acknowledge their responsibilities and provide informative books at low cost as an easy access to readers.

Belk (2004) has made an account of students' psychology, reading style, arrangement of books, practicing loud reading, reading through games and recordings and an active participation in reading seminars can be very affective in reading process. A competent teacher always produces competent students through clear instructions and adopting best methodologies. Parents play a vital role in children's literacy through selection of books, delivering contents to children, by enhancing their reading experiences and also help them out to trace out outstanding position in the society.

Coveart and Eagan (2006) say that best gift from parents and teachers to children is the habit of book reading. A book can work as bridge to different cultures, realities, challenges, characters, benefits, losses, experiences and boundaries imposed to children. Bus (2003) considers book reading, a better activity then singing and playing. He emphasizes the book reading practices as art of living which is only possible through the proper selection of books by parents and teachers keeping in view the age group, level, interest and cultural background of children.

Stainthorp (1995) explains the role of society and culture in literacy practices. It seems that reading interests are being translated from parents to children. If they consider it less important and unable to comprehend than their children will also show lack of interest in the literacy practices and always lag behind the success stories. Smith (2004) argues that purpose of book reading is to get some information and all type of readers concludes decisions based on their knowledgeable experiences. Understanding of material plays an important role in this process. A

reader is just wasting his time on a fruitless activity, if he is reading any unknown material without understanding of meaning.

Stand and Booth (2008) argued a peaceful environment; availability of material according to interest of children belonging to different age groups and cultures, appreciation, and clear directions creates the stamina for reading on daily basis and increase their pool of information. Parents can also make this activity a source of pleasure and fun if they take an active part.

According to Trabasso and Magliano (1996) an actual perception of text can only be possible through deep attention. An effective reading can be done if there is solid thorough interaction between the text and reader. Beside these an expressive environment should also be adopted for sharing of developed ideas.

Fielding (2003) points out that selection of low-cost informative book can play an affective role to survive in the society. While selecting books for libraries, keep in mind the reader's class and interest. Castle (1996) put emphasize on the incentives, model role, provision of authentic material and clear directions for development of book reading skills for both genders. Hearne and Stevenson (2002) have divided the children according to different age groups based on reading habits.

Halsted (2009) says books are best friends for emotionally, intellectually satisfaction, cognitive ability, development of literacy skills, language capabilities and success in life. Home literacy and interaction of school education with story books creates the positive effect on the reading and understanding abilities of children, Dilevko and Gottlieb (2004). An unsecure relationship and less supportive system can be unsuccessful in engagement of children in reading process. Major factor that creates resistance includes immigration, class clashes and disabilities, lack of confidence. According to Shechtman (2007) these problems should be replaced with constructive behaviors, love, care, understanding and moral support as an immediate solution.

Sipe and McGuire (2006) elaborate intersexual, preferential, reality testing, kinetic, exclusionary and literary critical types of children's resistance. McDonald and Fisher (2006) introduce reading an art which can be meaningful and interesting through provision of proper environment and background knowledge of the contents. Cullingford (2001) is of the view that command at components of reading like phonics, grammar, structure, comprehension and vocabulary is compulsory for the fruitful activity of reading. Beside this fulfillment of basic needs of children like language, interaction with elder readers, categorization and discrimination is the necessity of hour.

Taylor (1996) explains the behavior of children who mostly depend on school for being literate and better education. He suggests that extra time, clear instructions, excellent efforts, discussion of reading stories, admiration and expression of personal creations must be encouraged. UNESCO considers four grades of primary education to be a literate as minimum criteria. Reading involves organization, relationship, recognition, verbal symbols of language, sounds and more complex cognitive process to indicate its meanings (Vernon, 2010). To build a positive relationship among the school and students' attendance in it, is a major problem due to class size, unawareness, teacher training, teaching methods, lack of reading materials, low economic development over population, illiteracy, poor policies, poor attendance, non-completion and repetition.

Chall (2002) explains pre reading, decoding stage fluency reading for learning the new: a first step, multiple viewpoints, construction and recognition – a world view. Nagaraju (2004) elaborates that factors that affect the reading habits may include gender sex, status of the family, parents, occupation, order of birth, size of the family, type of school, income of the family, locality and caste. Roller (2003) explains the merits and de merits of observation, teacher centered and student-centered approaches. Robb (2000) explains that collective reading and partnership in work leads to proficiency in reading and better understanding of text. According to Fielding (2003) re-reading approach can be helpful to children in easy comprehension, fluency of text and to overcome the difficulties at early stages of reading.

Use of supplementary material can be meaningful by interaction in words, sentences and through background knowledge about the new introductory text (Oliveria, 1996). Supplementary material provides comprehensive knowledge after reading, command over grammar usage and vast pool of information. Venkateswarlu (2007) says that supplementary material should be according to the mental ability of students, easily accessible, affordable, well arranged, in simple language, create motivation and supportive to text book.

In Pakistan there is critical situation of the problem. Students have no prior knowledge of the text and libraries are being neglected. Nighat (2003) says that reading skills are being affected due to ignorance of proper reading methodologies, unawareness of teaching skills, lack of motivation, perception and non-preservation of human rights.

Early reading development in children can be more progressive through provision of suitable academic and home environment and continuous leadership according to Goldenberg (2004). Guzzetti (2007)

explains that through keen attention and simple efforts children can develop their reading skills well and become able to read any document independently at grade 9-10. Johnston (2010) states that it is the right of every individual to be educated. Teachers should be well prepared, good teaching style, assign homework, test of abilities in the form of reading competitions. Carrasquillo, Krucer, and Abrams (2004) explain parental strategies to engage young children in book reading belonging to different backgrounds. Glass, Pike, and Peist (2000) point out the connection between level of books and developmental stages of a child and role of parents in choosing reading material. Lockwood (2008) says that for the welfare of society education of children is the basic need of hour. Bean (2009) says partnership of instructors and teachers with self-respect and mutual understanding can provide better opportunities and strategies to reader's problems. Brake (2010) put an emphasis on the emerging trends of technology in education system.

### **Research Methodology**

This study was an attempt to explore the reading interest of students of Bahawalpur enrolled in distance learning. The study is descriptive, and survey based as it is to reveal present situation. A questionnaire having 15 items was developed to collect information from students about their reading interest. Ensuring all ethical guidelines, a survey was conducted. 1100 students.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed with help of SPSS (17). Data analysis of 1100 students revealed that there are number of factors which influence the interest of students in reading. These include factors like to read only to pass the examinations. Less than 20% students read to increase their knowledge and similarly 19 % students read to develop their personality. There are only 4 % students who read books to do research. Although majority of students like reading due to different reasons but there is a visible number who do not like reading and even there are 2% students think extra reading as wastage of time. More Data analysis is presented here

Table 1

*Availability of Reading Material at Home*

Reading Material	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Newspapers	72	6.5	6.5	6.5
Magazines	73	6.6	6.6	13.2
Story books	53	4.8	4.8	18.0
Library books	40	3.6	3.6	21.6
History books	364	33.1	33.1	54.7
Islamic books	472	42.9	42.9	97.6
Children books	12	1.1	1.1	98.7
Any other	14	1.3	1.3	100.0

N=1100

Data in the table No. 1 shows the availability of different reading materials. Data analysis shows that mostly Islamic books are available at students' home which is reported by 42.9% of students. Second most common books are related to history they are 33.1%. Students reported that magazines and newspapers are available in 6.6 % and 6.5 % of homes respectively. Other story books, children books and other reading material is also available in students' homes as shown in the table above.

Table 2

*Relationship of Time Spent on Reading and Factors*

Correlations between	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	rhoSig. (2-tailed)
time spent on reading and Number of books available at home	.309**	.000
and Time Spent by father on reading	.118**	.000

N=1100

Data analysis shows a significant relationship between time spent on reading and number of books available at home as Spearman's  $\rho$  correlation coefficient value for reading time and number of books is 0.309 which is significant at  $\alpha = 0.000$ . Similarly, time spent by father on reading is also positively correlated with students' time spent on reading

as  $\rho$  value is = 0.118 and  $\alpha = 0.000$ . Hence, we conclude that reading environment at home and school matters a lot.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

It is revealed through this study that students read specialized material the most. Secondly, they read Islamic books and thirdly they read cosmic books. But the most interesting thing is that students' interest is significantly positively related to fathers' reading interest. So, we recommend that we should provide a book reading environment at home as children imitate their parents and not follow their orders. Teachers should encourage their students for book reading because students give more weight to their teacher's advice. Libraries should be more comfortable as it is seen that students spend more time in comfortable libraries

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