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Reading Habits of Rural and Urban College Students in the 21st Century

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Introduction

Reading has been the passion of the greatest personalities of all times. Humans have been reading since ages and thus words of knowledge have been passed on through generations. The reading habit influences in the promotion of one's personal development in particular and social progress in general. Regular and systematic reading sharpens the intellect, refines the emotions, elevates tastes and provides perspectives for one's living; and thereby prepares a person for an effective participation in the social, religious, cultural and political life. Reading fires the imagination of the person. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to mind. Reading loads the mind with new software (Satija, 2002). The individual who reads well has a means for widening mental horizons and for multiplying opportunities of success. Reading is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth. Sir Richard Steele has logically quoted, "*Reading is to the mind what exercise is to body*".

The definition of *reading* has undergone through many changes. In the past, reading simply meant to extract visual information from any given codes or systems. However, thereafter, reading became much more complex and involved the understanding of a whole text composed of written signs. Smith & Robinson (1980) defined reading as "an active attempt on the part of reader to understand a writer's message". According to Toit (2001) "Reading is as a process of thinking, recalling and relating concepts under the functioning of written words." Devarajan (1989) defined reading as the art of interpreting printed and written words. Irvin (1998) describes the reading process as "*The interaction of what is in the head with what is on the page within a particular context that causes students to comprehend what they read*". Thus, reading is the ability to recognise, and examine words or sentences and understand the information within. It is a cognitive process of understanding a written linguistic message and to examine and grasp the meaning of written or printed characters, words or sentences.

Reading Culture in Kashmir Valley

Kashmir valley has been a seat of learning since ages. Right from the very ancient times, Kashmir was a clearing house of spiritual knowledge, a laboratory of scientists and a place of thinking personalities as is evident from the ancient writings present on stone- slabs, copper plates and coins found in Kashmir (Iqbal, 2007). Kashmiri are proud of their literary glories of the past. They had produced masterpieces of history, poetry and philosophy. The *Rajataranini* speaks of many literary personalities who flourished in ancient Kashmir and who thought and wrote with ability on different branches of knowledge. The noteworthy among them are *Vasunanda*, *Candaka*, *Matrgupta* and *Vakpatiraja* (Roy, 2005). Presently, in spite of all odds, the students of Kashmir Valley achieve greatest highest in literary world.

Review of Literature

Reading has increasingly been the object of empirical and theoretical investigations since a long past. Norvell (1950) as cited by Hanna & Marriana (1960) identifies that sex and age are the two principal factors affecting reading habits. Moyes (2000), Stenberg (2001), Ross (2002) and Abram (2007) report female as more heavy reader than male. Clark & Foster (2005) reports that girls enjoy reading greater than boys and boys tend to hold more negative attitudes towards reading than girls. McKenna, Kearn & Ellsworth (1995) and Hassell & Rodge (2007) reveal that girls have more favourable attitudes than boys for both recreational and academic reading. Hopper (2005) depicts that (67%) of girls were reading compared with (54%) of boys. Sahai (1970) results make visible that more than (90%) of the users read newspapers and magazines and the percentage of women is higher than the men. Kendrick (1999) discovers that over half (56%) of the middle grade boys do not enjoy reading and (86%) of them complain that parents do not read with them. Yilmaz (2000) finds that the majority of the students (77.8%) don't have reading habits whereas the smallest ratio (6.5%) belongs to the heavy readers. Hastings & Henry (2006) reveal that more than half of respondents (56%) spend less than an hour a day on reading and (13%) says that they do not read at all. Igun & Adogbeji (2007) report that nearly two-thirds (61.5%) of postgraduate students are motivated for study & reading primarily by the desire for knowledge and skills, while (22.5%) study mainly to pass their examinations and tests and for self development. Cabral & Tavares (2002) study concerning the students reading habits reflects that students read for academic purposes (97.8%) almost as much as they use reading as a hobby (97.2%). The study of Hassell & Rodge (2007) depict that (72%) of the students are reading in their leisure time in which 22% read constantly and (50%) read when they get a chance. Blackwood (1991) indicates that students are reading about 2.5 hours each week for pleasure during academic session and slightly more during vacations. Tella & Akande (2007) disclose that the majority of the students (53.3%) spent between 1-2 hours per day on reading. The Department of Education, Hong Kong (2001) points out that the students are spending 2 or more hours on reading in a week. Sheorey & Mokhtari (1994) results reveal that students read an average of 4.75 hours per week. Karim & Hasan (2007) identify that the students spend about 7 to 9 hours per week on average to read. Kaur & Thiyagarajah (1999) reveals that while many students prefer spending as much as 3-5 hours per week in reading yet the breakdown of the responses indicate that (69.8%) of them spend this amount of time on literary works, (28.6%) on newspapers and (25.4%) on novels. Devarajan (1989) reports that irrespective of the socio-economic background, the majority is interested in reading literature (51.96%) especially novels followed by Science (34.66%). Clark & Foster (2005) report that 83.9% of pupils admit mother teaches them to read, followed by their teacher (72.2%) and their father (65.0%). Their mother (42.5%), teacher (38.5%) and father (32.4%) are also the most frequently cited reading partners. The mother (57.4%), father (42.1%) and friend (39.9%) are the top three people with whom pupils discuss their reading. De boer & Dall Mann (1960) is of the opinion that it is the task of the teacher to bring the child and book together. They further insist that the

techniques of improving a child's voluntary reading should in general be those of enticement and persuasion rather than those of coercion. Shokeen (2005) is of the opinion that it is the duty of parents and librarians to promote a love for reading among students. However, all parties concerned- parents, teachers and librarians should work together to infuse a habit of reading in children at the young age when the mind is most impressionable.

Scope of the Study

The present study is limited to the academic college students of Kashmir Valley covering the faculties of General Science, Social Sciences, Humanities, Business & Commerce and Computer Science. The total number of such colleges in Kashmir Valley is 20 in which 11 are falling in rural areas and 9 in urban area.

Purpose of the Study

The specific objective of the paper is to study thoroughly the reading habits of the 21st century rural and urban college students with the aim to identify their reading attitudes, purposes, preferences & tastes.

Methodology

The data was collected using the questionnaire method. Before drafting the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted to some college students, which provided some directions in drafting questionnaire. After the survey questionnaire was drafted, it was pre-tested with 30 students. The questionnaire was then modified according to the result of the pre-test. Later, the following statistical formula was used to obtain sample of the student.

Where,

Z = The probability given under 96.5% reliability

N = The population or universe

E = Sampling error

pq = Proportion of the total population (Rural: Urban)

The total population of students in the academic colleges of Kashmir was 54191 in which 28,838 were studying in rural colleges and 25,353 in urban colleges. Further, to ensure an optimal sample size, the 96.5% confidence level was pre-assigned and a small sampling error (0.04) was fixed.

The sample size of the rural and urban categories is determined by population allocation method as:

Where,

$i = 1, 2, 3, 4 \dots$

$n = 676$ (total Sample size)

N_i = Total number of students in the Category

N = Total population.

Category	No. of Students (N_i)	Proportion (N_i/N)	Sample Size $n_i = n(N_i/N)$
Urban	25,353	$25353/54191=0.4678$	$676(0.4678)=316$
Rural	28,838	$28838/54191=0.5322$	$676(0.5322)=360$

Total	54191	(100%)	676
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Data Analysis: Findings and Recommendations

Reading Enjoyment

It is revealed from the data (Table 1) that majority of the students (66.86%) enjoy reading in which urban students (68.99%) are more than rural counterparts (65%). The variation is possible due to many reasons like lack of adequate information centres and sources (like public libraries) in far-flung rural areas, lack of Internet facilities, etc. Thus, there is need to bridge the information access as well as digital divide gap between rural and urban students.

Table 1: Enjoyment of reading (Region wise)

Reading Enjoyment	Total	Rural	Urban
A lot	304/676 (44.97)	156/360 (43.33)	148/316 (46.84)
A bit	148/676 (21.89)	78/360 (21.67)	70/316 (22.15)
Not much	119/676 (17.60)	73/360 (20.28)	46/316 (14.56)
Not at all	105/676 (15.53)	53/360 (14.72)	52/316 (16.46)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Time Spent

The majority of the students (32.69%) spend 1-2 hours on reading per day. The average time (mean) students spend on reading is 1.90 hours daily. The data on the basis of region shows that majority of rural students (38.61%) spend 1-2 hours on reading per day whereas most of urban students (35.44%) spend 2-3 hours on reading in a day. The average time rural and urban students spend on reading is 1.81 hours and 2.02 hours per day respectively (Table 2). The variation is possible due to many reasons like low level of literacy in rural areas; lack of healthy reading tradition and so on. The need is to overcome the problem of illiteracy and develop a healthy reading culture in the country especially in rural areas. Moreover, the students should develop a time table to spend their time on different activities like playing games and sports, electronic media and print media. The students should always spend its share on academic and non-academic reading without any fall.

Table 2: Time spend on reading per day (Region Wise)

Time Spent	Total (t)	Rural (p)	Urban (q)
Up to 1 hour	162/676 (23.96)	94/360 (26.11)	68/316 (21.52)
1-2 hours	221/676 (32.69)	139/360 (38.61)	82/316 (25.95)
2-3 hours	183/676 (27.07)	71/360 (19.72)	112/316 (35.44)
3-4 hours	78/676 (11.54)	35/360 (9.72)	43/316 (13.61)
>4 hours	32/676 (4.73)	21/360 (5.83)	11/316 (3.48)
Total Time Spend (hrs)	(t)= 1287	(p)= 650	(q)= 637
Average Time Spent (hrs)	Mean= 1.90	Mean= 1.81	Mean= 2.02

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Inculcating the Reading Habit

It is clear from the data that students develop reading habits mostly of their own (36.24%) followed by with the help of parents (28.48%) and teachers (13.17%) respectively. The region wise break up of data shows that parents of the urban students (33.54%) play better role in developing reading habits of their children than parents of rural students (24.17%) (Table 3). The parents, teachers and librarians must join hands to develop reading habits in children at young age. Once the reading habit is formed at the early age, it is likely to last for a long time.

Table 3: Inculcating reading habit (Region Wise)

Inculcating Reading Habit	Total	Rural	Urban
Parents	193/676 (28.55)	87/360 (24.17)	106/316(33.54)
Brother/Sister	64/676 (9.47)	33/360 (9.17)	31/316 (9.81)
Teacher	89/676 (13.17)	51/360 (14.17)	38/316 (12.03)
Friends	60/676 (8.88)	35/360 (9.72)	25/316(7.91)
Self	245/676 (36.24)	139/360(38.61)	106/316 (33.54)
Others	25/676 (3.70)	15/360 (4.17)	10/316(3.16)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Preferred Time

Table 4: Preferred time for reading (Region wise)

Preferred Time	Total	Rural	Urban
Morning	299/676 (44.23)	166/360 (46.11)	133/316 (42.09)
Evening	149/676 (22.04)	85/360 (23.61)	64/316 (20.25)
Afternoon	40/676 (5.92)	20/360(5.56)	20/316 (6.33)
Late night	188/676 (27.81)	89/360 (24.72)	99/316 (31.33)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

The data (Table 4) depicts that the students mostly prefer to read in the morning (44.23%) compared to late night (27.81%) and evening (22.04%). The information gleaned from the region wise data reveals that more rural students (46.11%) prefer to read in the morning compared to urban students (42.09%) whereas more urban students (31.33%) prefer to read in the late night than rural students (24.72%). The reading not only needs silence but calm and quite atmosphere as well, it is possibly the basic reason that the students mostly prefer to read in the morning and late night.

Favourite Place

It is visible from the data (Table 5) that home is the dominating place for reading as majority of students (75.44%) prefer to read in home followed by library (10.95%) and park/field (8.14%). The region wise data reveals that more rural students prefer to read in home (71.67%) followed by park/field (12.78%) whereas urban students prefer to read at home (79.75%) followed by library (12.34%). The rural and urban students do not have healthy habits of reading in libraries. The provision of reading room facility in the libraries with all necessary infrastructural, sanitation, ventilation and other facilities can attract students towards libraries for reading.

Table 5: Favourite place for reading (Region wise)

Favourite Place	Total	Rural	Urban
Library	74/676 (10.95)	35/360 (9.72)	39/316 (12.34)
Home	510/676 (75.44)	258/360 (71.67)	252/316 (79.75)
Park/Field	55/676 (8.14)	46/360 (12.78)	9/316 (2.85)
Other place	37/676 (5.47)	21/360 (5.83)	16/316 (5.06)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Preferred Language

It is clear from data (Table 6) that majority of students read in English (71.75%) followed by Urdu (22.93%) and only a small number of them (5.32%) prefer to read in other languages like Persian, Hindi, Panjabi and Kashmiri respectively. The region wise data discloses that urban students read in English more than rural students (75.95% versus 68.06%) and rural students read in Urdu more than urban students (27.50% versus 17.72%). The students, irrespective of regional differences, do not read as per expectations in their mother languages in Kashmir Valley. The possible reasons are lack of qualitative reading material in these languages and lack of reading and writing skills in these languages. The possible solution is to translate qualitative reading materials from other languages to local languages. In this regard, the *Sahita Academy of India* can play a significant role. Moreover, the students should be trained to read and write in the local languages from the primary school level.

Table 6: Preferred language of reading (Region wise)

Preferred Language	Total	Rural	Urban
English	485/676 (71.75)	245/360 (68.06)	240/316 (75.95)
Urdu	155/676 (22.93)	99/360 (27.50)	56/316 (17.72)
Other	36/676 (5.33)	16/360 (4.44)	20/316 (6.33)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Reading Purpose

Table 7: Primary purpose of reading (Region wise)

Primary purpose	Total	Rural	Urban
Education	294/676 (43.49)	171/360 (47.50)	123/316 (38.92)
Information	272/676 (40.24)	136/360 (37.78)	136/316 (43.04)
Recreation	77/676 (11.39)	35/360 (9.72)	42/316 (13.29)
Other	33/676 (4.88)	18/360 (5.00)	15/316 (4.75)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

It is revealed from data (Table 7) that the students mostly read for education (43.49%) followed by information (40.23%) and recreation (11.39%). The region wise data depicts that rural students read more than urban for education (47.50% versus 38.92%) and urban students read more than rural for information (43.04% versus 37.78%) and recreation (13.29% versus 9.72%). The students of both the categories do not have positive attitudes towards recreational reading as majority of students read for education. This could possibly be due to pressure from their parents and teachers to improve their academic performance. The steps should be taken to encourage them for

recreational reading as well. Reading is a basic skill for lifelong learning and lifelong reading can be established through leisure reading.

Subject of Interest

The subject interest of students is to mostly read about Religion (28.85%) followed by Science & Technology (18.93%), Literature (18.34%) and Politics (12.87%). While having a glimpse on the region wise data, the results bring into light that the rural students read more about Politics (13.89% versus 11.71%), Religion (30% versus 27.53%), Science & Technology (22.22% versus 15.19%), and Games & Sports (8.89% versus 6.33%) than urban students whereas urban students defeat them in reading about literature (23.74% versus 13.61%) and Business (10.44% versus 6.11%) as shown in table 8. The students show interest in different subjects, so it is duty of the *Document Selection Committee* to build a balanced collection of quality material in libraries to satisfy the reading needs of all.

Table 8: Subject of interest (Region wise)

Subject of Interest	Total	Rural	Urban
Literature	124/676 (18.34)	49/360 (13.61)	75/316 (23.74)
Politics	87/676 (12.87)	50/360 (13.89)	37/316 (11.71)
Religion	195/676 (28.85)	108/360 (30.00)	87/316 (27.53)
Science & Technology	128/676 (18.93)	80/360 (22.22)	48/316 (15.19)
Games & Sports	52/676 (7.69)	32/360 (8.89)	20/316 (6.33)
Business	55/676 (8.14)	22/360 (6.11)	33/316 (10.44)
Others	35/676 (5.18)	19/360 (5.28)	16/316 (5.06)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Conclusion

The reading habits of rural and urban college students of the 21st century show that the reading culture is more developed in urban students than rural counterparts. The need is to bridge the gaps in reading culture between regions for developing a great reading nation. The goal can only be achieved through different means; however, the *Education for all* and *Information for all* are the two main pillars of reading society that need more emphasis.

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