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Micheal Owusu-Acheaw

Koforidua Polytechnic, oamicky2004@yahoo.com

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Reading Habits Among Students and its Effect on Academic Performance: A Study of Students of Koforidua Polytechnic

BY

M. OWUSU-ACHEAW

Koforidua Polytechnic, Koforidua, Ghana

Email:oamicky2004@yahoo.com

&

AGATHA GIFTY LARSON

University of Education

Winneba, Ghana

Email:agagift2003@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The study sought to assess the reading habits among students and their effects on their academic performance. The study was conducted in Koforidua Polytechnic situated in the Eastern Region of Ghana. A questionnaire was used for the data collection. The data collected were analyzed quantitatively with the use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Figures and tables were used to present the results of findings. From the total of 1052 copies of questionnaire distributed, 1000 copies, representing 95.0% were filled and returned. The findings showed that majority of the respondents acknowledge the importance of reading, 81.9% of the respondents neither read novel nor fiction within the last two semesters while 62.0% of the respondents only read for the purpose of passing examination. The study confirmed that reading habit has influence on academic performance and there is a relationship between reading habit and academic performance. The study recommended among others that lecturers should be advised to stop providing handouts to students but rather encourage them to use the library for research and also, the current system of assessing students should be given a second thought with respect to the formulae of assessment.

Keywords: Reading Interest, Academic Performance, Academic Libraries, Students, Tertiary

Institution

Introduction

Reading habits are well-planned and deliberate pattern of study which has attained a form of consistency on the part of students toward understanding academic subjects and passing at examinations. Reading habits determine the academic achievements of students to a great extent. Both reading and academic achievements are interrelated and dependent on each other. Students often come from different environments and localities with different levels of academic achievement. Therefore, they differ in the pattern of reading habits. While some students have good reading habits, others tend to exhibit poor reading habits. Academic achievement means how much knowledge the individual has acquired from the school (Bashir & Mattoo, 2012).

A creative and pragmatic education involves the habit of personal investigation. The act of personal investigation requires self-study to be followed by self-thinking and analysis. Self-study, otherwise referred to as reading at one's own accord, requires a habit, which is known as reading habit. Reading makes way for a better understanding of one's own experiences and it can be an exciting voyage to self-discovery. "Reading habit is best formed at a young impressionable age in school, but once formed it can last one's life time (Green, 2001).

Reading and academic achievement are essential for research workers and educationists to know that every child whether he or she is gifted, average, normal or backward etc, should be educated in his or her own way but if he or she possesses good study habits, he or she can perform well in academics and in every situation. It is the reading habits which help the learner in obtaining meaningful and desirable knowledge. Good reading habits act as a strong weapon for the students to excel in life (Bashir & Mattoo, 2012).

According to Palani (2012), reading habit is an essential and important aspect for creating a literate society in this world. It shapes the personality of individuals and it helps them to develop proper thinking methods, and creates new ideas. However, the developments in the Mass Media, had continued to influence interest in reading (hard copy of literatures such as...) books, magazines and journals, among others.

Palani (2012) is of the opinion that, effective reading is important avenue of effective learning and reading is interrelated with the total educational process and hence, educational success requires successful reading habit. He believes reading is the identification of the symbols and the association of appropriate meaning with them. It requires identification and comprehension. Comprehension skills help the learner to understand the meaning of words in isolation and in context. Before the advent of the television, both the young and the old found enough time to read. Apart from teachers, other professionals used to spend their leisure time in reading both English and vernacular literature. English medium schools almost always demanded extra reading from their students. But all these have become a thing of the past. Palani (2012) further added that, nowadays, reading habit has lost its importance as both the young and the old are glued to the television. As far as educational institutions are concerned, coaching students for the examinations seems to be the be-all and end-all of our educational system.

A lot of researchers like Ogbodo (2002), Bhan & Gupta (2010), and Singh (2011) have done work on reading, especially how it affects the academic performance of students. However, most of these works pertain to the international community. Few ones such as Ward, (1997), Agbezree, (2001) conducted in Ghana were limited to primary and secondary levels of education. It is against this backdrop that it has become necessary to conduct similar study in Ghana to examine the effect of reading habits on the academic performance of students in the tertiary level of education in Ghana with particular reference to Koforidua Polytechnic.

Statement of the Problem

The problem most students have that contributes to their poor performance in tests and examinations is lack of proper reading habits. For an excellent performance, there is the need for the student to form good reading and study habits. At present, due to the influence of the mass media, people do not show much interest in reading books; magazines and journals, among others (Palani, 2012). Even the cankerworm of examination malpractices may be traceable to the prevalent poor reading interests and habits among the wide spectrum of students. In addition, the by-products of scientific and technological inventions and innovations have also contributed greatly to the dwindling fortunes of the good practice of reading among majority of the students. Today, many students prefer to watch movies and other shows on the television, listening to audio-CDs, watching video-CDs, among others (Issa, 2012). Many parents and teachers complain about students of our generation who have not developed reading habits among themselves. Officials of the West African Examinations Council and teachers of English complain of the kind of English written by today's generation of students (WAEC, 2008). The net result is the poor performance of many students in final examinations. One of the many issues confronting students nowadays is perhaps, not their inability to read but their lack of interest. From the assertion above, the work was conducted to examine the reading habits among students and the effects on their academic performance in tertiary institutions, specifically among Koforidua Polytechnic students.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the research is to assess the reading habits of students and how it affects their performance. The specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To examine the reading habits (styles) among students

- ii. To assess the effect of reading habits on students' performance
- iii. To examine the material students read when they visit the library
- iv. To ascertain why students engage in reading
- v. To ascertain the relationship between reading habit and academic performance

Research questions

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

- i. What are the reading habits among students?
- ii. Does reading habit have effect on academic performance?
- iii. Is there a relationship between (Students') reading habits and academic performance?
- iv. What kind of materials do students read when they visit the library?
- v. Why do students engage in reading?

Literature Review

Reading is the ability to understand words contained in a document and make use of the knowledge for personal growth and development (Dadzie, 2008). This implies making meaning out of recorded information either printed or non-printed in the life of an individual. People read for different reasons and purposes, some of which include for pleasure, leisure, relaxation, information and for knowledge.

Reading is the identification of the symbols and the association of appropriate meaning with them. It requires identification and comprehension. Comprehension skills help the learner to understand the meaning of words in isolation and in context (Palani, 2012). He believes reading is a process of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning and problem solving.

Reading is an essential tool for knowledge transfer and the habit of reading is an academic activity that increases skills in reading strategies. To know about the world and its environment, a child helps himself through reading books, newspapers and other magazines. 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. Children, who miss the opportunity of getting in touch with books in their early stages of life, find it hard to acquire good reading habits in their later years (Deavers, 2000). Reading is an intellectual action which is possible only if a man forms a habit of reading and practices these from childhood. Reading habits, therefore, play a very crucial role in enabling a person to achieve practical efficiency. “Laws die but books never.” Indeed, books are the most suitable medium through which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation (Issa et al, 2012).

Singh (2011) examined academic achievement and study habits of higher secondary students. The study was conducted on hundred (100) higher secondary students randomly from two higher secondary schools. The result indicates that girls and boys differ significantly in their study habits and academic achievement.

Bhan and Gupta (2010) on the other hand examined study habits and academic achievement among the students belonging to scheduled caste and non-scheduled caste group. The results revealed that sex has no significant impact on the study habits and academic achievement of students.

Higginbotham (1999), examined the reading interests of middle school-sixth, seventh, and eighth grade-students in a metropolitan, public school located in a southeastern state Atlanta, Georgia. The result of this study showed differences in interest by gender, which are congruent with many society’s

stereotypes, and females reported a stronger interest in Romance, Friendship, Animal Stories, Adventure, and Historical Fiction, while the males reported stronger preferences for the categories of Sports and Science. Also, the male respondents had a stronger preference for non-fiction than did the female respondents.

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”. There is little knowledge about the everyday reading practices of tertiary education students and how these practices affect their academic achievement. Everyday reading consists of individuals’ reading activities for a variety of purposes, such as for relaxation or information (Issa. et al, 2012). They believes that from middle childhood through adulthood, reading becomes a major component of studying, and much information learned through studying is initially acquired through reading. Thus everyday reading activities in which students engage may, considerably influence their studying skills and subsequent academic performance. There is a general sense in which one appreciates the link between good habits of reading and the academic performance of students generally, (Issa et al, 2012).

Guthrie, Benneth & McGough, (2007) believe that “reading” is the act of getting meaning from printed or written words, which is the basis for learning and one of the most important skills in everyday life. (Issa et al 2012) further explain that reading is usually associated with books as only the written words provide a complete picture of the act of reading. It means 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. Thus, reading provides the key to all forms of information necessary for our day-to-day survival and growth.

It follows then that if you are in the practice of reading regularly without thinking about it because of the permanence of its continuity, one can conclude that good reading habits have been formed. This is because a habit is formed unconsciously when an individual does something many times, and becomes part and parcel of such a person's life. Incidentally, many students do not belong in the category of those with good reading habits. Their poor or bad reading habits could partly be held responsible for general poor performance that the school systems usually record in both internal and external examinations (Issa et al, 2012).

Perhaps, due to lack of good reading habits among students, academic performance with respect to their examination result has been dismal nowadays creating a great source of worry and concern for all stakeholders in the educational sub-sector (Issa et al, 2012). The setting of "crashed programmes," quite prevalent in the school systems today has not been supportive in the development of the good practices of reading. Thus, the enthusiasm associated with the urge to engage in reading practices voluntarily, pleasurably and extensively is almost nearly absent among the greater number of students in the schooling system today (Issa et al, 2012).

According to (Ogbodo, 2010) Parents send their children to school to learn. In the school, children are exposed to various experiences which influence their behaviour. Therefore, learning is a change in behaviour. Such a change is seen in their mental reasoning, physical growth, manipulative skills and development of values and interests. The change may be easy or difficult depending on the home and the school environment.

Ogbodo (2010) further identifies three main types of reading habits. These are Hobby, Recreational and Concentration. A hobby is an activity one does because one derives some joy and satisfaction from doing it. After formal education's attainment, some people like reading as their hobby. Its purpose is to widen the reader's horizon areas like educational, religious, political, economic, current affairs, fiction and non-fiction. The practice of reading as a hobby helps one to be versatile in knowledge in many areas and the person can discuss issues knowledgeably with others.

Fundamentally, reading for recreation or relaxation is very common among the educated elite. People who have gainful employment spend the whole day in the offices trying to solve problems related to the jobs they do. When they come back from work, they normally desire a change by reading books, newspapers and other written materials which are different and of interest to them. Students should be encouraged to read magazines instead of reading textbooks all the time. Students, who read magazines at intervals learn to relax, cool their brain and avoid mental fatigue and also makes them live a disciplined life in the school. In most cases, its effect in inducing sleep and rest after tedious reading in the classroom or the library adds to good health habits. The concentration reading is the most important type of reaching the desired outcome. It is the bedrock and the result oriented reading which makes for achievement (Ogbodo, 2010).

Methodology

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 was of the opinion that 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 effected 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

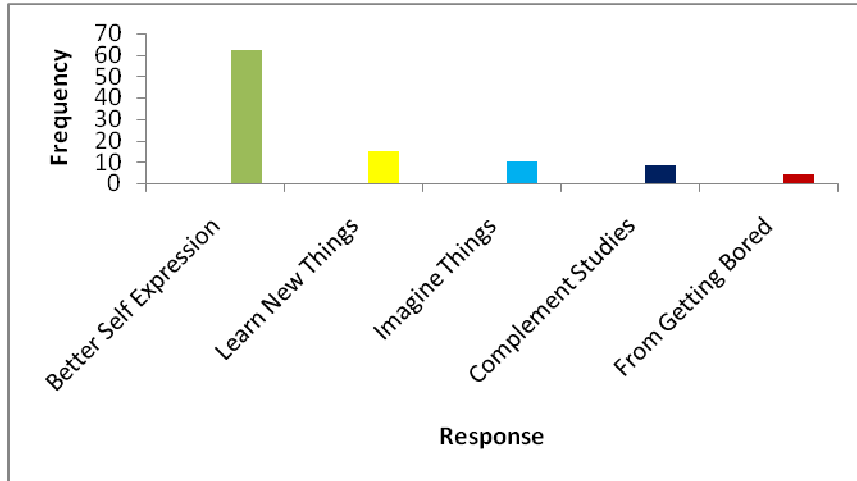


Figure 1: Importance of Reading Novel or Fiction

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.

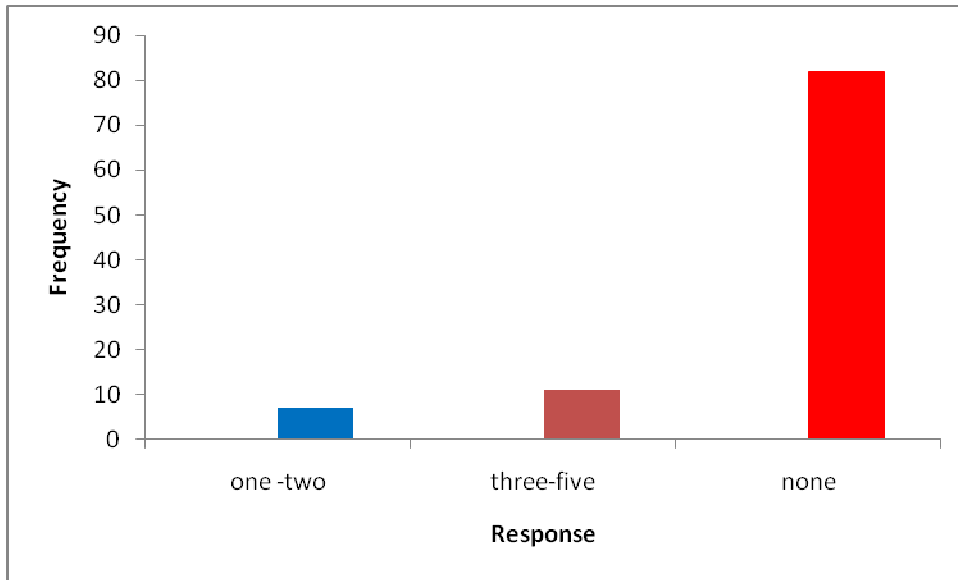


Figure 2: Number of Novels or Fiction Read

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.

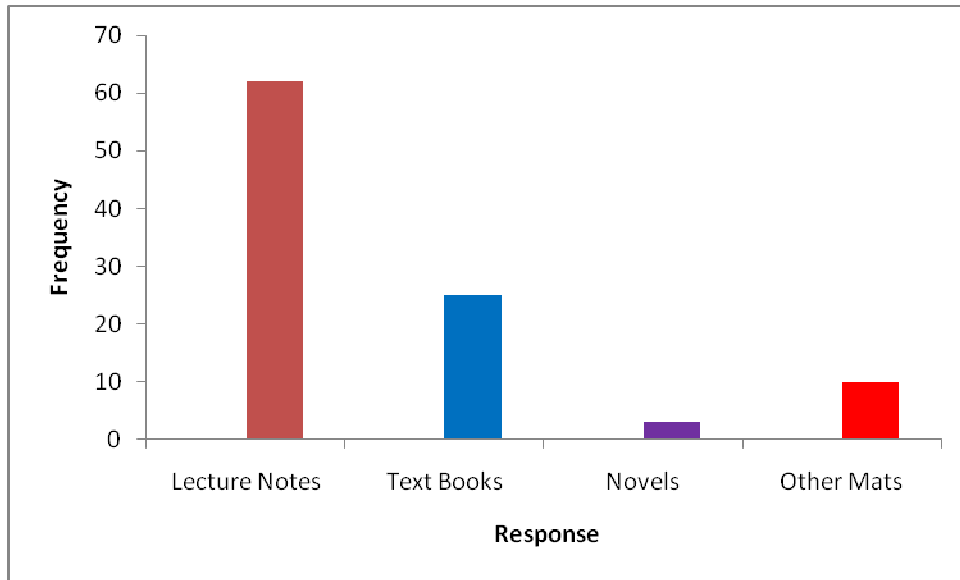


Figure 3: Materials Read at Library

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 text books all the time. This is because students, who read magazines at intervals learn to relax, cool their brain and avoid mental fatigue.

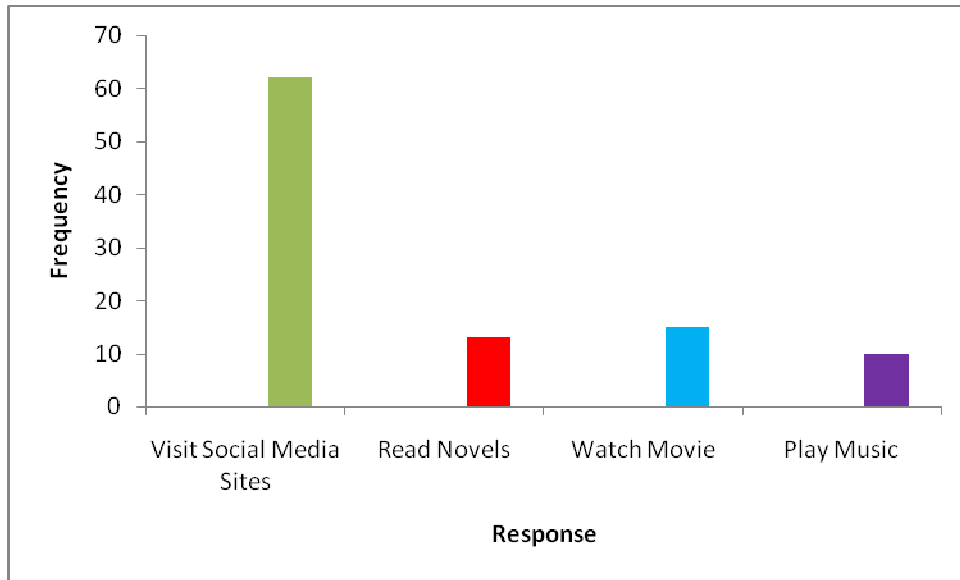


Figure 4: Leisure Time

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.

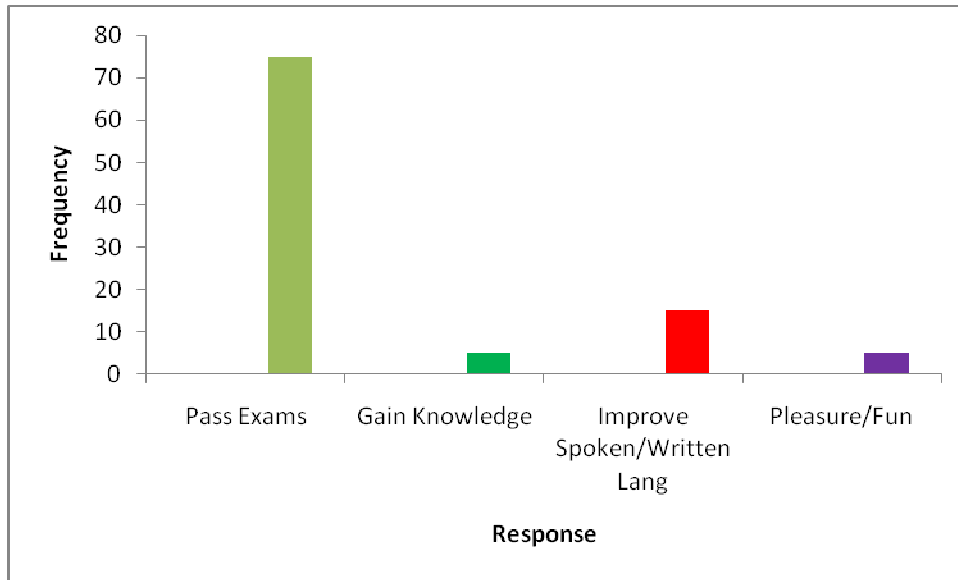


Figure 5: Engagement in Reading

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.

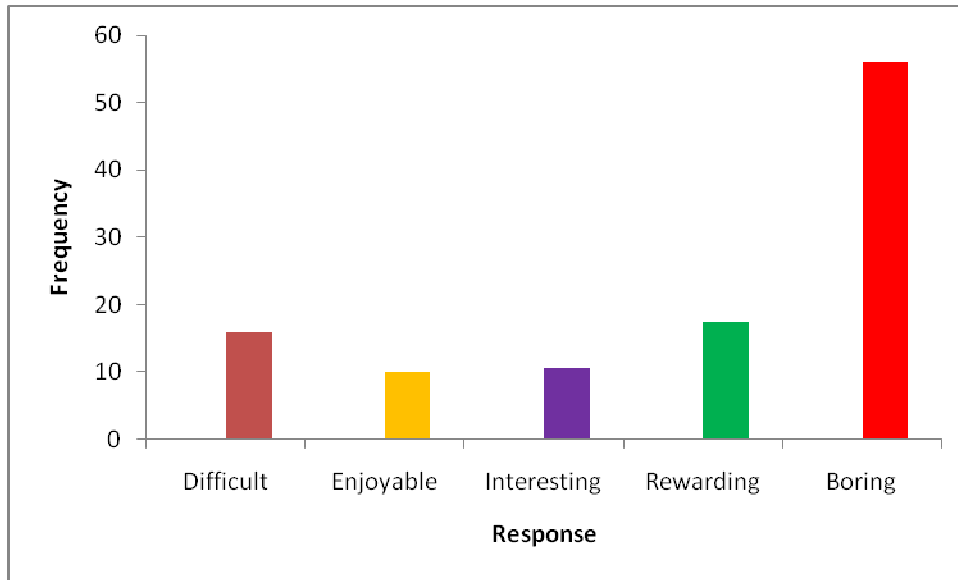


Figure 6: Perception about Reading

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.

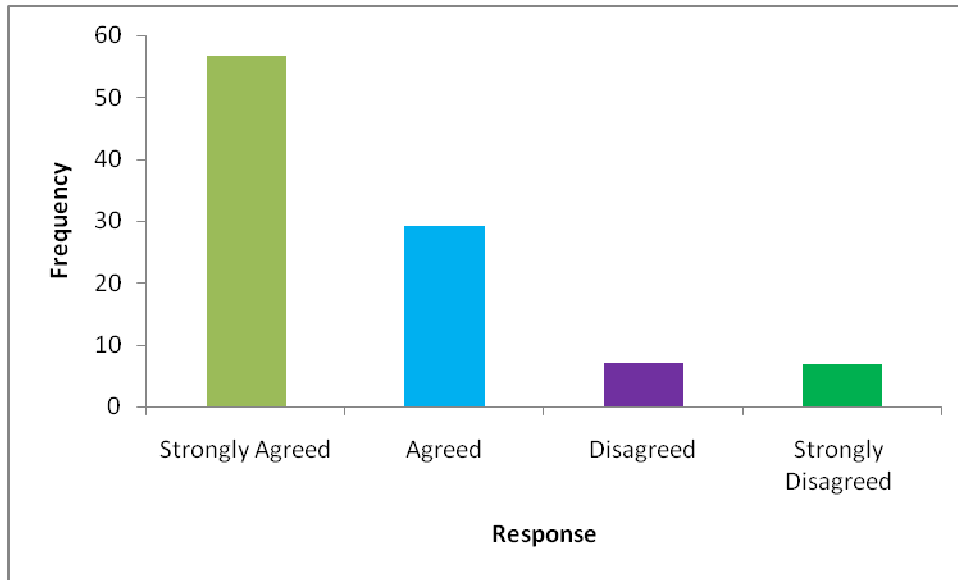


Figure 7: Influence of Reading on Academic Performance

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.

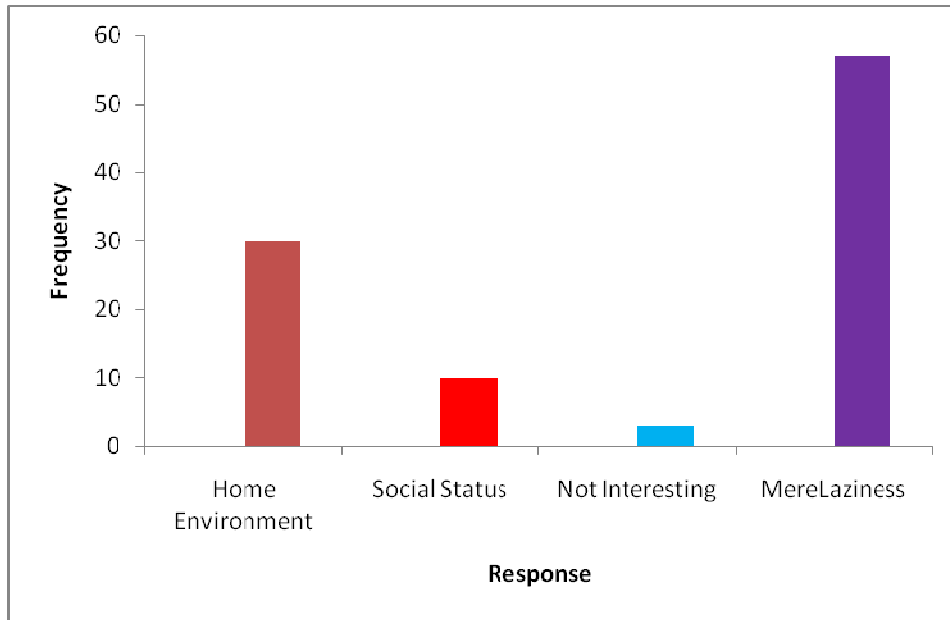


Figure 8: Hindrance to Reading Habits

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.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that 62.5% of the respondents acknowledge the importance of reading and said reading helps them to express themselves better. However, the study also found that 81.9% had not read a novel or fiction within the two preceding semesters and only 18% said they had read a novel or fiction within the same period. The study further confirmed that 75.0% respondents engage in reading just to pass an examination. It was also confirmed in the study that 62.0% of the respondents visit the library to read lecture notes, 25.0% to read textbooks and only 3.0% visit the library to read novels or fiction. The study revealed that majority of the respondents had the view that reading habits have effect on academic performance and that there is a direct relationship between reading habits and academic performance. The study further found out that laziness is one of the basic hindrances to reading among the respondents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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.

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.

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 handouts for students and they will complement it by further research in the library.

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.

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 in the near future.

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