

Socio-Demographic Variables and Students' Reading Habits in Secondary Schools in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Socio-demographic variables and students' reading habits were explored using respondents from public secondary schools in Calabar education zone of Cross River State. Research design adopted for this study was Ex-post facto. The population of the study was 13,250 students. A sample of 703 respondents was selected for the study, from 24 public schools in the study area using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Three hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The instrument used in collecting data for the study was questionnaire. Face validity was established by three experts. The reliability coefficient of 0.76 was established through Cronbach alpha reliability method. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and independent t-test analysis were the statistical tools used to test the hypotheses under study. The result of the analysis revealed that, gender, age and parental level of education significantly influenced the reading habit of secondary school students in Calabar education zone. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that irrespective of family size, students should be given conducive atmosphere to read and avoid distractions from family members. Also parents should invest in the children's educational advancement by purchasing reading textbook that is age appropriate and gender balance.

Keywords: reading, habit, socio-demographic, students, variables

Introduction

Human beings have been reading since ages, and words of knowledge have been passed on through generations. The reading habit influences the promotion of one's personal development in particular and social progress in general. Regular and systematic reading sharpens the intellect, refines emotions, elevates tastes and provides perspectives for one's living and thereby prepares a person for an effective participation in life. Reading fires the imagination of a human person. It adds new insight to eyes and new wisdom to the mind. The individual who reads well have at his command a means for widening his mental horizons and for multiplying his opportunities of success. Reading is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth.

The definition of reading has undergone many changes. In the past, reading simply meant to extract visual information from any given codes or systems. However, reading became much more complex and involved the understanding of a whole text composed of written signs. According to Alex (2011), "reading is a process of thinking, recalling and relating concepts under the functioning of written words". Reading is an art of interpreting printed and written words. Alex (2011) further described 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". Reading is the ability to recognize, 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.

Being successful in school requires good reading habits. Habit is the schedule of a person; what he or she does in every situation. A habit may be good or poor. It does not get affected by the changing of place or schedule. A habit is also something that is done on a regular, planned basis that is not relegated to a second place or optional place in one's life. It is simply done, no reservations, no excuses, and no expectations (Korenman, Miller & Sjaastad, 2005). They further state that reading habit is buying out a dedicated scheduled and un-interrupted time to apply one's self to the task of reading. Good reading is not just an important professional skill, it is also a way to enjoy informative, creative, and inspiring works of literature that enrich life's experiences. Like any skill worth mastering, a reading habit requires time and dedication to develop.

It is therefore of interest to understand what characteristics will make one student branch out and read resources, while another one might not. To encourage students' formation of good reading habits, it is important to understand what factors encourage

students to seek out and read. Demographics may yield important clues as to what factors contribute to students' reading habits. cursory observations indicate that there may be a correlation between certain socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, the home as well as school background on students' reading habits. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to find out if socio-demographic variables such as gender, age and parent's level of education are significant factors in the reading habits of students in secondary schools in Calabar education zone, Cross River State.

Reading habit is best formed at a young impressionable age in school; once it is formed, it can last one's life time. According to Wagner (2002), the activity of reading is regarded as a habit when it is repeatedly carried out. In measurable terms, reading habit is often considered in terms of the amount of materials being read, the frequency of reading as well as the average time spent on reading; this habit can be cultivated. Reading, which is a long term habit starting with the very early ages, is the prominent gateway to the knowledge room. It can be assumed as a practice that assists individuals to gain creativeness and develop their critical thinking capacities. In this sense, reading habit is an important tool for the development of personalities and mental capacities of individuals. 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.

Chettri and Rout (2013) believed that there would naturally be differences in interests between individuals of different age and gender, and would be greatly influenced by internal factors such as the home, motivation and attitude as well as external factors such as peers, schools, teachers, and the library facilities available to the individuals. Reading interests often refer to the selection of subject matter or preference for a genre of literature being read. It is therefore often equated that an individual has developed a reading interests when such activity is repeatedly carried out voluntarily for leisure. This habit and interests could be nurtured at an early age.

Parveen, Noor-UL-Amin and Nazir (2013) noted that parental educational level or attainment has been found to be significantly related to the educational attainment of their children in both rural and national samples. The study established that poor girl students may face conditions in their homes that leave them with less time and energy for studies. This study established that poor girl students are likely to have parents, family members and neighbours who are also less educated. Such students are not able to get much guidance for their education in their homes.

Researches have shown the importance of strong family school relations. Threlfall, Seay and Kohl, (2013), and Hafiz, Tehsin, Malik, Muhammah (2013) point out that parents have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that their children are at school and their school work is done. However, these authors note many parents have never attended school and they cannot read, write or count properly. This may affect their children's reading habit and the parents cannot read for them at home. Eneji (2013) concurs with this when they state that children in rural areas and in poorer homes drop out earlier compared to their more affluent counterparts. The parents in this study purported that: we do not have time or ability to help in homework of our children. We are incapacitated; we did not go to school ourselves. Sometimes we are too busy trying to make ends meet for our families. Time is also a serious challenge to us; it is the responsibility of the teachers to help students with homework since they are paid for that. Some parents think that their responsibility as parents is to provide food on the table.

According to Chinyoka (2014), parental attitudes towards school may lead to high or low level support they give to their children. In Zimbabwe, parents are responsible for assisting their children when doing homework. This simply means that the level of education of the parents affects the way they assist their children and this may have an adverse effect on the child's performance. The attitudes and behaviour of the significant others of the child such as parents, siblings, relatives and peers have been seen to affect the academic attitude of the girl child. These significant others are also the first socializing agents who affect how the girl child react to life situations and perceive academic achievement; the family background plays a pivotal role in building the character of the child and in enhancing academic performance.

Statement of the problems

The desire to read for knowledge acquisition has significantly diminished. The experience and liberation of the mind that comes as a result of reading for leisure are lost to the present generation of youths who are indeed the future leaders of the nation. It is certain that if one do not read well and prepare well, one cannot do well in examinations and other societal engagements. It becomes imperative therefore to ascertain the likely reasons for the poor reading habits observed among secondary school students in Calabar education zone. In other words, is there any relationship between demographic variables: gender, age, parent's level of education and reading habit of secondary school students? It is in the light of this that the present study investigates socio-demographic variables and how they influence reading habits of secondary school students in Calabar education zone.

Purpose of the study

1. To find out if student gender influences reading habit of secondary school students in Calabar education zone.
2. To examine the extent to which students' age influences reading habit of secondary school students in Calabar education zone.
3. To determine how parent's level of education influences reading habit of secondary school students in Calabar education zone.

Research questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does gender influence the reading habit of secondary school students in Calabar education zone?
2. To what extent does age influence reading habit of secondary school students in Calabar education zone?
3. How does parent's level of education influence reading habit of secondary school students in Calabar education zone?

Hypotheses

Ho1: Gender has no significant influence on the reading habits of secondary school students.

Ho2: Age has no significant influence on the reading habits of secondary school students.

Ho3: Parent's level of education has no significant influence on the reading habits of secondary school students in Calabar education zone.

Methodology

This study was carried out in secondary schools in Calabar education zone, Cross River State. The population of the study was 13,250 students. A sample of 703 respondents was selected for the study using purposive and simple random sampling techniques, from 24 public schools in the study area. The sampling techniques adopted are the Purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purpose sampling technique was used in selecting schools to ensure that those in the core rural areas are also considered. Simple random sampling technique was used to select students of JSS1 to SS2. A research instrument titled: Socio-Demographic and Reading Habits Questionnaire (SDRHQ), was used to gather data for the study. The validity of the instrument was determined by three experts in Test and Measurement. The reliability coefficient was found to be 0.76. This shows that the reliability coefficient were high enough and reliable. The data gathered was analysed using t-test and ANOVA.

Presentation of results

Ho1: Gender has no significant influence on the reading habits of secondary school students.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is gender (male and female) while the dependent variable is reading habits. Independent t-test analysis was adopted to test this hypothesis. The result is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of gender on secondary school students' reading habits (N=703)

Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	t-value
Male	359	67.37	4.27	-2.250*
Positive	344	66.63	4.49	

* Significant at .05 level, df = 701

The result in Table 1 revealed that the calculated t-value of 2.250 was higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 698 of degree of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis that gender has no significant influence on secondary school students' reading habits was rejected. This result therefore implied that, gender has a significant influence on secondary school students' reading habits.

Ho2: Age has no significant influence on the reading habits of secondary school students.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is age (below 10, 10-15 and 15 and above); while dependent variable is reading habits. To test this hypothesis, reading habits were compared based on age using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results of the analysis are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Summary of data and one-way ANOVA of the influence of age on reading habits (N=703)

Age	N	\bar{x}	SD		
Below 10	217	66.37	5.51		
10-15	267	67.17	3.71		
15 and above	219	67.43	3.81		
Total	703	67.00	4.39		

Source of variance	SS	Df	Ms	F	Sig of F
Between group	135.275	2	67.637	3.538*	.000
Within group	1338.713	700	19.120		
Total	13518.987	702			

*Significant at P< .05 level, critical F=3.00, df= 2, 700.

The result on table 2 revealed that the calculated t-value of 3.538 was higher than the critical F-value of 3.00 at .05 level of significance, with 2 and 700 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result therefore implied that age significantly influence students' reading habits.

Since age has significant influence on students' reading habits, a post hoc analysis was employed using Fishers' Least Significant Difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 3.

Table 3: Fishers' Least Significant Difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis of the influence of Age on students' reading habits LSD

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
				.046
1.00	2.00	-.79988(*)	.39965	
	3.00	-1.06513(*)	.41882	.011
2.00	1.00	.79988(*)	.39965	.046
	3.00	-.26525(*)	.39864	.506
3.00	1.00	1.06513(*)	.41882	.011
	2.00	.26525(*)	.39864	.506

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The result of the analysis in table 3 shows that secondary school students whose age is below 10 are significantly different in their reading habits from those whose age is either 10-15 or 15 and above. Also secondary school students whose age is 10-15 are significantly different from those who are 15 and above in reading habits.

Ho3: Parent's level of education has no significant influence on the reading habits of secondary school students in Calabar education zone.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is parent's educational level (primary, secondary and tertiary); while the dependent variable is reading habits. To test this hypothesis, reading habits were compared using One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), based on educational qualification of parents with primary, secondary and tertiary qualifications. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of data and one-way ANOVA of the influence of educational qualification of parent on reading habits (N=703)

Educational qualification of parent	N	\bar{x}	SD		
Primary	249	66.76	2.91		
Secondary	363	65.66	4.27		
Tertiary	91	73.03	3.02		
Total	703	67.00	4.39		
Source of variance	SS	Df	Ms	F	Sig of F
Between group	3979.424	2	1989.712	146.002*	.000
Within group	9539.563	700	13.628		
Total	13518.987	702			

*Significant at $P < .05$ level, critical $F=3.00$, $df= 2, 700$.

The result of the analysis in table 4 showed that calculated F-value of 146.002 is higher than the critical F-value of 3.00 at .05 level of significance with 2 and 700 degree of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result therefore implied that educational qualification of parent has a significant influence on students' reading habits.

Since educational qualification of parent had a significant influence on students' reading habits, a post hoc analysis was carried out using Fishers' Least Significant Difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 5.

Table 5: Fishers' Least Significant Difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis of the influence of educational qualification of parent on students' reading habits

LSD

(I) Parent Education	(J) Parent Education	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
1.00	2.00	1.10465(*)	.30377	.000
	3.00	-6.26991(*)	.45220	.000
2.00	1.00	-1.10465(*)	.30377	.000
	3.00	-7.37456(*)	.43278	.000
3.00	1.00	6.26991(*)	.45220	
	2.00	7.37456(*)	.43278	

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The result of the LSD indicates that there are significant differences based on the qualifications of the parents.

Discussion of the findings

The findings in this aspect of the study indicated that, gender had significant influence on secondary school students' reading habits. The finding of this study agrees with that of Bhan and Gupta (2010) who examined reading habits and academic achievement among the students belonging to scheduled caste and non-scheduled caste group. The result revealed that sex has no significant impact on the reading habits and academic achievement of students.

The result of this aspect of the study indicated that, age significantly influenced secondary school students' reading habits. The findings is in line with the view of Chetti and Rout (2013) who observed that there would naturally be differences in reading interest between individual of different age. Reading which a long-term habit is starting with the very early ages, is the prominent gateway to the knowledge room. It can be assumed as a practice that assists individuals to gain creativeness and develops their critical thinking capacities. In this sense, reading habit is an important tool for the development of personalities and mental capacities of individuals. 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.

The result of third facet of the study indicated that, educational level of parent significantly influences secondary school students' reading habits. The findings are in line with the view of Parveen (2013) who noted that parental educational level has been found to be significantly related to the educational attainment of their children in both rural and national samples. The study established that poor girl students may face conditions in their homes that leave them with less time and energy for studies. This study established that poor girl students are likely to have parents, family members and neighbours who are also less educated. Such students are not able to get much guidance for their education in their homes.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it is concluded that socio-demographic variables including gender, age and educational qualification of the parents have influence on the reading habits of the students.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this research, the recommendations suggested are as follows:

1. Authors of secondary curriculum text should take into cognizance gender interest in reading to bridge the gender.
2. Students' age factor should be taken into consideration in the choice of reading material.
3. Parents should ensure that their children read even if they are not literate.

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