



Original Research

Exploring University Students' Reading Culture: Practices, Challenges, and Institutional Support

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the practice and challenges of university students' reading culture and the roles played by their universities in promoting the culture of reading. The study focused on graduating class students of five selected universities, namely, Jimma University, Welkite University, Mettu University, Wollega University, and Ambo University. Data were collected from 198 (Jimma University (59), Welkite University (34), Mettu University (36), Wollega University (19), and Ambo University (50) sociology graduating class students from the five universities. Moreover, data were also collected from 10 key informants (five ELIC coordinators and five library workers). Two instruments, namely a questionnaire and an interview, were used to collect data. The data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The findings of this study showed that a significant number of the students (49% and 35.35%) read for exam purposes and academic purposes, respectively. This implies that the magnitude of practicing reading different books is low. In order to minimize the hampering factors and to promote the students' reading culture, some possible solutions were suggested as recommendations.

Article Information

Article History:

Received: 02-04-2025

Revised: 26-05-2025

Accepted: 30-06-2025

Keywords:

Reading Culture,
Reading Society,
Informed Society*Corresponding
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INTRODUCTION

The habit of doing something often refers to the number of things being done, the frequency of something that we do, and the average time we spend on what we do (Chettri, 2013). This means habit is related to a hobby that is concerned with something that someone does regularly without any more concentration and attention, and it is difficult to stop doing it. Accordingly, reading habits are related to the way people read, the extent to which they read, the time when they read, and the type of materials they read.

Reading is a lifelong activity; it is a tool through which we can free ourselves from ignorance, disease, and backwardness because a

- lot of information is contained in books (Okebukola et al., 2013). Moreover, reading is an important part of modern education, and it is also useful for people to understand other cultures and ways of thinking. It is also suggested that anybody who likes reading is a saved person—saved from ignorance, boredom, and loneliness (Ruterana, 2012).

Statement of the problem

“For a reading culture to be possible, reading must be part of all aspects of life instead of being just certain parts such as school or work” (Magara & Batambuze, 2005). However, most parents,

especially in Ethiopia, do not read different books (reading materials) for their children. They simply provide support when their children study school courses for exam purposes. Similarly, beginning from lower classes, teachers at school are also supposed to play their roles in nurturing their students' reading culture by using different mechanisms like establishing reading clubs, creating awareness for the students on the importance of reading, etc. Nevertheless, on the teachers' side, the work done on promoting their students' reading habits is not satisfactory.

Some of the factors that contribute to the decline of reading culture are unfamiliarity with reading on the part of many children, inadequate development of reading skills among children, lack of continuity with reading programs on the part of the teachers, language interference, etc. (Okebukola et al., 2013). Moreover, Greaney (1996) suggests that lack of reading materials, absence of light, the burden of a number of daily household tasks, and child labor practices are the common factors that affect students' reading culture. Bus (2003) also argues that parents' negative attitude towards reading directly influences children's reading habits.

Regarding this, a local study conducted by Rukya (2016) on the title "Reading Habits of Secondary School Teachers" focused on an exploration of the reading habits of high school teachers. Fifty-four teachers from five schools who teach in different schools in Addis Ababa and Dessie participated in this study. Data were collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The result of the study showed that the reading habits of the high school teachers were poorly developed. This study is different from the current study in that it focused on teachers, whereas the current study focused on students. Most of the studies conducted on the issues related to reading culture were conducted in countries other than Ethiopia. As the reading culture of one country is different from the reading culture of another country, it is difficult to say that their findings also show the situation in Ethiopia before conducting research. On the other hand, as far as the

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., April. –June 2025, 14(2), 118-128 researchers' reading is concerned, only one study focused on the issue of reading culture, while many studies that the researchers are familiar with were conducted on students' reading comprehension. The local study, as explained above, was a small-scale study that focused only on 54 teachers, and the focus of the study was teachers, whereas the current study attempted to focus on university students on a relatively large scale. This study, therefore, tried to investigate the practice and challenges of university students' reading culture and the roles played by their universities in promoting the culture of reading.

Research questions

Therefore, the following research questions were set to achieve the main objective.

Do university students have a habit of reading different books?

For what purpose do university students read books?

What are the likely problems/activities that hinder university students' reading culture?

Are there reading programs employed in the universities to promote free voluntary reading among the students?

Is there any awareness-raising program given by the universities to students on the importance of developing a reading culture?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design of the study

This study tried to investigate the practice and challenges of university students' reading culture and the roles played by their universities in promoting the culture of reading. The data from questionnaires were analyzed by using descriptive statistics such as percentages and mean values, whereas the qualitative data that were collected through interviews were described using descriptive methods. Accordingly, a descriptive survey was used as a design for the study.

Population and sample

The study targeted graduating class students from five selected universities, namely, Jimma

University, Welkite University, Mettu University, Wollega University, and Ambo University. The five universities are selected to increase the number of respondents to make the data valid. There are many colleges in each university, and it is not possible to include all colleges in the study. Thus, the researchers randomly selected one common college, the Social Science College. Moreover, to make the sample size manageable for data collection, the researchers first identified the common departments of the selected colleges across the selected universities, and they randomly selected one department (the sociology department) from the common ones. Accordingly, data were collected from 198 graduating class students of Jimma University (59), Welkite University (34), Mettu University (36), Wollega University (19), and Ambo University (50), and 10 key informants (5 ELIC coordinators and 5 library workers) from the five universities.

Data collection instruments

To collect data for the study, two instruments, namely a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, were used.

Questionnaire

Data were mainly gathered through questionnaires from the students. This is because questionnaires are very important in that the inflow of data is quick and from many people (Gillham, 2007). The researchers used closed-ended questions. This is because closed-ended questions provide 'ready-made' categories within which respondents reply to the questions asked by the researcher (Kumar, 1996).

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were used for selected students and the key informants (five selected library workers and five ELIC coordinators). In the interview conducted with the students, three universities, namely Jimma University, Ambo University, and Wollega University, were

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., April. –June 2025, 14(2), 118-128
randomly selected because it was not manageable to interview students from all selected universities, whereas, for the key informants, the selection was not needed as their number was manageable. Five students were purposely selected from each of the three universities for the interview. With the assumption that they could give reliable responses, the students whose rank ranged from one to five based on their cumulative results were selected. Accordingly, the interview data were collected from fifteen (15) students and ten (10) key informants.

Data analysis

The data obtained from the respondents through the instruments were analyzed using mixed methods. The descriptive method was used to analyze the qualitative data, whereas the quantitative data were reported using percentages and mean values.

Ethical Considerations

To maintain the anonymity of the respondents, they were told not to write their names on the papers, and they were also informed that the data that would be collected from them would be used only for research purposes. The students, therefore, agreed to take part in the process of data collection. Generally, in these ways, care was taken to address ethical issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Analysis and presentation of data obtained through a questionnaire

This section deals with the analysis of the students' responses obtained through a questionnaire about their reading culture. The data were collected to answer four research questions related to the practice of reading books, the types of reading materials used by the students, the purpose of their reading, and the likely problems that affect their reading. Thus, the data were presented and analyzed in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean values of students' Practice of reading books

S.No	Descriptive Statistics	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Textbooks/handout	198	2.00	4.00	3.2172	.48144
2	Novel/Fiction	198	1.00	4.00	2.6010	.80443
3	Newspapers/Magazines	198	1.00	3.00	2.1212	.81574
4	Books	198	2.00	4.00	3.1566	.51449
5	Health-related books	198	2.00	4.00	2.3990	.66638
6	Religion books	198	2.00	4.00	3.3434	.60726
7	History books	198	1.00	3.00	2.3990	.66638
8	Poetry	198	1.00	4.00	2.3939	.80378
9	Encyclopedia	198	1.00	4.00	2.0909	.94617
10	Dictionaries	198	3.00	4.00	3.5000	.50127
11	Art books	198	1.00	3.00	1.4949	.66644
12	Politics books	198	1.00	3.00	1.7020	.64288
13	Journals	198	1.00	4.00	2.0051	.89838
14	Philosophy	198	1.00	3.00	1.6061	.66559
15	Biographies	198	1.00	3.00	1.8081	.74964

In order to assess the practice of students' reading habits, 15 different types of books are included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire is answered by the students, and the responses are presented in [Table 2](#).

The mean values of 3.2172, 3.1566, and 3.3434 in the above table, respectively, show that the students read textbooks, reference books, and religious books only sometimes. Moreover, they rarely read books like novels/fiction,

newspapers/magazines, health-related books, history books, poetry, encyclopedias, and journals. The mean value obtained for each of them ranges between 2.0 and 2.6, and this confirms that the students rarely read the books. On the other hand, the students' responses indicated that they never read books like art books, politics books, philosophy, or biographies. This (the report) has been confirmed by the mean values that range between 1 and 1.8.

Table 2*Frequency and mean values of students' responses on the purpose of reading.*

SN	Reading purpose	N	Percent
1	For pleasure	5	2.52
2	For academic purposes (Assignments, exams, etc.)	167	84.35
3	For knowledge and skills	11	5.55
4	For survival	2	1.0
5	For information	13	6.56

As indicated in [Table 2](#), five different reading purposes were included in the students' questionnaire to identify the purpose for which the

students read. Accordingly, the students' responses on the reasons why they read books are put in

percentages in the table, and the analysis is presented below.

The data indicates that a very insignificant number of the respondents (students) read books for pleasure (2.52%), for knowledge and skills (5.55%), for survival (1.0%), and for information

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., April. –June 2025, 14(2), 118-128 (6.56%). On the other hand, a very significant number of the respondents (84.35%) responded that they read for academic purposes. This implies that many of the students have only a single reading purpose, and this also limits the types of materials they read.

Table 3

Mean values of factors that affect students' Practice of reading books

Descriptive Statistics						
SN	Factors that affect reading habits	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Watching film	198	2.00	4.00	3.2929	.47799
2	Chatting through a social network	198	2.00	4.00	3.8364	.61832
3	Playing a video game	198	2.00	4.00	2.9343	.81902
4	Sleeping	198	1.00	4.00	2.8586	.75414
5	Joke with friends	198	2.00	4.00	2.5960	.66713
6	Lack of interest	198	2.00	4.00	3.2374	.44972
7	Inadequate reading materials	198	2.00	4.00	3.1919	.49724
8	Distraction from television	198	1.00	4.00	2.0202	.82450
9	Household task	198	1.00	3.00	1.4121	.64749
10	Absence of a reading club in your university	198	2.00	4.00	3.7899	.59388
11	Absence of a reading club in your previous school	198	1.00	4.00	3.8677	.53702

To investigate the factors that impede students' reading habits, eleven (11) common factors are included in the students' questionnaire. Accordingly, the students responded to the items, and the responses are analyzed and presented below.

Table 3 indicates that factors like chatting through social networks and the absence of reading clubs in their previous school and in their university are identified as the factors that affect the students' reading culture too much. This is indicated by the mean values of 3.8364 for chatting through social networks, 3.7899 for the absence of a reading club in the students' university, and 3.8677 for the absence of a reading club in the students' previous school.

Moreover, the students' responses show that factors such as watching films, playing video games, sleeping, joking with friends, lack of interest, inadequate reading materials, and destruction of television affect the students' reading habits to some extent. Regarding "household tasks," on the other hand, the students responded that they never affect their reading habits.

Analysis and presentation of data obtained from key informants through interviews

In order to develop students' reading habits, different awareness creation activities, like reading clubs, creating a university-wide reading day, teacher role models, book fair week, encouragement from family and friends, and having

a library day, should be performed by the concerned bodies. To check if the activities are being performed by the concerned bodies in Ethiopian universities to create their students' awareness of the importance of developing reading habits and to answer the research question stated as, "Is there any awareness-raising program given by the universities to students on the importance of developing reading culture?", interviews were conducted with the five key informants (ELIC coordinators) and five randomly selected library workers. Accordingly, the five ELIC coordinators said that there is no reading habit-related issue included in the ELIC program. As a result, they are not working to develop students' awareness of reading culture. Most of them said that developing students' reading habits through establishing reading clubs and creating a university-wide reading day should have been part of the ELIC program. They added that they will include the issue in their plan to make it a part of the activities they perform under the program.

To obtain library-related data, an interview was conducted with five librarians. They were asked if there are book fair weeks, tent activities, and library day programs in their universities to motivate students to read. They said that such activities are not common in their universities. The respondents reported that they do not have activities to be done outside their library apart from serving students in the library when they go there. The respondents did not deny the importance of such practice to develop students' reading culture, and they said that they would take it as a good experience.

Analysis and presentation of data obtained from selected students through interviews

The purpose of conducting interviews with students was to substantiate the data obtained from all the students through questionnaires and from the key informants through interviews. For this purpose, seven interview questions related to their family educational background, the role of their families in motivating them to read, the availability of reading programs in their previous school and their current university, and the factors that hinder their reading

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., April. –June 2025, 14(2), 118-128
culture were prepared for the students. The responses, therefore, are summarized and presented below.

Regarding the availability of reading programs both in the students' previous school and their current university, the students reported that there are no reading programs in either place. This result is aligned with results from students' questionnaires. This implies that neither schools nor universities are nurturing students' reading habits. This may be the reason for the student's reading habits deteriorating. In addition to this, the students during the interview reported that using social media, watching movies, a shortage of reading materials, and a lack of role models are the factors that affect their reading culture.

Discussions

Do university students have a habit of reading different books?

Reading is a source of information, and it helps people to increase their knowledge and ways of thinking. According to [Bell \(1998\)](#), extensive reading fosters the reader's personal, moral, and intellectual growth. In order to get these benefits, readers should choose to read during their leisure time and make reading a lifelong habit. One of the research questions of this study, as mentioned above, was to assess whether university students have a habit of reading different books. To answer the research questions, data were collected from the graduating class students of the sociology department through a closed-ended questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the result of the analysis indicated that the students read only academic-related books like textbooks/handouts, reference books, and dictionaries. Moreover, the result indicated that the students have the habit of reading religious books too. Regarding the other books, like novels/fiction, newspapers/magazines, health-related books, history books, poetry, encyclopedias, journals, art books, politics books, philosophy, and biographies, on the other hand, the findings showed that the students' habit of reading them is low. This implies

Guta & Gemechis

that the students rarely have the habit of reading different books that are not related to their discipline. This shows that the student's reading habits are poor because reading habits can be developed by engaging in reading a variety of books (Carbo & Cole, 1995). It is not in line with the fact that reading culture evolves when an individual habitually and regularly reads different books and other information materials (Gbadamosi, 2007).

For what purpose do university students read books?

Reading can take place for different purposes, among which reading for pleasure, reading for academic purposes, reading for knowledge and skills, reading for survival, reading for information, and reading for exams are worth mentioning. One who regularly attempts to read for all these purposes by default has good reading habits. Reading takes place both in formal and informal settings based on the purpose of reading. In order to assess the purpose for which university students read and to decide the status of their reading habits, the six purposes of reading were included in the students' questionnaire. Accordingly, the findings of this study on this issue show that the majority of the students (49%) read for exam purposes. Moreover, an almost significant number (35.35%) of the respondents read for academic purposes. On the other hand, a very insignificant number of students read for other purposes (for pleasure (2.52%), for knowledge and skills (5.55%), for survival (1.0%), and for information (6.56%). This implies that most students read only to pass exams, and this is a forced and conditional reading. Failure to read different books as part of our regular work limits our reading purpose. This is contrary to the idea stated by Otieno and Hesbon (2021), as the habit of reading is as important as any other hobby. Thus, it is possible to understand from these findings that the students have a poor reading culture. This finding aligns with the findings of the study conducted on Kenyan students that they have no good reading culture, and the absence of a

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., April. –June 2025, 14(2), 118-128
reading culture has hindered them from appreciating the value of books (Odini, 2002).

What are the likely problems/activities that hinder university students' reading culture?

Non-availability of libraries, absence of necessary textbooks, lack of education and motivation from parents, and the unprecedented rise in the price of books are among other factors that negatively affect the reading habit in Nigerian secondary schools (Olu, 2017). Among the many factors, some common factors are included in the students' questionnaires to check if they hinder Ethiopian university students' habit of reading. Accordingly, factors like chatting through social networks and the absence of reading clubs in their previous school and in their university are identified as the factors that affect the students' reading culture too much. Moreover, the students' responses show that factors such as watching films, playing video games, sleeping, joking with friends, lack of interest, inadequate reading materials, and destruction of television affect the students' reading habits to some extent. This finding aligns with the findings of the study conducted on Nigerian students that they prefer to spend their time watching television and home videos and playing on the street instead of reading (Olu, 2017).

Are there reading programs employed in the universities to promote free voluntary reading among the students?

Various organizations and institutions, such as the Egerton University Reading Tent Project (EUTRP), Kenya National Library Services (KNLS), Kenya Library Association (KLA), Reading Association of Kenya (RAK), Kenyatta University Basic Education Resources Center (KUBERC), and the National Book Development Council of Kenya, are aggressively working to promote reading culture (Makenzi, 2004). For this study, therefore, interviews were conducted with five key informants (ELIC coordinators) to determine if there are such programs (activities) to promote university students' reading culture. The findings showed that the program itself is not active in some of the

universities. In the universities in which the program (ELIC) is active, the program focuses only on the improvement of general language skills. Interested students are registered for the skill they want to develop. Those who are registered for reading skills are given training on the development of reading ability, not reading habits. There are no works done on awareness creation and promotion of reading culture by the universities. Moreover, there are no NGOs, publishers, book industries, or international bodies currently working on the development of students' reading habits. This is contrary to the work taking place in different African countries like Kenya and Nigeria, where several activities and programs have taken place to promote the concept of reading culture since the beginning of the 20th century. For example, many scholars, NGOs, publishers, book industries, and international bodies, such as the United Nations, have been agitating for the development of a reading culture in the world since the early 1980s in Kenya (Fredrick, 2011). Similarly, there are huge investments in education in general and in reading programs in particular in Nigeria annually (Olu, 2017).

Is there any awareness-raising program given by the universities to students on the importance of developing a reading culture?

The habit of reading should be inculcated right from childhood and should be maintained throughout one's lifetime (Inatullayeva, 2023). Africans have been labeled as "an oral society" (Mulindwa, 2001). This, according to Sangkeo (1999), refers to the fact that people have no reading habits. In such societies, people stop reading once formal education is completed (Tötemeyer, 1994). In order to make reading sustainable and become a habit, many works are expected from the concerned bodies. In Kenya, for example, the National Book Development Council of Kenya has been running children's Reading Tent activities since 1997 under the banner of the National Book Week celebrations, which is an annual event of the NBDCK. This is one way of developing students' awareness of

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., April. –June 2025, 14(2), 118-128

reading. Moreover, to develop a reading habit, it is necessary for libraries and other stakeholders to reach out to the people. Librarians will have to take books to the people rather than wait for people to visit them if they really want the people to read (Fredrick, 2011). As said above, an interview was conducted with the concerned bodies (ELIC coordinators and library workers) to know if they are working to develop students' awareness to develop reading habits. The results from the respondents showed that there is no work on the issue. The issue of students' reading habits is not yet considered part of their program. As a result, it can be concluded that there is no awareness-raising program given by the universities to students to develop their reading culture. In contrast to this reality, scholars suggest that work should be done to make students love reading and get accustomed to reading. According to Ameyaw and Anto (2018), once students have been taught how to read and develop a love for books, they can explore for themselves the wealth of human experience and knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

The data obtained from the students on their practice of reading different books were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the result of the analysis indicated that the students read only academic-related books like textbooks/handouts, reference books, and dictionaries. This implies that the students rarely read books like novels/fiction, newspapers/magazines, health-related books, history books, poetry, encyclopedias, journals, art books, politics books, philosophy, and biographies. From this, it is possible to understand that the student's reading habits are poor.

Reading can take place for different purposes, among which reading for pleasure, reading for academic purposes, reading for knowledge and skills, reading for survival, reading for information, and reading for exams are worth mentioning. Accordingly, the findings of this study on this issue show that the majority of the students (49%) read for exam purposes. Moreover, an almost significant

number (35.35%) of the respondents read for academic purposes. This implies that most students read only to pass exams, and this is a forced and conditional reading.

Among the many factors that affect students' reading culture, some potential factors are included in the students' questionnaires to check if they hinder Ethiopian university students' habit of reading. Accordingly, factors like chatting through social networks, lack of role models, absence of reading days, and absence of reading clubs in their previous school and in their university are identified as the factors that affect the students' reading culture too much. Moreover, the students' responses show that factors such as watching films, playing video games, sleeping, joking with friends, lack of interest, inadequate reading materials, and destruction of television affect the students' reading habits to some extent.

Interviews were conducted with five key informants (ELIC coordinators) to determine if there are programs (activities) to promote university students' reading culture. The findings showed that the program itself is not active in some of the universities. In the universities in which the program (ELIC) is active, the program focuses only on the improvement of general language skills. There are no NGOs, publishers, book industries, or international bodies currently working on the development of students' reading habits.

In order to make reading sustainable and become a habit, many works are expected from the concerned bodies. Creating awareness is one of the activities expected from the concerned bodies. Accordingly, interviews were conducted with ELIC coordinators and library workers to determine if they are working to develop students' awareness to develop reading habits. The results from the respondents showed that there is no work on the issue. The issue of students' reading habits is not yet considered part of their program. As a result, it can be concluded that there is no awareness-raising program given by the universities to students to develop their reading culture.

Recommendations

Students should strive to develop by reading different books to know about their world. For this to take place, first, students should be interested in reading books. The second is that parents, teachers, and schools should facilitate a conducive environment and be supportive in everything to help students so that they can develop their reading culture.

One can be referred to as having a reading habit when he/she reads for different purposes. Apart from reading for exams and academic purposes, students should read different books for pleasure, for academic purposes, for knowledge and skills, for survival, and for information. For this to happen, students should plan to effectively use their time. They should not waste their time watching films, playing video games, sleeping, joking with friends, and chatting through social networks. The concerned bodies should construct public libraries furnished with important books. Moreover, students should buy and read different books at different times.

In order to nurture students' reading culture, there should be reading clubs and reading day programs in the universities. For this to happen, the ELIC program is responsible above all. ELIC coordinators, in collaboration with other concerned bodies like university management and different NGOs, should work to help students develop their reading habits. Students should not only read to develop their reading ability, but they also read different books to develop their reading culture. This should be one part of the ELIC program.

To make reading sustainable and become a habit, many works are expected from the concerned bodies. Creating awareness is one of the activities expected from the concerned bodies. Accordingly, ELIC coordinators and library workers should develop students' awareness to develop reading habits by doing their share. The ELIC coordinators ought to establish a reading day that should be celebrated at the beginning of each semester. Moreover, the librarians should also do their share. They can do activities like reading, tent activities,

Guta & Gemechis

and taking books to the people rather than waiting for people to visit them.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Guta Legese: Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, visualization, **Gemechis Teshome:** Writing—Original Draft, Writing—Review & Editing

Declaration of competing interests

The authors affirm that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval

The Research and Ethical Review Board of the College of Social Science and Humanities approved the ethical clearance of the work. Ref. CSSH/5/57/2015.

Data availability statement

Adequate data is available and will be presented upon request.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the College of Social Science and Humanities, Jimma University, for the research grant. They extend their heartfelt gratitude to the sociology department graduating class students of the five selected universities for their willingness to respond to questionnaires and interview questions. Further, thank the five ELIC coordinators and the five selected library workers for their cooperation in the process of data collection through interviews.

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