Comparative Linguistics Translation and Literary Studies
Vol. 2 No. 2 April 2025 (83-93)

Relationship of Reading Habits with Academic Performance of Secondary School Students of Sargodha

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Article History:

Submission: March 02, 2025 | Revision: April 15, 2025 | Accepted: April 17, 2025

Abstract

Background: English is taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistani educational institutions. A great many efforts have been made to boost the standard of English Language teaching and learning in Pakistan. Several studies have revealed that students do not have enough exposure to the English language. **Knowledge Gaps:** Despite efforts to improve English language teaching, many students enter college with underdeveloped language skills, largely due to limited exposure and ineffective teaching methods. **Aims:** The current study aimed to identify reading habits, factors affecting reading habits, motivators, and hindrances among secondary school students. **Methods:** Data were collected from 200 secondary-level students using a multi-stage proportionate stratified convenience sampling technique. **Result:** The results showed that students preferred school libraries for reading materials and preferred home reading, while fast food restaurants and canteens were less preferred. Story books and the internet were the most preferred reading materials, while magazines were less read. The study found that parental support in providing reading material was a significant factor, with attitude and value being the highest. Students' favorite subjects increased their reading habits, and the desire for learning new things motivated them. **Novelty:** The study provided valuable insights for improving academic performance and could guide future educational policies, curriculum development, and teaching practices. **Implication:** The findings imply that targeted interventions—such as enhancing access to engaging reading materials, involving parents in literacy development, and aligning reading content with students' interests—can foster stronger reading habits and language proficiency among secondary school learners.

Keywords: reading habits, academic performance, teaching practices, parental support

Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, communication between different cultures has become increasingly frequent. Language plays a dual role in this process: it serves not only as a means of communication but also as a carrier of culture. According to Newmark (1988), culture is a way of life, and its manifestations are unique to a group of people who use a specific language as a medium of expression. This definition underscores the inseparable relationship between

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language and culture, as they continuously interact, collide, and integrate (Cao & Zhao, 2022).

The education sector in Pakistan has grown rapidly in recent years, yet there remain significant concerns for both teachers and students. While most studies addressing concerns of students and teachers focus on graduate or postgraduate students, fewer explore the reading habits of secondary-level students Abid et al., (2023). Additionally, there is a lack of research examining the correlation between academic performances and reading habits of secondary school students in Pakistan. To address this gap, this study investigates the relationship between reading habits and academic performance in secondary school students.

Reading, alongside study habits and skills development, can enhance learning and improve academic outcomes. The time spent reading is one factor influencing academic success. Reading not only supports learning but also broadens knowledge and sharpens critical thinking. For students, reading is essential to staying informed and effective. It also plays a pivotal role in lifelong learning. Through reading, individuals gain knowledge through various media, including print format books and digital resources. Studies suggest that encouraging strong reading habits among teenagers can better prepare them for future academic and career challenges. However, little research has been conducted on the specific behaviors, challenges, and motivators influencing students' reading habits at the secondary level in Pakistan. Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding how these factors shape academic performance. Additionally, insights from this type of study may help inform educational policies, particularly regarding the integration of digital resources like e-books (Mushtaq and Mahmood 2021).

Competence in reading is essential for functioning adequately today. In this respect, it is crucial to encourage students' high-quality forms of reading motivation and, therefore, to stimulate them to read more frequently (Naeghel, 2012). Research indicates that intrinsic reading motivation declines as children go through school (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). Hence, it is important to uncover strategies which foster students' "love of reading" in order to break through the declining trend in reading motivation throughout children's educational careers. Moreover, encouraging students' willingness to read can be considered as a critical part of a high-quality education (Naeghel et al., 2012), which can equip children from different socioeconomic backgrounds with the necessary reading competencies to be successful in today's society (OECD, 2004). Furthermore, teachers' activities to promote their students' volitional or autonomous reading motivation are of importance for achieving equal opportunities for all children, as teachers reach the majority of children, independent of their socioeconomic background. In this respect, studying teachers excellent in promoting autonomous reading motivation can reveal critical strategies to promote reading motivation in education. (Mohan, 2008) even explicitly encourages further research on excellent reading teachers.

Amy (2024) examines a convergence of evidence that enhances the comprehension of reading as influenced by multiple factors, diverse processes, and various sources of information. They begin by addressing concerns regarding the portrayal of the simple view of reading by certain scholars and media representatives, who have applied this model in a limited manner to the education of young readers. Subsequently, the authors delve into the complexity present in (a) theoretical frameworks of reading grounded in empirical studies, (b) new insights concerning the brain's role in reading, and (c) research outcomes derived from detailed observations of young learners. Ultimately, the authors contend that simplistic and singular models of reading not only

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fail to acknowledge the unique characteristics of young readers but also overlook the systemic transformations required within schools and communities to equitably support all students.

A culture of reading contributes to personal and societal development (Abuzar, 2024). Leisure reading expands a child's worldview and fosters critical thinking. Increasing a culture of reading can strengthen the education system and improve literacy rates, which ultimately help in national development (Sajid et al., 2020). This is exactly what Margaret Fuller once said: "Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."

Students possess different reading habits (Pecjak & Kosir, 2008) . Most students read only when necessary (Daniels and Steres 2011; Naeghel et al., 2012). Some view it as enjoyable and relaxing, while others engage in extensive reading for academic purposes. Reading methods vary, from scanning specific information to skimming texts quickly, critical reading, and in-depth reading and understanding. Each method contributes to different learning outcomes in elementary school students. The students read from a variety of sources, using different channels, using different techniques for reading, motivated by unique factors, facing barriers, and hence their reading outcomes are also different.

Owusu and Larson (2014) highlighted that a lack of reading skills in children can lead to broader societal issues. Thus, fostering reading habits is essential for academic achievement and personal growth. Moreover, reading is crucial for developing creativity and critical thinking, and it also helps students to access new knowledge, boosts confidence in reading, and contributes to language proficiency (Ögeyik and Akyay, 2009).

Reading habits among secondary school students can be understood through several key aspects, including the frequency of reading during leisure time, the number of books completed, and the time allocated to both academic and non-academic reading (Cesar, 2014; Creswell and Plano, 2007). These aspects offer insights into students' engagement with both educational and recreational texts, highlighting their overall reading behavior and preferences. The development of reading habits is influenced by various factors such as parental and peer support, access to books, teacher encouragement, and classroom activities that incorporate library use (Anyaegbu, 2016; Inderjit, 2014; Lane & Wright, 2011). Libraries serve as critical spaces for promoting reading, though recent studies show that many students primarily read for exams and increasingly prefer electronic materials for leisure (Yaqoob & Tabassum, 2023). Academic performance is deeply connected to reading habits and is shaped by both skill and motivation. It reflects a student's ability to meet learning expectations and includes competencies such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving. Self-esteem also plays a significant role, with higher self-worth often correlating with better academic outcomes. Academic performance is typically measured through Grade Point Average (GPA), which serves as a standard indicator of student achievement and educational quality. Understanding these relationships helps inform strategies to foster effective reading habits that can enhance academic success.

Academic performance is influenced by a range of interrelated predictors, among which socioeconomic status plays a significant role. A student's financial background, parental education, and occupational status directly affect access to educational resources and learning opportunities. Parental involvement is another key factor, enhancing students' skill development, academic interest, and long-term aspirations. Motivation is critical in determining school success; students with clear educational goals and engagement tend to perform better (Robbins et al., 2004;

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Crede & Kuncel, 2008). Academic objectives, such as scholarly motivation and the use of effective learning strategies, further mobilize students toward achievement (Aaron & Skakun, 1999; Murray & Wren, 2003). Students' personal responsibility and attitudes toward learning also shape their academic outcomes (Ames, 1992; Ames & Archer, 1988; Armitage, 2008). Educational goals are influenced by the broader school context, parental characteristics, and teacher-student dynamics (Covington, 2000; Tinto, 1975; Gonzalez et al., 2002; Turner & Johnson, 2003). Teaching behavior and the quality of teacher-student interactions—especially in early education—are crucial for guiding student goals and promoting progress (Moreira et al., 2010; Urdan, 2004; Rivkin et al., 2005; Nye et al., 2004; Meece et al., 2006). Finally, personality traits, as categorized in psycho-biological and contemporary personality models, have a consistent impact on individual motivation, self-concept, and academic achievement (Cloninger et al., 1993). Collectively, these factors form a complex but coherent framework for predicting student academic performance.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2003 revealed the low reading competency of Indonesian students, which raised global concerns about reading proficiency. Under the global concerns in another Asian country, Pakistan, it can also be assumed that the school students might be affected. This study therefore examines the reading habits (status of library usage, preferred places to read, factors affecting the reading habits, motivators, and barriers) of the secondary school students and identifies how reading habits influence the academic performance of the secondary school students. This research aims to fill that gap by identifying the reading behavior of secondary school students and examining the relationship between reading habits and academic performance. Academic performance is often used as an indicator of educational quality.

The present study aims to examine the reading habits of secondary school students and their potential impact on academic performance. Specifically, the study aims to assess the status of library usage among students and to explore the nature, frequency, and preferences that define their reading behaviors. It further seeks to investigate the home environment to identify the factors that either foster or hinder students' engagement in reading outside the classroom. Another key objective of the study is to understand the motivational drivers behind students' reading habits—such as personal interests, parental influence, and access to reading materials—as well as to uncover the barriers that may limit or disrupt these habits. These barriers may include a lack of resources, distractions, or a non-supportive reading culture within the household. In addition, the study aims to analyze how students' reading habits correlate with their academic achievement, thereby evaluating whether stronger engagement in reading contributes positively to academic outcomes.

Through these objectives, the study seeks to generate data-driven insights that can inform educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers about the critical role of reading in the academic development of secondary school students. By identifying both the enabling and inhibiting factors, the research intends to support the design of more effective educational strategies, promote a culture of reading, and ultimately enhance student learning and performance.

Method

The present study adopted a descriptive research design grounded in a quantitative methodological approach to systematically examine the reading habits and their relationship with

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academic performance among secondary school students in Sargodha. Descriptive research was considered suitable for this investigation as it allows for the objective analysis of existing conditions, behaviors, and trends within a defined population, without manipulating the study environment.

The population for this study comprised secondary-level students enrolled in educational institutions across Sargodha. From this population, a sample of 200 students was selected for participation during the 2023 academic year. The sampling procedure was designed to ensure a diverse and representative subset of the broader student population, capturing variations in gender, academic background, and socio-economic status. The sampling technique used was a multi-stage proportionate stratified convenience sampling method, which ensured equitable representation while also considering logistical feasibility and accessibility of participants.

Data collection was carried out using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire, which was developed by the researchers based on relevant literature and expert validation. The questionnaire consisted of items measuring various dimensions of reading habits (e.g., frequency, preference, motivation, and environment), as well as perceived academic performance. The instrument was pre-tested with a small pilot group to refine wording and ensure clarity, reliability, and validity before large-scale administration.

Once finalized, the questionnaire was distributed to participants both physically and digitally, depending on accessibility, and responses were collected over a period of three weeks. To ensure ethical standards, participants were informed of the purpose of the research, their anonymity was preserved, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

For data analysis, the responses were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17.0. Descriptive statistical techniques were used to interpret the data, including the calculation of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations for each questionnaire item. These measures allowed the researchers to summarize patterns, identify trends, and draw initial conclusions about students' reading behaviors and their academic outcomes. The analysis aimed to reveal not only the prevailing habits among students but also the factors influencing those habits and their potential implications for academic success.

This methodological framework ensured a systematic and data-driven exploration of the relationship between reading habits and academic performance, providing a reliable basis for the study’s findings and subsequent recommendations.

Results and Discussion

A. Result

Q#1: ***Do you spend time in reading books in the library?***

This question seeks to explore students’ engagement with library facilities, aiming to understand whether libraries remain a significant resource for reading or are being replaced by more accessible digital alternatives. This question is particularly important for educators and policymakers aiming to promote effective reading environments and reimagine the role of libraries in the 21st-century learning landscape.

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Table 1: Distribution of student responses regarding time spent reading books in the library

Sr. No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score
1	Strongly Agree	33	16.5	2.95
	Agree	37	18.5	
	Undecided	43	21.5	
	Disagree	60	30.0	
	Strongly Disagree	27	13.5	
	Total	200	100.0	

Table 1 shows that only 16.5% of respondents strongly agreed, while 18.5% agreed. A notable 21.5% remained undecided, whereas a larger proportion—30% disagreed and 13.5% strongly disagreed. The overall mean score was 2.95, indicating a general tendency toward disagreement. This suggests that a significant portion of students do not actively utilize the library for reading purposes, with 43.5% expressing disagreement or strong disagreement.

Q#2: ***Do you think that fiction books have a positive impact on learning process?***

This question aims to assess students' perceptions of the educational value of fiction and whether they recognize its role in enhancing their academic journey. Understanding student attitudes toward fiction can provide educators with valuable insights into how literary content can be better integrated into curricula to strengthen learning outcomes.

Table 2: Students' perceptions of the impact of fiction books on the learning process

Sr. No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score
2	Strongly Agree	79	39.5	3.53
	Agree	40	20.0	
	Undecided	18	9.0	
	Disagree	33	16.5	
	Strongly Disagree	30	15.0	
	Total	200	100.0	

Table 2 shows that 39.5% of students strongly agreed and 20% agreed, amounting to a majority of 59.5% in favor of the statement. A smaller group of 9% were undecided, while 16.5% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.53 supports the assertion, indicating a consensus that fiction books contribute positively to the learning experience.

Q#3: ***Do you encourage your students to interact through social media?***

The question aims to investigate how educators view the role of social media in academic settings and whether they actively promote its use as a tool for learning and student interaction. Understanding their perspectives can inform policies and practices surrounding digital literacy and educational technology integration.

Table 3: Teachers' attitudes toward encouraging student interaction through social media

Sr. No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score
3	Strongly Agree	57	28.5	3.38
	Agree	52	26.0	
	Undecided	18	9.0	
	Disagree	56	28.0	
	Strongly Disagree	17	8.5	
	Total	200	100.0	

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Table 3 shows that 28.5% of the respondents strongly agreed, 26% agreed, 9% undecided, 28% disagreed, and 8.5% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.38, which supported the statement. So the majority, 54.5% of the respondents, agreed with the statement.

Q#4: ***Do you implement texting to practice reading skills?***

This question explores whether educators are adopting texting as a pedagogical method and how they perceive its effectiveness in enhancing students' reading abilities. The findings can provide insights into how modern communication tools are being repurposed for literacy development in academic settings.

Table 4: Teachers' use of texting as a strategy to enhance reading skills

Sr. No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score
	Strongly Agree	63	31.5	
	Agree	37	18.5	
4	Undecided	48	24.0	3.45
	Disagree	34	17.0	
	Strongly Disagree	18	9.0	
		200	100.0	

Table 4 shows that 31.5% of participants strongly agreed and 18.5% agreed, suggesting that 50% of the sample actively supports the use of texting for reading practice. A significant portion (24%) remained undecided, while 17% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.45 indicates overall agreement with the use of texting as a tool for improving reading skills.

Q#5: ***Teaching reading skills through social media strengthens reading habits everlasting.***

This question seeks to examine whether the integration of reading instruction with social media usage contributes to the sustained development of reading behaviors. Exploring this question provides valuable insight into how technology can be leveraged to create enduring literacy practices in the digital age.

Table 5: Student Perceptions of the Long-Term Impact of Teaching Reading Skills Through Social Media

Sr. No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score
	Strongly Agree	55	27.5	
	Agree	52	26.0	
5	Undecided	27	13.5	3.41
	Disagree	51	25.5	
	Strongly Disagree	15	7.5	
	Total	200	100.0	

Table 4 indicates that 27.5% strongly agreed and 26% agreed, leading to a majority of 53.5% in support of the claim. 13.5% were undecided, while 25.5% disagreed and 7.5% strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.41 further reinforces the overall agreement, suggesting that many respondents believe social media can play a sustainable role in strengthening students' reading habits.

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B. Discussion

The findings of this study present a nuanced view of secondary school students' reading habits and their engagement with both traditional and digital platforms for reading development. The first significant observation is the limited use of school libraries, as evidenced by the low mean score (2.95) and the fact that 43.5% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they spend time reading books in the library. This result aligns with global concerns about the declining role of libraries in the digital age and suggests that students may not view the library as an accessible or stimulating environment for reading. This may reflect infrastructural or motivational issues, such as limited availability of engaging materials, outdated collections, or lack of reading culture fostered within schools.

Conversely, the positive perception of fiction books—supported by a mean score of 3.53 and 59.5% agreement—suggests that students recognize the value of imaginative literature in enhancing learning. This is consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of fiction in building vocabulary, empathy, and comprehension skills. The gap between this favorable perception and the low frequency of library use may indicate that students prefer accessing fiction through other means, possibly through digital formats or personal collections rather than institutional libraries.

The data also reveal a growing acceptance of digital platforms and informal tools, such as texting and social media, for educational purposes. A majority of students agreed that they encourage social media interaction (54.5%), use texting to practice reading skills (50%), and believe that teaching reading through social media leads to lasting reading habits (53.5%). These findings reflect a paradigm shift in literacy development, where traditional reading environments are being replaced or supplemented by technology-mediated practices. While this shift offers opportunities for engagement and accessibility, it also raises concerns about the depth and quality of reading that digital media fosters. Instant messaging and social media may encourage brief, fragmented reading experiences, which could affect students' ability to engage with complex texts.

A further implication of the results is the increasing agency students have over their reading habits. Their willingness to adopt new tools such as texting for skill-building and to use social platforms as interactive learning environments points to a shift in learner autonomy and a move toward more socially constructed learning (Zhong, 2018: Lewis, 2013). However, this transition also necessitates pedagogical adjustments. Educators must recognize and harness these new platforms while ensuring that students develop critical reading, comprehension, and analytical skills that go beyond digital fluency ((Brueck et al., 2019; Karchmer-Klein & Shinas, 2012).

Critically, while digital tools offer flexibility and motivation, they should not be seen as substitutes for structured reading programs and comprehensive literary exposure (Brueck et al., 2019; Chen & Macleod, 2021). Rather, they should be strategically integrated into the curriculum to complement traditional methods. The findings underscore the importance of balancing innovation with educational rigor. The low use of libraries suggests an urgent need for educational policymakers and school administrators to rethink library spaces, update resources, and encourage

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habitual reading through incentive-based programs or blended approaches that combine digital and print media.

The study reveals a complex landscape in which students favor modern, informal tools over traditional reading environments. This trend offers both opportunities and challenges. The positive attitude toward fiction and digital reading tools is encouraging, but it must be accompanied by thoughtful pedagogical strategies and institutional support to ensure that students not only read more but also read well. Schools must work collaboratively with teachers, parents, and policymakers to create a balanced and enriched reading culture that leverages both traditional and technological resources for long-term academic success.

Conclusion

the findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating digital literacy programs alongside traditional reading instruction. By equipping students with the skills to effectively navigate and comprehend digital reading materials, educators can support the development of well-rounded, adaptable learners prepared for the demands of the modern information landscape. It is equally essential to implement initiatives that cultivate strong reading habits from an early age, as early exposure to reading lays a critical foundation for future academic achievement and lifelong learning. Promoting a balanced approach that values both print and digital literacy will not only enhance students' educational outcomes but also foster personal growth, critical thinking, and a sustained love for reading in an increasingly digital world.

Originality Statement

The authors declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for publication in any other published materials, except where due acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom the author[s] have worked, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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