



Undergraduate Students' Reading Choices in the University of Benin, Nigeria

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Abstract. This study examined the reading choices and time spent reading of undergraduate students in the University of Benin, Nigeria. One research question and three hypotheses gave direction to the work. The study utilized the descriptive survey research design, using a questionnaire as the research instrument. A sample of 326 students were conveniently selected from four faculties and across four academic levels. Findings revealed that students generally preferred the reading of journals, newspapers, textbooks and magazines in descending order. However, comic books, non-fiction and fiction were materials less frequently read. Similarly, the amount of time students spend reading is inadequate to meet their academic and leisure reading needs. In addition, students' reading choices did not differ by sex. However, significant differences were found in students' reading choices by academic levels. It was recommended among other that undergraduate students should be encouraged to devote more time to reading and to read a variety of materials.

Keywords: Undergraduate reading, reading choices, Reading time, Leisure reading, Academic level

1. Introduction

Reading is an essential aspect of education. It is a fundamental building block of learning. Therefore, effective reading skills enhance success in school and beyond. It is needed for everyday living. Effective reading skill is beneficial to students as it brings about growth, development of word knowledge and social development (Ahmad, Dar, & Lone, 2019). It is a skill that affects many facets of an individual's life because reading ability is needed in everyday functioning. A person's self-esteem may be impaired as a result of limited reading ability. Similarly, advances in technology have resulted in more

occupations that require special training, possible to acquire only if a person is competent in reading.

Reading shapes the personality of individuals. The more a person reads, the more he becomes a better reader and the more success is achieved as he becomes a better and skillful reader (Ken & Anderson, 2011; Tresleasy, 2001). Armstrong, Johnson, Bridges and Gessmer (2013) are of the view that with today's rapid technological advances, scientific explosion, the need for critical thinking and the advent of evidence-based practices, professional educators must promote lifelong learning. Reading also equips the individual with problem solving skills (Igwe, 2011).

Moreover, the tertiary level of education, which include universities, is a stage in which proficiency in reading is particularly desirable and necessary. Proficient reading is complex and requires the development of higher order level and varied reading skills. Skilled reading requires mastery, integration and application of numerous skills and knowledge (Morrison, 2017). Comprehension occurs as readers build mental representations of the text. Reading, therefore, is an avenue to widen one's mental horizon and for multiplying opportunities for success in school. For undergraduate students to succeed in school, they need to possess effective and efficient reading skills needed for extensive reading in addition to having the ability to comprehend and interact with materials read. The university is a place where students need to read extensively in their core subject areas in order to succeed academically. Reading ability is a significant predictor of academic achievement. The ability to read and critique materials read is an essential outcome of undergraduate programmes. According to Applegate, Applegate, Mercantini, McGeehan, Cobb, DeBoy and Lewinski (2014), universities seek to create "ideal readers" who

are enthusiastic and fueled by reading both within and out of the classroom setting.

However, it has been observed that students are simply not engaged in the reading process, even when it is for a class (Applegate et al., 2014). At the secondary school level, studies have shown that students exhibit poor reading skills (Ama, 2002; Kurata, Ishita, Miyata & Minsaami, 2016). These poor reading skills at the secondary education level are obviously carried over to the tertiary level. Similarly, it has been observed that the amount of time undergraduate students spend reading is lower than university expectations; only a small proportion of undergraduate students read the sources recommended by teaching staff (St. Clair-Thompson, Grahamb & Marsham, 2018). For example, Connor-Greene (2000) found that 72% of students reported rarely or never completing reading assignments on time. This sparsity of reading has been noted in many subject areas, such as business (Artis, 2008; Starcher & Profitt, 2011), education (e.g. Carney, Fry, Gabriele, & Ballard, 2008; Tomasek, 2009), sociology (Howard, 2004), planning (Sturzaker, 2014), philosophy (Broost & Bradley, 2006), and science (Henderson & Rosenthal, 2006; Jensen & Moore, 2008).

Furthermore, in addition to academic reading, university students need to engage in leisure reading as it can actually help them attain better mastery of the reading skill. Leisure reading is reading that is done for pleasure. Leisure reading helps students to develop higher order reasoning and promotes critical thinking. It could also help to raise the standard of education since one of the goals of education is to promote lifelong learning/reading. The choice of materials to read is an important factor in leisure reading and it also helps to foster lifelong reading. Students who choose what they read and have an informal environment where they engage in reading tend to be more motivated to read, read more, and show greater language and literacy development (Krashen, 1993; Ofuani, 2014). Choice therefore, is a key motivation to read.

Although several researches have focused on different areas of undergraduate students' reading such as the time spent reading, reading preferences, the type of text read, and whether or not students' sex, faculty and academic level influences reading preferences, the results have been contradictory. The inconclusiveness of previous researches in addition to the scarcity of literature in the Nigerian context on the reading choices of undergraduate students necessitates this study. Therefore, this study examined the reading choices of undergraduate students of the University of

Benin. In addition, it sought to determine whether students reading choices differ by sex, faculty and academic level. Basically, the study is centered around three objectives:

- Identify the reading choices of undergraduate students.
- Determine if there is a significant difference in undergraduate students' reading choices based on sex.
- Determine if there is a difference in undergraduate reading choices based on academic level.

2. Review of Literature

Many researchers are worried about the fact that undergraduate students do not create the time to read (Halteberg, 2014; Huang, Cappa, Blocklock & Garza, 2014). Starcher & Profitt (2011) observed that students do not like to read beyond their recommended texts. Similarly, the students in Bharuthram's (2017) study read only when they were forced to read. With reference to academic reading, only 33.87% of the respondents indicated that they read often. The results suggest that students have a limited commitment to reading generally and academic reading specifically. This situation is in spite of the fact that students are aware of the importance of reading in enhancing academic achievement (Edem & Ofre, 2010; Quadri & Abomogie, 2013). However, in the universities, courses are organized around textbooks and other reading materials. Thus, there is a need for students to engage in substantial reading. Reading is crucial for a students' success in school. Therefore, the cultivation of good reading skills should be encouraged.

One way to cultivate good reading skills is through engagement in leisure/pleasure reading. Several studies have been carried out to examine students' leisure reading and the choice of materials read. For example, of the 201 undergraduate students surveyed by Burak (2004), 63 percent reported having read a book for pleasure in the past semester. In Bharuthram's (2017) study, of all the reading materials listed for casual reading, newspapers were most popular (64.51%), followed by magazines (61.29%) and novels (40.32%). Gilbert and Fister (2011) reported that undergraduate students read a variety of newspapers, magazine (including sports, lifestyle, gossip, and news magazines) and internet sources. Ntakirutimana and Okoro (2021) found that students read more of class notes and textbooks.

In Nigeria, Ifedili (2009) examined the reading culture among students in tertiary institutions. Her study revealed that 60% of students read prescribed

textbooks only during examination period; only 21% of students buy novels to read for knowledge and pleasure. Similarly, Quadri and Abomoge's (2013) study of undergraduate students in selected universities in Nigeria found that a majority of the students in Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) read newspapers, novels and comics on a daily basis. For students in the University of Ibadan (UI), it was revealed that magazines, newspapers and textbooks were read in that order on a daily basis.

Furthermore, in relation to whether differences exist in the reading materials selected by undergraduate students based on sex, the findings of Gilbert and Fister's (2011) study showed that the males were twice as likely as the females to read science fiction, but the females were slightly more likely than the males to read fantasy. Again, female students were much more likely to read romance than male students. Female students were also more interested in reading general fiction, as almost nine in ten of them read fiction compared to over half of the males. However, both the male and the female students reported reading nonfiction at about the same rates. In addition, while the females were more likely to read magazines, the males were more likely to read newspapers and pursue reading on the Internet.

Similarly, Morrison (2017) reported that women prefer to read fiction books such as romance, mystery, thriller, and crime, while men tend to read nonfiction books such as history, biographies and memoirs, and science fiction. Thums, Artelt and Wolter (2021) explored gender differences and adults' reading competence with respect to specific reading text types such as informational and literary texts. The quantitative research was based on a sample of 830 university students and adults aged between 19 and 71 years. The study revealed that men and women had different reading preferences. Women read more often for entertainment (science fiction, novels, crime fiction, and thrillers or horror books) in their leisure time, whereas men more often preferred to read to gain information (newspaper, factual books, biographies). Milal, Jannah, Sa'adah and Fitria (2021) surveyed the leisure reading preferences of undergraduate EFL students in the Department of English. In terms of gender differences, the study's findings revealed a tendency that both males and females like to read social media, followed by literary works. Reading reference books was preferred by females more than by males, whereas reading information from the mass media was preferred by the males more than by the females. In addition, the males read al-Quran, self-development books, webtoon comics, watch YouTube and Islamic history while the females watched the TV,

webtoon, manga, fanfics, google trivial tips like DIY (Do It Yourself), economic and business blogs and articles.

Moreover, students' reading choices could differ across the various academic levels. According to Bana (2020), reading habits, which includes choice of material read, are associated with educational background among other factors. For example, Thomas, Hockings, Ottaway, and Jones (2015) reported that students later in their degree programme allocate more time to independent learning activities when compared to first year students. This assertion is consistent with academic expectations as final year students are required to familiarize themselves with recent research studies to help them in the writing of their undergraduate project. Similarly, Clair-Thompson et al.'s (2018) study indicated that on average, undergraduate students in later years of their programme read more of journal articles compared to other materials. The study also found a significant effect of academic year on time spent reading journal articles. Pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences between students in Year 1 and Year 2, and Year 1 and Year 3. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the year groups in terms of independent reading. In the same vein, Gilbert and Fister's (2011) study revealed slight variations by academic year in terms of students' reading choices. First year students were slightly less likely to read biographies and other non-fiction than those in the other levels. A little less than 1 in 5 first year students read nonfiction while results from the other levels combined were closer to 1 in 3.

To round up the discussion on undergraduate students' reading choices, it is obvious that a plethora of research have focused on different aspects of undergraduate reading. However, the topics have been inconclusively studied, with only a few studies available in the Nigerian context. Therefore, it seems important to conduct a study on undergraduates' reading choices in the University of Benin to fill the gap in research and to provide more insights on the state of undergraduate students' reading in Nigerian universities.

3. Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. The population of the study comprised all the undergraduate students of the University of Benin. The sample size was made up of 326 undergraduate students. The sample was selected using the random and the convenience sampling techniques. Out of the fourteen (14) faculties in the University of Benin, four

(Faculties of Arts, Education, Physical Sciences and Social Sciences) were randomly selected using the ballot procedure. Thereafter, students were selected randomly across the four academic levels (Year 1, 2, 3 and 4) from the selected faculties on the basis of convenience. Convenience sampling was carried out due to the fact that as at the time of collecting data for the study, many of the students had gone home for the holidays. It was therefore impossible to select students based on some other predetermined criterion. Thus, only students who were available and accessible were used in the study. Table 1 provides more details on the sample of the study.

Table 1: The Sample of the Study

Faculty	Number of Students Sampled
Social Science	57
Education	119
Arts	115
Physical Science	35
Total	326

Moreover, data for the study were collected using a questionnaire titled “Undergraduate Students’ Reading Choices” (USRC). The questionnaire is accompanied by a cover letter indicating the purpose of the research and notifying the respondents that their

participation in the research is voluntary. It also explains the type of questions asked and assures the respondents of confidentiality. The questionnaire is made up of two sections – A and B. Section A covers the respondents’ demographic information. Section B has seven items intended to identify undergraduate students’ reading choices. It is a modified Likert Scale with four frequency options of “30 minutes or less a day” =4; “30 minutes to 1 hour a day” = 3; “1 to 2 hours a day” = 2; and “More than 2 hours a day” =1. A score of 2.5 (the average of the scale) was set as the decision marker. When the mean of the responses to an item is greater than or equal to 2.5, the item is accepted and vice versa.

In establishing the validity of the instrument, the draft was examined by three lecturers in the Department of Curriculum and Instructional Technology, Faculty of Education, University of Benin. Their useful comments/suggestions were considered before making the final draft. Thereafter, the instrument was administered on fifty students of similar status as those used in the study. The data collected were analysed using Cronbach Alpha statistics and a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained.

4. Results

Research Question 1: What are the reading choices of undergraduate students?

In order to determine undergraduate students’ reading choices, the frequency with which they read different materials was measured. Details are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency with Which Undergraduate Students Read Different Materials

S/N	Reading Materials	30 mins or less a day	30 mins to 1 hour a day	1 to 2 hours a day	More than 2 hours a day	Mean	Rank
1	Textbooks	40 (14.1%)	98 (30.1%)	120 (36.8%)	62 (19.0%)	2.61	4TH
2	Journals (educational)	30 (9.2%)	75 (23.0%)	128 (39.3%)	93 (25.5%)	2.87	1ST
3	Magazines	56 (17.2%)	77 (23.6%)	124 (38.0%)	69 (21.2%)	2.63	3RD
4	Comic books	59 (18.1%)	111 (34.0%)	103 (31.6%)	53 (16.3%)	2.46	5TH
5	Fiction (Novels, narratives, stories)	91 (27.9%)	113 (34.7%)	88 (27.0%)	34 (10.4%)	2.20	7TH
6	Non-fiction (Self-help, biography)	92 (28.2%)	84 (25.8%)	86 (26.4%)	64 (19.6%)	2.37	6TH
7	Newspapers	34 (10.4%)	85 (26.1%)	105 (32.2%)	101 (31.3%)	2.85	2ND

Decision Score \geq 2.50

Table 1 reveals that undergraduate students frequently read journals (\bar{X} = 2.87), newspapers (\bar{X} = 2.85), textbooks (\bar{X} = 2.61) and magazines (\bar{X} = 2.63) in descending order. However, comic books (\bar{X} = 2.46), non-fiction (\bar{X} = 2.37) and fiction (\bar{X} = 2.20) were materials less frequently read respectively. In addition, the results reveal that across sex, faculty and academic year, students generally do not spend enough time engaged in reading. For example, for the most read material, journals, only 25.5% of students read it for more than two hours a day. Similar cases are found for the other reading materials.

Undergraduate Students’ Sex, Faculty, Academic Level and Reading Choices

In order to determine whether undergraduate students differ in their reading choices by sex, faculty and academic level, three hypotheses were tested.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in undergraduate students’ reading choices based on sex.

Table 3: Percentage of Students’ Reading Choices by Sex

S/N	Reading Materials	30 minutes or less a day		More than 30 minutes to 1 hour a day		More than 1 hour to 2 hours a day		More than 2 hours a day	
		Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1	Textbooks	14 (12.96)	32 (14.68)	38 (35.19)	60 (27.52)	41 (37.96)	79 (36.23)	15 (13.89)	47 (21.56)
2	Journals (educational)	8 (7.41)	22 (10.09)	28 (25.93)	47 (21.56)	45 (41.67)	83 (38.07)	27 (25)	66 (30.28)
3	Magazines	25 (23.15)	31 (14.22)	27 (25)	50 (22.94)	35 (32.41)	89 (40.83)	21 (19.44)	48 (22.02)
4	Comic books	23 (21.23)	36 (16.51)	32 (29.63)	79 (36.24)	33 (30.56)	70 (32.11)	20 (18.52)	33 (15.14)
5	Fiction (novels, narratives, stories)	32 (29.63)	59 (27.06)	33 (30.56)	80 (36.69)	32 (29.63)	55 (25.23)	10 (19.26)	24 (11.01)
6	Nonfiction (self-help, biographies)	34 (31.48)	58 (26.61)	35 (32.41)	49 (22.48)	24 (22.22)	62 (28.44)	15 (13.89)	49 (22.48)
7	Newspapers	11 (10.19)	23 (10.55)	27 (25)	58 (26.61)	45 (41.67)	60 (27.52)	25 (23.15)	77 (35.32)
	Total	Male: 108; Female: 218							

Table 3 shows that female students in general spend more time reading when compared to the male students. For example, for textbook reading, 21.56% of the females read for more than two hours a day while the result is 13.89% for the males. Similar results are found for the other reading materials. In terms of reading choice specifically, the females preferred magazines (40.83%), journals (38.07%), fiction (36.96%), textbooks (36.23%), newspapers (35.32%), comic books (36.24%) and nonfiction (28.44%) in that order. For the male students however, their preferences are journals and newspapers (41.67% each), textbooks (37.96%), magazines and nonfiction (32.41% each), and comics and fiction (30.56% each) respectively.

Table 4: Group Statistics for Students’ Sex and Their Reading Choices

Item	Sex	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading Choices	Male	108	2.49	.69	.07
	Female	218	2.61	.67	.05

Results on Table 4 indicate that female undergraduate students have more varied reading choices ($\bar{X} = 2.61$) when compared to the male students ($\bar{X} = 2.49$). The t-test on Table 5 reveals whether the difference between the means of the female and male undergraduate students reading choices is significant.

Table 5: t-test of Students’ Sex and Their Reading Choices

Reading Choices	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variance		t-Test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.03	.87	-1.38	324	.17	-11	.08	-27	.05
Equal variances not assumed			-1.37	210.77	.17	-11	.08	-27	.05

Table 5 shows that $p (.17) > 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that undergraduate students do not significantly differ in their reading choices on the basis of gender. The data on Table 5 clearly captures the students' choices.

Hypothesis Three: There is no difference in undergraduate reading choices based on academic level.

Table 9: Percentages of Students' Reading Choices by Academic Year

Reading Materials	30mins. or less a day				More than 30mins. to 1 hour				More than 1 hour to 2 hours				More than two hours a day			
	Yr. 1 %	Yr. 2 %	Yr. 3 %	Yr. 4 %	Yr. 1 (%)	Yr. 2 (%)	Yr. 3 (%)	Yr. 4 (%)	Yr.1(%)	Yr. 2 (%)	Yr. 3 (%)	Yr. 4 (%)	Yr. 1 (%)	Yr. 2 (%)	Yr. 3 (%)	Yr. 4 (%)
Textboo-ks	10 25	19 14	14 12	3 9	20 5	42 30	31 27	5 15	5 13	53 38	43 38	19 58	5 13	26 19	25 22	6 18
Journals (educati-onal)	10 25	14 10	6 5	0 0	18 45	28 20	29 19	8 24	9 23	51 36	55 49	13 39	3 8	47 34	31 27	12 36
Magazin-es	12 30	23 16	16 14	5 15	15 38	30 21	25 22	7 21	11 28	51 36	53 47	9 27	2 5	36 26	19 17	12 36
Comic books	12 30	25 18	18 16	4 12	15 38	39 28	44 39	13 39	8 20	48 34	36 32	11 33	5 13	25 20	15 13	5 15
Fiction	14 35	43 31	29 26	5 15	19 48	45 32	36 32	13 39	5 13	36 26	37 33	10 30	2 5	16 11	11 10	5 15
Nonfictio-n	16 40	42 30	25 22	9 27	12 30	31 22	27 24	14 42	7 18	37 26	38 34	4 12	5 13	30 21	23 20	6 18
Newspa-pers	6 15	15 11	10 9	3 9	21 53	27 19	26 23	11 33	7 18	48 34	42 37	8 24	5 13	50 36	35 31	11 33

Note: Percentages are rounded up to the nearest whole number.

Data on Table 9 show that for students in 100 level, the reading choice is newspaper (53%), textbooks (50%), fiction (48%), journals (45%), nonfiction (40%), and magazines and comic books (38% each) in that order. For students in 200 level, the reading choice is textbooks (38%), journals/newspapers/magazines (36%), comic books (34%), fiction (32%) and nonfiction (30%) respectively. For 300 level students, the order of reading choice is journals (49%), magazines (47%), comic books (39%), textbooks (38%), newspapers (37%), nonfiction (34%) and fiction (33%). In the case of students in 400 level, the order is textbooks (58%), nonfiction (42%), journals/fiction/comic books (39% each), magazines (36%) and newspapers (33%).

In terms of time spent reading, more students in 400 level spent more than 2 hours reading more materials (36%, magazines and journals), followed by those in 200 level (36%, newspapers), 300 level (31%, newspapers), and 100 level (13%, textbooks, comic books and newspapers respectively).

Table 10: Means of Undergraduate Students' Reading Choices by Level

Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
100	40	2.10	.65	.10
200	140	2.62	.69	.06
300	113	2.64	.65	.06
400	33	2.69	.59	.10
Total	326	2.57	.68	.04

The analysis of data presented on Table 7 reveals that undergraduate students in 400 level have the highest mean ($\bar{X} = 2.69$). They are followed by students in 300 ($\bar{X} = 2.64$), 200 ($\bar{X} = 2.62$) and 100 levels ($\bar{X} = 2.10$) respectively.

Table 8: ANOVA of Undergraduate Students' Reading Choices by Level

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.04	3	3.35	7.61	.00*
Within Groups	141.65	322	.44		
Total	151.69	325			

* $p < .05$

Data on Table 8 shows that $p (.00) < 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that undergraduate students differ significantly in their reading choices on the basis of academic level. In order to find out the sources of significant differences, a post hoc test was carried out.

Table 9: Post Hoc Test of Undergraduate Students' Reading Choices by Academic Level

(I) LVL	(J) LVL	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
100 Level	200	-.51*	.12	.00	-.85	-.18
	300	-.53*	.12	.00	-.88	-.19
	400	-.58*	.16	.00	-1.02	-.15
200 Level	100	.52*	.12	.00	.18	.85
	300	-.02	.08	.99	-.25	.22
	400	-.07	.13	.97	-.43	.29
300 Level	100	.53*	.12	.00	.19	.88
	200	.02	.08	.99	-.22	.25
	400	-.05	.13	.99	-.42	.32
400 Level	100	.58*	.16	.00	.15	1.02
	200	.07	.13	.97	-.29	.43
	300	.05	.13	.99	-.31	.42

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Results on Table 8 indicate that significant differences exist between the reading choices of undergraduate students in 100 level and the other levels (200, 300 and 400). In other words, the reading choices of students in 400 level significantly differs from the reading choices of students in 100 level. Similarly, the reading choices of students in 300 level significantly differs from those in 100 level. Again, the reading choices of students in 200 level significantly differs from those in 100 level. This result therefore indicates (as seen on Table 7) that students in 400 level have more varied reading choices followed by those in 300, 200 and 100 levels respectively.

5. Discussion of Findings

The results for research question one indicated that undergraduate students read more of journals. This choice was followed by newspapers, textbooks and magazines respectively. Comics, nonfiction and fiction materials were less frequently read. The result is similar to those of Bharuthram (2017) and Gilbert and Fister (2011) where newspapers and magazines were identified as the most popular casual reading materials for undergraduate students. In addition, the result seems to indicate that newspaper reading is a favourite pastime for undergraduate students in Nigeria as revealed in Quadri and Abomoge's (2013) study.

Moreover, the result seems to highlight the fact that the reading of fiction and non-fiction materials is not of particular interest to the undergraduate students.

This reasoning is supported by Ifedili's (2009) study which showed that only a small percentage of undergraduate students read novels for pleasure. Quadri and Abomoge's (2013) study differs in this respect as the students reported reading comics on a daily basis. The seeming reluctance of undergraduate students to engage in the reading of fiction and non-fiction materials may stem from the monetary implication involved. Many of the students in public universities struggle to meet their basic needs; some of them are self-sponsored. Therefore, they have to spend their financial resources wisely. Reading newspapers and magazines would seem a better economic choice than reading the novels and other forms of fiction and nonfiction materials as the former can be accessed in most cases without monetary cost. Students can read the newspaper from newspaper vendor stands or from school libraries. Similarly, several magazines, particularly religious ones, are given out for free. So, the newspaper and magazine might be serving as alternative leisure reading materials in contrast to fiction/nonfiction materials that may require the students to spend money to purchase the ones that actually interest them.

Furthermore, the fact that journals and textbooks featured in undergraduate students' preferred list of reading materials seem to indicate that the students are more concerned about academic success in school. In other words, reading to pass examinations is their primary motivation for reading as indicated in Ntakirutimana and Okoro's (2021) study. Thus, leisure reading does not rank high in their list of

priority. In addition, the results of the study indicated that generally, the time students spend reading is below expectation. Several factors could account for this. One of such factors is constraints on and competing demand for students' time (Clair-Thompson et al., 2018). Informal discussions with students by the researchers revealed that many of them combine full time schooling with one or more part-time jobs that they label as "side hustle". Thus, they are unable to meet the time demands for reading/studying.

Moreover, the study revealed that undergraduate students do not differ significantly in their reading choices on the basis of sex. The fact that no significant difference was found in undergraduate reading choices by sex would seem to corroborate the idea that the choice of materials read is predicated on economic reasons which affects all students irrespective of their sex. However, a majority of the female students were found to have more varied reading choices than the male students. The female undergraduate students preferred the reading of magazines, journals, fiction, textbooks, newspapers, comics and nonfiction respectively. They also spend more time reading those materials. For example, in the case of textbook reading, 21.56% of the female students read for more than 2 hours a day compared to 13.89% for the male students. Similar results are found for all the other reading materials selected. The male students on the other hand preferred the reading of journals and newspapers, textbooks, magazine and fiction, and comics and fiction respectively. The results for hypothesis one are thus in line with those of previous studies which showed differences in the reading materials selected by undergraduate students on the basis of sex (Gilbert & Fister, 2011; Milal et al., 2021; Morrison et al., 2017; and Thums et al., 2021).

Lastly, the study's findings showed that undergraduate students differ significantly in their reading choices by academic level. Students in 100 level (Year 1) differed significantly from other levels (Years 2, 3 and 4) in terms of their reading choices. In addition, the result indicated that the higher the academic level, the more varied the reading choices were. Thus, students in 400 level had more varied reading choices, followed by students in the other levels (300, 200 and 100) respectively. The result is in consonance with the common-sense view that students in their final year should spend more time reading a variety of materials, especially as they engage in the writing of their final year project. In addition, while Clair-Thompson et al.'s (2018) study showed no statistically significant difference between the year groups in terms of independent study, the reverse was the case in this study. However, variations in students' reading

choices by academic year aligns with the findings of Gilbert and Fister (2011). Again, students in final year were found to spend more time reading activities, although they were closely followed by those in 200 level. students from other levels. This finding corroborates that of Thomas et al. (2015) where it was reported that students allocate more time to independent reading later in their degree programme.

6. Conclusion

This study has provided a snippet view of the reading choices of a convenience sample of undergraduate students in the University of Benin. It has shown that although reading is an important aspect of higher education, students do not devote enough time to it, a situation observed by several researchers. In addition, it was revealed that students have varied reading choices and spend different amount of time reading especially as it relates to their academic levels. Evidently, there are factors exerting constraints on students' reading choices and the amount of time spent reading. However, if university students are to succeed academically in addition to becoming lifelong readers/learners, concerted efforts must be made by relevant stakeholders to encourage students to read extensively and devote more time to reading.

Furthermore, a limitation of this study is its small sample size. Although the sample represents a cross section of students from different faculties and levels in the university, its findings are not generalizable to the whole student population. Moreover, further studies could probe reasons informing students' choice of reading materials and time spent reading. In addition, the choice of reading materials according to genre could be made more specific with students identifying authors and titles where possible.

7. Recommendations

In the light of the findings of the study, it is recommended that undergraduate students be encouraged by the relevant stakeholders to spend more time reading and to read a variety of materials. Similarly, provision should be made by the school authorities to make students' reading preferences, especially as it relates to leisure reading, available and accessible to them. In addition, the academic calendar should be student-friendly, such that it allows the students to have ample time for both academic reading and leisure reading.

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