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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ATTITUDE OF FUTO UNDERGRADUATES TOWARDS RECREATIONAL READING

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Abstract
Recreational reading had been found to promote academic achievement. This study investigated undergraduate students’ attitude to recreational reading. The study adopted survey research design using 120 undergraduates purposively selected from the Federal University of Technology Owerri. Attitude to Recreational Reading Questionnaire (ARRQ) was used to collect data. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics involving frequency counts and percentages. The findings revealed that undergraduate students are favourably disposed towards recreational reading. Based on the results it was concluded that if students are well motivated and reading materials are available, students would effectively harness the benefits of recreational reading for personal and academic enhancements.

Keywords: recreational reading, attitude, assessment, undergraduates

Introduction
Students of the Federal University of Technology Owerri like other students of universities of technology in Nigeria are core science students. It is through the general study programme that students are exposed to varied knowledge in the liberal arts. The use of English component of general studies equips students with study skills necessary for academic success through the teaching of the four language skills—listening, reading, speaking and writing among other study skills.

Among the four language skills, reading is regarded by many as the most important for academic and intellectual accomplishments. This is probably because it is a resource for the learning of almost every other school subject. Consequently, it has been hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between reading efficiency and academic achievement. Wilson (1986) opined that the ability to read efficiently gives the student, the professional and even the technical staff leverage over others because the whole world becomes a place where he can thread without fear. He added that to be disabled in reading is like going through a minefield blind-folded. This is to say that to be inefficient in reading amounts to living dangerously and ignorantly. This is an expensive price no one can afford.

Today, we live in a world where we are consistently bombarded with information encoded in spoken, written and visual formats. Be it as it may, an important tool necessary for effective acquisition and utilization of information is undoubtedly reading. As Holden (2004) puts it, “reading is an important gateway to personal development, and to social, economic and civil life.” Considering these submissions, it could be said that reading is a must for an active and meaningful living in the modern society.

Nevertheless, reading, especially in the second language situation, is an exercise that does not go down well with too many people. Nigerians in general, young and old, teachers and students, academics and non-academics are guilty of this offence (Ihejirika, 2008). Among the students, according to Ihejirika, the much they do is “compulsory reading” that is, reading for assignments, tests or examinations. This view is supported by Anigbogu (2006) who asserted that most undergraduates read more during examinations. This is an indication according to Oba (1982) that reading has not yet been established as an enjoyable activity among Nigerians.

Apart from reading for academic purposes, reading can be done for recreational purposes. Recreational reading or pleasure reading is independent, self-selected reading of a continuous text for a wide range of personal and social purposes (IRA, 2014). According to Bordonaro (2011) Recreational reading, also referred to as pleasure reading or extensive reading, involves language learners’ self-choice of reading material. To Clark and Runford (2006), recreational reading refers to reading that we do of our free-will anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to the reading having begun at someone else’s request will continue because he is interested in it. It typically involves materials that reflect our own choice and takes place at a time and place that suits us. Thus, recreational reading is a form of extracurricular
reading in which someone reads outside the formal curriculum.

The benefits of recreational reading have been documented in literature. DiGiovanna (1994) and Rothman (1990) cited in Watkins and Edwards (2002) observed that recreational reading promotes academic achievement. They reported that there is a relationship between high academic achievement and great amounts of recreational reading. Nell (1998) was of the view that recreational reading is a form of play that allows us to experience other worlds and roles in our imagination. Similarly, Bruner (1996) noted that recreational reading offers students a great insight into human nature and decision making. In other words, students who engage in recreational reading will find their knowledge of human affairs broadened and deepened. Whether in the individual or the social, they will understand the possibilities of human life both for good and evil. In all the academic benefits of recreational reading can be summed up in the words of Krashen (2004) when he asserted that as students start to read for pleasure:

"Good things will happen. Their reading comprehension will improve, and they will find difficult, academic-style texts easier to read. Their writing style will improve, and they will be better able to write prose in a style that is acceptable to schools, business, and the scientific community. Their vocabulary will improve, and their spelling and control of grammar will improve." (p. x)

That recreational reading has both academic and personal development benefits cannot be argued. As noted earlier, the majority of undergraduates read just to pass their examination which suggests that they rarely read for pleasure. However, often times, students' unwillingness or inability to carry out or participate in any activity is a function of the attitudes they exhibit towards that process. This brings us to an examination of students' attitude and learning.

Students' Attitude and Learning
Attitude has been viewed from different perspectives by scholars. Lawrenz (2003) saw attitude as a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavor. Ma and Xu (2004) described it as a condition of readiness for a certain type of activity while Hussain (2006) viewed it as a tendency to react favourably or unfavourably towards a designated class of stimuli. Orhum (2007) asserted that attitude is a fairly stable emotional tendency to respond consistently to some specific object, situation, person or category of person. It has three components: cognitive core, affective values and behavioural action tendencies. He explained that the cognitive aspect of attitude consists of beliefs and ideas that a person has about the attitude object. The affective component includes feelings of like and dislike towards any object and behavioural aspect consists of intentions to respond in a particular way towards the object. Nevertheless, despite these different views about attitude, one common line of agreement is that attitude is an important motivator of behaviour and it affects the achievement of goals.

Scholars have consistently maintained that reading particularly recreational reading is an asset for an active living in today's world and for a success in every sphere of life. According to the theory of reasoned action, "attitudes are a function of beliefs." Based on this theory, believing that performing a task will result in mainly positive outcomes leads to exhibiting favourable attitude towards the task while mistrust of the success of performing the task will result in taking an unfavourable attitude (Azen &Fishbein, 1980 cited in Farzaneh &Nejadansari, 2014). The implication of this is that the attitude students show towards a school subject or phenomenon determines the importance they attach to it which invariably affects their engagement in it. Therefore, the evaluation of students' attitudes will provide new insight into the way these attitudes hinder or facilitate learning (Farzaneh &Nejadansari, 2014). This brings us to the crux of this study which is to survey the attitudes of some undergraduates of Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) towards recreational reading.

Research Question
This research question was used to guide the study: What is the attitude of FUTO undergraduates towards recreational reading?

Methodology
Research Design and Sampling Technique
This study adopted a descriptive, survey-based design. One hundred and twenty undergraduate students of FUTO were purposively selected to participate in the study.

Instrument
A questionnaire was designed by the researcher in order to elicit information on students' attitude to
reading generally and recreational reading in particular. The Attitude to Recreational Reading Questionnaire (ARRQ) is a 10-item four-point modified likert scale. Participants were asked to indicate their feelings by ticking Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA). The instrument was given to experts for moderation.

**Method of Data Analysis**
Data generated in the study were analysed using descriptive statistics involving frequency counts and percentage.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Research Question**
What is the attitude of FUTO undergraduates towards recreational reading?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will rather spend my free time watching television than reading a book.</td>
<td>30 (25%)</td>
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<td>7 (5.8%)</td>
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<td>Reading is my favourite pastime.</td>
<td>28 (23.3%)</td>
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<td>Reading outside the recommended texts will not help me to pass examinations.</td>
<td>60 (50%)</td>
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<td>There is no time for me to do recreational reading.</td>
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<td>Recreational reading will enhance my speaking, reading and writing skills.</td>
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<td><strong>Average Total:</strong></td>
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Table 1 indicates that the statement respondents disagreed with the most is item 8. This item investigated students' opinion on the statement that recreational reading is a must for every student. On the other hand, item 5 is the most agreed to among respondents. The item asked respondents to indicate their feeling on the statement that they have no time to do recreational reading. Next to this, is item 6 which sought respondents' opinion on whether recreational reading enhances speaking, reading and writing skills. These results suggest that participants are favourably disposed to recreational reading. This can be linked with the fact that they acknowledge that recreational reading could help them improve their language skills. However, as Table 1 reveals,
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participants tended towards the opinion that they do not have time to do recreational reading. This is evidenced by the 70% (58%) of the participants that strongly agreed that they do not have time to do recreational reading. One possible explanation for this result could be that their work load in terms of the number of courses they offer is so heavy that they do not have enough time for recreational reading. But it is known that without motivation and proper counseling, adolescents are found to be preoccupied with more than they can cope with. As a result, they have difficulty putting their priorities right. However, the result obtained here is well supported by the finding of Bordonaro (2011) whose study showed that undergraduate students do not read recreationally because of lack of time. Thus, it could be said that students’ inability or unwillingness to read for recreation could be traced to some factors other than attitudes. Such factors could be excess course work, lack of motivation and unavailability of reading materials among others.

Conclusion/Recommendation
The primary concern of this study was to survey the attitude of FUTO undergraduate students towards recreational reading. A survey was carried out to determine this. The findings of the study revealed that most students acknowledge the academic benefits of recreational reading. There was also an indication that they have positive attitude towards recreational reading.

Based on the above findings, it was recommended that teachers should encourage and motivate students to read recreationally. Similarly, the Reading Association of Nigeria should expand and intensify its reading enlightenment campaigns. The association should also establish reading clubs in institutions of higher learning across the country. These, it is hoped, would improve recreational reading habits of undergraduates.

REFERENCES


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