ECONOMICALLY DAMAGED BOOK READING HABITS OF THE STUDENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: AN AFTERMATH OF ONLINE LEARNING DURING COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study unfolds the affected book reading habits of two hundred newly admitted University undergrads, having virtual learning during COVID-19 at HSSC level, studying in various arts & humanities and social sciences' disciplines. The qualitatively data, based on five broad questions followed by Wh questions, has been discussed in detail to draw conclusion for possible implications. The results show that the majority subjects say that virtual learning, though time saving, but has harmed their book reading habits because of the closer of institutions and access to printed sources such as libraries due to Pandemic which ultimately affected their reading habits and writing skills by furthering their perceptions that virtual learning made them more information retrieving learners than knowledge seekers as Internet supported facilities also detracted them from the habit of book reading. Hence, the study concludes with the remarks that for University graduates learning of new knowledge and skills are more significant than information as they assist them in present as well as future academic and professional life.

Keywords: book reading, habit, higher education, Internet, Information, knowledge

Introduction

Reading, according to (Nuttal, 1982) can be said that it is the display of meaningful pictorial and graphic based symbols. Reading illuminates the mind, sharpens the intellect, and allows individuals to move far without moving (Braunger & Lewis, 2006). Due to the recent past because of Pandemic COVID-19, the educators generally make derogatory statements about how students work on the latest ICT, and among them Internet is one the top which is probably become a bridge in between advanced and developing countries in the comity of nations (Onovughe, 2012). Reading was the passion of the greatest people ever and they have read it for centuries, so the word of knowledge has been passed down from generation to generation. It is further to remember that it is reading which goes for the personal growth as well as socialization of the readers which ultimately promotes them as socially progressive people. And when it is done consistently by making it more systematic it has some other effects such as refining of the intellect of the readers, provides balanced emotional approach, enables the readers a consciousness that what to read and what not by affecting the overall behaviour towards life.

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Hence, the aftermaths could be traced as that the people after becoming good readers. The people who are good readers automatically learn the way to become socially effective individuals participate in all sorts of socio-religious as well as cultural and political activities in the society because it is reading that affects the imagination of human beings. Consequently, it reshapes the vision of the readers by providing them wisdom and new outlook towards life (Satija, 2002).

With this important fact in mind, the study was designed to know that how did online based learning of knowledge and skills affected the book reading habits of University undergraduates who are expected to have appropriate knowledge and skills according their academic level after learning and passing grade XII in COVID-19 situation and presently studying in the first semester of various undergrad degree programs at a public sector University. It also aims to understand whether or not this situation has made them information or knowledge seekers if their book reading habits have been compromised.

Study objective

The study focuses on the reflections of the newly admitted undergrads (learnt and passed grade XII through technology based examination) of arts & humanities and social sciences to understand the impacts of online teaching and learning on their reading habits as well as their knowledge and skills.

Research queries

The study intends to get the answer of the following questions:

1. Have the online teaching and learning affected the book reading habits of undergrads admitted in various academic disciplines or not?
2. Has the virtual learning during Pandemic COVID-19 impacted adversely on the knowledge and skills of the undergrads required in their academic level?
3. Have the undergrads, studied online, become more of information retrievers or knowledge seekers with good writing skills?

Interview broad areas' questions:

1) Were you involved in the habit of book reading before COVID-19 situation and what were your areas of interest?
2) Were you engaged in book reading during COVID-19 scenario and how frequently did you read books?
3) Do you feel online teaching and learning dragged you more to seek information than knowledge and why?
4) Do you think book reading enhances knowledge and writing skills of the undergrads and how?
5) Do you feel that while retrieving matter from Internet sources your attention is detracted because of other available applications and why?

Methodology and procedure

The study is qualitative in nature and has been conducted on one hundred students of undergrad programs joined University (semester-I) after studying and passing HSSC virtually. To reach the

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conclusion the five broad questions were asked followed by some sub *Wh* questions to understand exact benefits or disadvantages of virtual teaching and learning with regard to their reading habits. The subjects were interviewed in an informal setting and were allowed to comment freely so that first hand responses related to their approach to information and knowledge for the enhancement of different skills required during and after graduation. The qualitative data has been discussed in the last part of the study to draw conclusion.

Review of Related works

Smith & Robinson (1980) believe that reading could be defined as some positive attempt by enabling the readers to comprehend the intended message of writer or author. Whereas, Toit (2001), has taken reading in other perspective and said that it is the process of thinking, retain and matching or association of concepts to be consider under the functions of writing of process or skills or written words and on the other hand Devarajan (1989) said that reading is understand the printed words. Irvin (1998) is more prone to reading and accordingly has described this as a process of the the association or connection in between the ongoing things in the brain and the printed material which is on the paper with a focus on the subject matter that should be specific to enable the students to understand what they are reading.

(Mirza, et al., 2021) are of the opinion that with an addition to skills including technical, they proposed it as basic reading infrastructure or tools, such as smart devices and with better connection of Internet the readers could have prevented learners from reading in matter available in English during a pandemic. Hence, the laptops are arguably one of the most popular e-learning devices along with tablets and smartphones which could be considered less effective than laptops. The term reading can be called a habit if it is repeated and repeated continuously. In this context (Wijesuriya, 1995) says that reading habits are mostly gauged with amount of the matter read by the readers, the time spend on such activity , frequency, etc., as these techniques develop readers' habits mature. According to Reyhenes (1998), good reading habits are proposed to improve students' reading comprehension. Green (2002), on the other hand, hypothesized that good reading habits of students would help increase their experience and knowledge.

Palani (2012) is of the opinion that effective reading habits are necessary for successful education, as effective reading is important for effective learning and reading is related to academic performance. I can say Active reading habits help students deepen their understanding and improve their academic performance. (Issa et al, 2012) believe that how students read on a daily basis can affect their learning ability and thus their academic performance. In most cases, there is a close correlation between good learning habits that students can develop and their academic performance and grades.

Oke (1996) explains why people read this way. Reading is a remodeling technique, mastery, equipment of skills for a better job, and a self-improvement tool that leads to reading for joy and relaxation. Reading is a status symbol, about the prestige and value that society gives to reading, not nothing. We also confirmed that all parties to the education system should make conscious efforts to promote reading habits. In the particular research of (Hassan, et al., 2012) it has been said that habits with reference to reading have been defined as that it does how often, how much it is read and what is the matter students read. For quite some years comprising few decades, a

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number of researchers have extended their devotion to studying learners' reading attitude with regard to reading and such habits which are directed to reading (e.g. Allen, 1986; Anderson, Higgins, & Wurster, 1985; Cheng, Shen, Chou, & Hung, 1997)

(Li-Bi Shen, 2006) argues that the invention of computers in the 1950s, advances in ICT in the 1970s, and the expansion in the personal computers in the 1980s and 1990s seem to have revolutionized the world of literacy for people in the current century. Presently, people Today, ICT based resources from emails to chartrooms by relying on information exchange, etc., rather than paper-based discussions. Lyon (1999) argued that the computer revolution did not have a significant impact on reading habits, both historically and from current reading and reading tendencies but there are some other researchers who have a belief that computers and the Internet were altering the life and habits of people especially of reading (Lamb, 2005).

Without an iota of doubt the facility of Internet is becoming an important element in the life of students who are having their education at colleges and it utilized not only for the problems of conducting research but also in common life as a social being as a tool for getting to know other people and others around the world (Chou & Hsiao, 2000). It is widely believed that the countries of the Third World, which have recently introduced Internet devices, are affected by such rapid use of the Internet for students. For example, in a study of reading habits in some high school students in Yaoundé, Bobda (2011) found that the lack of reading in Africa, especially in Cameroon, was a phenomenon often despised by public opinion.

Leuven et al., (2004) dug out no link between increased use of ICT in education and student performance. In fact, they find a consistently negative and slightly significant relationship between ICT use and some student performance indicators. To help with this, some students can use ICT to extend their free time and spend less time studying. Online games and enhanced communication channels do not necessarily mean improved performance. Karim and Hassan (2006) focused on the exponential growth of digital information and changed the way students perceive learning and reading and the way they use printed material to facilitate learning.

(Ofodu, 2012) by citing Cull (2011) opined that while the Internet is a text-saturated world, reading an online screen is very different from reading printed text. In his study, he looked at literature in various fields on the technical, social, behavioral, and neuroscientific effects of the Internet on reading practices. Especially in Canada and the United States, the focus was on the reading behavior of young college students.

But, so far as (Holden, 2004) is concerned, is an important gateway to self-development, social, economic and civil life. It allows us to learn from others about history and social studies, language, art, science, mathematics, and other subjects learned in educational institutions (Lyon, 1997). According to the International Reading Association (Moore et al., 1999), young people entering the adult world in the 21st century will be able to read and write more than ever in human history. They require advanced literacy skills to work, guide their families, act as citizens, and manage their personal lives. Reading and writing skills are required to process the vast amount of information that is ubiquitous. You need literacy skills to stimulate your imagination so that you can create the world of the future. Therefore, reading comprehension can be very important in a complex and sometimes dangerous world.

Qualitative analysis/discussion

The study was designed to dig out the perception of the students with regard to their reading habits that whether or not these were harmed because of COVID-19 situation which has almost affected the entire world community and especially the education sector. The interview was based on the following five broad questions:

1) Were you involved in the habit of book reading before COVID-19 situation and what were your areas of interest?
2) Were you engaged in book reading during COVID-19 scenario and how frequently did you read books?
3) Do you feel online teaching and learning dragged you more to seek information than knowledge and why?
4) Do you think book reading enhances knowledge and writing skills of the undergrads and how?
5) Do you feel that while retrieving matter from Internet sources your attention is detracted because of other available applications and why?

Discussion

Our first query was: Were you involved in the habit of book reading before COVID-19 situation and what were your areas of interest?

It is important to mention that majority students sought admission after fulfilling all academic requirements the majority subjects were quite direct while answering the questions and sub questions reflecting that they always believed that without reading getting good academic scores were not easy and, hence, that was the main force behind them which attracted them to read to succeed. Though some of the subjects studied science pertaining courses but at least were engaged in the habit of book reading and they compared virtual learn with face to face they opined that it's nt only reading habit that was compromised but some other skills such listening, speaking and writing; during face to face teaching and learning the teachers always assigned them various tasks but online material was simply the coked item they had.

While answering to the question No. 2 and annexed sub questions the subjects primarily do not recommend the Internet as a source of knowledge search, but rather give researchers a sense of quiz and know almost all academic and social needs to actually use it. It turns out that the Internet is used for academic needs. Subjects know that overuse of the Internet does not provide real knowledge. Similarly, visiting a public library is a time-consuming task, and COVID-19 constraints prevented them from visiting the library and this very factor affected their book reading habit. As a result, the thirst for real knowledge is reduced and consequently they started relying on the Internet sources to get some solved items.

Over-use of the Internet for specific topics and specific academic and social purposes got their sole aim to get through the exams but at the same time the majority subjects are aware of the fact that reading books and printed matter can be provide them in-depth knowledge which furthers and sharpens different academic skills but this immediate facility did not become as conducive as

it was dreamt in the beginning and they are facing its aftermaths in the form of poor book reading habits.

While discussing the responses of the subjects on the third question it's very important to say that it's a way to get information by compromising knowledge which in fact the ultimate for the students of such level who are expected a lot after completing graduation but too much of available material has made them sort of lazy in seeking generating knowledge provide as there have been less opportunities of learning different skills during virtual teaching and some minutes were reserved for one particular course. The subjects felt that face to face learning facilitates them in meeting their teachers even after the classroom to discuss topics of various natures which enhanced their communication skills as well.

We must not ignore the fact, in view of the responses of the majority subjects, that currently available search engines can meet the academic needs of students within seconds because Internet has opened up new perspectives for young people to instantly connect them with anyone in the world through Face book, messenger services, Skype, etc., which can provide them instant information but for the generation of knowledge they need to consult books and teachers to improve their speaking and writing skills.

The worrying aspect, in the light of the responses of the subject with regard to question No. 5, is that subjects who use the Internet for academic purposes appear to be more concerned about the relevant parts of the information related to their academic concerns. The information presented to them is related to the fact that it makes them information retrievers rather than seeking knowledge. It may be true for college graduates in developed countries, but it is very important to remember that developed countries have made great progress in social technology by reading books and printed matter, and have become a great source of knowledge and skills. Therefore, countries of the world, such as Pakistan, a third-generation youth, cannot afford to set aside books that are the secret to progress and guarantee technological progress.

In light of the results, this study considers that virtually training or teaching/learning during COVID-19 left its aftermath in the form such students who went for information to get good score in the exams by compromising their knowledge which, at higher education level students, enables them to learn skills required in their future professional life but it would become very difficult for them to using inconveniently acquired skills based on simply source of information scattered in bits because it takes time to acquire knowledge. It has been noticed that the undergrads studying in Economics and management studies, etc., are more confused about the problem as their conceptual understanding has also been harmed because of regular virtual learning.

Conclusion

In light of the results of this stud we can conclude by saying that the subjects academically played in the comfortable zone of learn without toiling hard to seek knowledge and skills because of on online learning which was economical but damaged the reading habits the future graduates who are to demonstrate both knowledge and their skills in their academic and professional arenas. It is primarily because of the easy and digitally available Internet information sources with the remarks that it might lead the students of developing countries like

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us to face intellectual powerlessness if the over use of the Internet as a source of knowledge is consistently extended by a new generation, especially those participating in higher research.

Suggestions:

1. Remedial language learning workshops for newly admitted undergrads in various degree programs should be arranged by the Universities.
2. Special writing tasks must be assigned to the students, other than regular course work, to improve their writing skills.
3. Library period should be made compulsory to regularize their reading habits.
4. Teacher-student interaction after the class at University level should be ensured on daily basis.

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