

READING INTEREST AND PREFERENCES OF THE MALE AND FEMALE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: NEED FOR RE-ORIENTATION.

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Abstract

This study sets out to investigate the reading interests and preferences of senior secondary school students in Rivers State. It is a survey research intended to examine the proportion of students who showed preference for various categories of books, their reading tastes and to find out whether sex differences influence students' preferences for the books. The sample consists of 640 students (336 boys and 304 girls) who responded to the questionnaire on the types of books students prefer to read. The data were analyzed using percentage and rank order. The results showed that the students show preference for religion. Boys prefer religious literature to other types of books while girls prefer romance literature. The study revealed that sex differences influence the choice of books students read. It was recommended that parents, organizations and government should donate books that would sensitize students to read and that students should be motivated to vary their preferences for books to reflect the changes in this age of information technology so as to be at par with their counterparts in advanced societies of the world.

Introduction

Reading is central and crucial to formal education. In spite of the fact that it is a major instrument that students employ in learning, the reading encounter cannot be rigorously pursued unless there is interest. Dewey (1975:17) opined that "interest means being engaged, engrossed or entirely taken up with some activity because of its recognized worth". Through interest an individual can develop his/her reading potential and can become an avid and proficient reader as a result of the importance attached to the task. Guthrie (1981:984) explained that "When we speak of a student's interest, we are referring to what he/she is attracted to, attentive to, conversed about, invested money in and engrossed the self in".¹ Therefore, the role interest plays in reading cannot be waved aside if students have to engage in extensive, reading that could make them gain insight into the world around them or the one that they engage in so as to cover a lot of grounds in preparation for internal and external examinations.

Reading interests and preferences vary according to individual needs, tastes, age, cultural background, social status, level of education, religions and political values. Hussen and Postlethwaite (1985) explained that reading interests and preferences vary according to the age and sex of adolescents. They revealed that the popular themes with the adolescents include suspense, humour, violence, sport, and social responsibilities. While the adolescent boys seem to show preferences for sports, hobbies, sex, crime, adventure, and war, the adolescent girls prefer books on people, social relationships and mystery without violence. They claimed that adolescent girls tend to read more than boys, In addition to this, Moffil(1992) discovered that female adolescents prefer romance novels, adventure, fantasy, detectives, and suspense whereas the male adolescents tend to prefer different kind of books with wider tastes such as fantasy, science fiction, sports, adventure, suspense and detectives. She claimed that sex differences in leisure reading are statistically significant.

Benton (1996a) revealed another dimension in adolescent reading interests and preferences. He expressed concern over the increasing popularity of violent books among adolescents. He observed that a widening gap exists-between boys' and girls' reading interests and that girls tend to show more interest in "Point Horror"¹¹ series than boys. He revealed that girls claimed to like the suspense and sudden twist of events at the end of the story. He attributed the popularity of such a book to its easy reading because it can be devoured at a sitting and it offers a strong action-packed story-line in very simple language. But in his 1994 survey, 'Amiga and Sega' a computer game magazine, 'Shoot' and 'Match' and so on were read by boys while girls prefer 'Just 17' 'Mizz' 'Smash Hit' and so on. Majority of the

action-packed stories tend to reflect the computer age.

However, the senior secondary school students belong to the adolescent age group and it is expected that they should have preferences for reading some books more than others. But students' interest in reading at this stage is at a low ebb probably because they cannot read or they regard reading as a school and related task for which the school and parents persistently put pressures on them to perform. In addition to this, the adolescents are restless. They are not interested in tasks that will make them sit in a place. They are eager to be entertained, hence their preference for television viewing especially the home video, music, sports and other social activities. The type of control which television viewing had on Nigerian teenagers may not be unconnected with their inability to read coupled with some environmental factors that did not motivate students to develop interest in reading. Equally, at the secondary school level, the restless nature of most students coupled with their inability to apply themselves adequately to reading tasks are motivating factors in this study. The central point of this study is the attempt to examine that proportion of students who should interest and preferences for reading various categories of books in order to identify the problems and offer some solutions. The present study focuses on senior secondary school students' interest and preference for reading some books more than others.

Purpose Of The Study

The purpose of the study was to:

1. Examine the proportion of senior secondary school students in Rivers state who showed preference for reading various categories of books.
2. Find out whether sex differences influence the senior secondary students' preference for reading various categories of books.

Research questions

The following research questions were adopted:

1. What proportion of students showed preference for reading various categories of books?
2. What proportion of male and female senior secondary students showed preference for reading various categories of books?.

Methods

The study was a survey which covered senior secondary school students in eight local government areas in Rivers State. Two schools per local government, (one public and one private) making a total of 16 schools were used. The stratified random sampling technique was used. Consequently 40 students per school, that is 10 students (5 boys and 5 girls) from SSI, and 15

students from each of SS2 and SS3, (8 boys and 7 girls per class) that is 336 boys and 304 girls and that gave a total of 640 students which constituted the sample size.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire for students named Reading Interests and Preferences Questionnaire (RIPQ). The questionnaire was a checklist designed to elicit responses from students regarding their order of preference for reading various categories of books. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section was meant to elicit responses on students' personal data while the second section was to elicit responses on their level of preference for reading various categories of books.

The RIPQ was face-validated by four experts in language education and test and measurement. The suggestions given were used in producing the final version of the questionnaire. The test-retest technique was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The RIPQ was administered to 60 senior secondary school students (of both sexes) in a school that did not participate in the main study. A reliability co-efficient of 0.79 was obtained and by implication, the instrument was reliable. The researcher went to schools to personally administer copies of the RIPQ to the students so as to hasten the completion and retrieval of the questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were subjected to descriptive statistics, of percentages and rank order of the responses. The results were discussed based on the research questions.

Data Analysis And Results

Research Question One

What proportion of students showed preference for reading various categories of books?

Research Question one is answered in table 1.

Table 1; Frequencies and percentages of Students' Preferences for Reading Various

Categories of Books	Frequencies	Percentages%	Rank
Adventure	62	9.7	3 rd
Crime	34	5.3	8 th
Detective	48	7.5	5 th
Violence	45	7.0	7 th
Romance	106	16.56	2 nd
Suspense	34	5.3	8 th
Biography	47	7.34	6 th
Science Fiction	59	9.2	4 th
Career	33	5.2	10 th
Travel	25	3.9	11 th
Religion	147	23	1 st
Total	640	100	

From Table 1, it is evident that Religion (23%) topped the list while Romance (16.56%) came second in students' order of preference for reading materials. The least popular book with the students is Travels (3.9%). By implication, majority of the students have high preference for Religion and Romance literatures above the other books.

Research Question Two

What proportion of male and female senior secondary school students showed preference for reading various categories of books? Research Question Two is answered in table 2.

Table2: Frequencies and Percentages of Students' Preference for Reading Various Categories of Books by Gender.

Categories of Books	Male			Female		
	Frequencies	Percentages	Rank	Frequencies	Percentages	Rank
Adventure	39	11.6%	3 rd	26	8.6%	3 rd
Crime	16	4.8	10 th	21	6.9%	5 th
Detective	30	8.9	4 th	18	5.9	7 th
Violent	28	8.3	5 th	17	5.6	8 th
Romance	44	13.1	2 nd	77	25.3	1 st
Suspense	20	6.0	9 th	14	4.6	9 th

Biography	28	8.3	5 th	19	6.2	6 th
Science fiction	28	8.3	5 th	26	8.6	3 rd
Career	19	5.7	9 th	14	4.6	9 th
Travels	12	3.6	11 th	13	4.3	11 th
Religion	72	21.4	1 st	59	19.4	2 nd
Total	336	100		304	100	

Table2 revealed the proportions (%) of male and female students' preference for reading various categories of books. An observation of the results indicates that Religion (21.4%), Romance (13.1%) and Adventure (11.6%) ranked first, second and third respectively in the order of preference by the boys while Romance (25.3%), Religion (19.4%) and Adventure (8.6%) and Science fiction(8.6%) ranked first, second and third for girls. The least favoured novel in order of preference by both sexes is Travels (3.6%)for boys and (4.3%) for girls, and was ranked 11th by both sexes. Equally, Table2 shows that students' tastes differ according to gender because while the boys have preference for religion, the girls' priority is for romance literature.

Discussion

The study had shown that students' preference for Religion (i.e.23%) takes the lead followed by Romance (16.56%). Out of the eleven categories of books presented for students' preference, Travels was the least favoured while Religion is the most favoured. It was equally affirmed in this study that Religion (21.4%) topped the list of male preference for reading while Romance (25.3%) topped the list of female preferences. Further more, students' preference for Religion as first choice among the list of eleven categories of books may appear a little strange to a non-Nigerian. However, our dehumanizing culture, in which crime, unemployment, economic depression, injustice and political instability predominated and the inability of the individual to liberate himself/herself might drive the average Nigerian to seek solace in religion and the spiritual. Equally, the avalanches of religious propaganda and public revivals have brought religion to the top of the social matrix in Nigeria. This could make the youths begin to get curious about religion by devoting more attention to religious literature- The renewed interest in public religious revivals by various Christian and Moslem organizations and the abundance of free literature from the various religious groups and house-to-house fellowships might have enhanced the reading of religious literature by the sampled students. But the implication of this is that if the adolescents especially in a religiously polarized society like Nigeria devote too much attention to the reading of religious literature, it could result in breeding religious fanatics and this could spell doom for the fragile unity and peace in the nation.

On the other hand, preference for religious literature could motivate the adolescents to come closer to God in their belief and relationship with their fellowmen. It is also capable of moulding their characters and promoting upright behaviour among them. Consequently the rate of crime, hooliganism and other dishonest behaviour prevalent among Nigerian youths could be drastically reduced as a result of their interest in reading religious literature.

Furthermore, the female adolescents' *priority*- is Romance (25,3%). This is not unexpected because reading in romance could be psychologically satisfying to the youths. This finding reinforces the earlier findings of Moffit (1992) that female adolescents prefer Romance as their favourite followed by adventure. The conclusion one can draw from this is that sex differences exist in students' preference for reading different types of books. One crucial thing to bear in mind is that while adolescent students in developed countries have preference for 'Amiga and Sega'-a computer game magazine, 'Shoot', 'Match', especially the boys, 'Just 17', 'Mizz' and 'Smash Hits' for girls as pointed out by (Benton 1995b), the Nigerian adolescents are craving for religious literature. I think it is time to move with time. Societies are changing, preferences should change including reading preferences. The Nigerian students should change their reading tastes to reflect societal change. This is computer age, and

Nigerian students, reading preferences should reflect this.

Recommendations

The following are recommended to promote students interests in their choices of reading materials:

- 1 That parents, government and philanthropic organizations should donate various types of reading materials to schools so as to improve and increase students tastes and preferences in their choice of reading materials. This will reduce the preference for religious literature.
2. Experts should be trained to guide the adolescent students in their choice of appropriate reading materials.
3. Libraries should be established in schools and stocked with current books that could cater for the needs, tastes, individual differences and intellectual demands of adolescents as well as books that reflect social changes and technological advancement in societies.
4. Schools should create reading periods on the timetable to enable students to do voluntary reading.

Conclusion

The study had shown that senior secondary school students showed preference for religious literature more than other types of books. It had shown that boys prefer religious books to other types of books while girls prefer Romance to other novels. It is therefore recommended that students be sensitized to vary their tastes through the provision of books, which could be acquired through generous donations by parents, government and voluntary organizations. Such books if donated could cater for the needs, tastes, age, and sex of the Nigerian adolescent students.

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