

Exploring University Students' Library Engagement: Reading Habits, Preferences, and Gender Dynamics

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Abstract: This cross-sectional study aimed to investigate university students' library engagement, emphasizing preferences, motivations, and reading habits, with an additional focus on gender dynamics. A total of 373 participants were involved in the research, and data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the participants' reading habits in different library sections, types of books read, and reasons for their preference for reading in the library. The Kruskal-Wallis test was employed to examine potential gender differences in these variables. The findings revealed variations in the frequency of students' reading activities across different library sections, with the main reading room being the most preferred section. The study also identified specific book types, such as personal notebooks and library textbooks, that were frequently read by students. Reasons for students' preference for reading in the library included the motivating environment, availability of book options, assistance from librarians, and fewer distractions compared to other places. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test indicated significant gender differences in the ranks for certain library sections, book types, and reasons for reading in the library. These findings provide valuable insights into students' reading habits and preferences, highlighting the importance of creating diverse reading spaces, expanding book collections, promoting a supportive library environment, and enhancing librarian support. The implications of the study underscore the need for gender-inclusive services, thoughtful space design, and comprehensive collection development to meet the evolving needs of students and foster a reading culture in libraries.

Keywords: library preferences, motivations, reading habits, gender differences, student research

INTRODUCTION

Reading, frequently seen as a fundamental skill, has evolved beyond its primary role to become a cornerstone of education, personal growth, and cultural enrichment. It provides a path to information acquisition, critical thinking, and successful communication in addition to text decoding. Understanding the intricate interaction of students' reading practices and preferences has far-reaching ramifications for educators, academics, and policymakers. In this context, the role of gender has received increased attention due to its potential importance in promoting gender parity, developing a diverse reading culture, and improving overall educational achievements.

Reading's multidimensional nature extends well beyond its technical features. It acts as a conduit, connecting people to a large world of ideas, viewpoints, and experiences. Reading allows people to explore diverse narratives, widen their perspectives, and develop empathy. This strong reading habit is a vital pillar for academic success and critical thinking (Carey et al., 2020; Lucantoni, 2019; Seifert, 2020).

Reading, a cognitive activity important to human engagement with written material, includes a variety of activities with goals ranging from gaining knowledge to amusement to the

study of different opinions. The surrounding environment, a crucial driver of reading experiences, has a significant impact on individuals' reading patterns and preferences. This includes the decision of whether to read at home or at a library, both of which have the potential to significantly shape the whole reading experience and impact the reasons driving reading habits. The dynamic interaction between the reading environment and human preferences emphasizes the critical role it plays, with diverse settings such as home and library contexts emerging as prominent elements, each offering unique benefits and exerting distinct impacts.

The home reading environment embodies comfort and familiarity, fostering personalized and serene reading experiences tailored to individual preferences in seating, lighting, and ambient sounds. This approach enhances engagement by allowing readers to craft an environment that optimally elevates their reading experience. Studies reveal a moderate, positive link between the home literacy environment and children's reading comprehension (Dong et al., 2020). Libraries, on the other hand, carve out controlled areas dedicated to reading and learning, providing concentrated surroundings free of distractions—a fertile ground for deep reading and attention (Cheung & Waldeck, 2016; UNESCO, 2016). The abundance of various reading materials at libraries, spanning a wide range of genres and subjects, further confirms their reputation as havens for readers.

Further investigation reveals that the psychological and cognitive characteristics of reading environments drive individual preferences. Home reading promotes a sense of comfort and relaxation, potentially increasing motivation and engagement levels with reading materials. Libraries, on the other hand, use the psychological idea of priming, in which the physical environment prepares the mind for a certain action, in this case, reading. The presence of other readers in libraries may foster a shared reading culture and foster a sense of social accountability, which may serve as a motivation for more regular reading engagements (Adkins & Brendler, 2015).

Gender inequality in education has long been a source of concern. Research consistently highlights discrepancies in academic achievements and engagement levels between male and female students (Tatiana et al., 2022). These gaps are rooted in societal norms, prevalent expectations, and established gender roles, which collectively impact students' educational choices, opportunities, and experiences. The impact of reading environments on reading habits and motivations is equally profound. The choice of reading at home vs. in a library, for example, can have a major impact on the overall reading experience (UoPeople, 2022). Libraries, as specialized locations for study and discovery, have distinct characteristics that influence students' reading habits and motivations.

Understanding gendered reading habits is becoming increasingly important as educators strive to create inclusive and fair learning environments. Investigating whether male and female students have different preferences for reading materials, reading places, and motives might help educators and librarians develop a balanced and varied reading culture. This study project not only identifies ways to address gender differences in reading engagement but also informs efforts to promote gender parity.

While the value of reading as a core ability and the necessity for gender equity in education are well recognized, there is still a large gap in our understanding of how gender affects students' reading behaviors, preferences, and motivations, particularly in library environments. These gaps likely persist due to a lack of intersectional perspective and context-specific research on gender differences in academic engagement. Previous gender and reading research has generally focused on wider patterns in book choices and academic success (Espinoza & Strasser, 2020; Summers, 2013), frequently missing the complex impact of reading environments and the unique variables influencing students' interactions with reading materials.

This is problematic, as it limits our ability to design targeted interventions that promote gender parity and foster inclusive learning cultures. Without unraveling how gender norms, stereotypes, and societal expectations contribute to shaping reading engagement within specific settings like libraries, educators, librarians, and policymakers will continue to struggle to meet the needs of all students. Bridging these knowledge gaps with further investigation is critical, as it will

provide practical insights to transform gendered reading landscapes and enhance educational experiences.

Gender is a diverse and complex social construct that has a major impact on many aspects of people's lives, notably their reading habits and preferences. These factors are profoundly rooted in the historical history of societal conventions and cultural expectations, which have shaped various reading tendencies among different genders. As a result, there is a rich tapestry of book choices, reading habits, and motives that represent the interplay between gender and literature.

Gendered reading patterns have been historically influenced by prevailing societal standards. Throughout history, civilizations have maintained a strong distinction between "masculine" and "feminine" literature, propagating prejudices about the sorts of reading material thought appropriate for each gender. Historically, women were limited to reading items that matched their assigned responsibilities, such as novels and periodicals focusing on domesticity and emotional experiences. Men, on the other hand, were encouraged to engage with scholarly and intellectual literature, cementing gender-specific literary divisions (Howard & Allen, 1990). Nonetheless, the gendered reading habit trajectory has not stayed constant. Feminist movements and ongoing efforts to challenge established gender stereotypes have triggered a shift in reading habits. This transition has resulted in a more diverse and inclusive selection of reading options for people of both genders.

The genres and subjects that people are drawn to reveal their gender preferences. According to studies, women typically gravitate toward romance, and storylines focused on relationships and emotional discovery (Radway, 1991). Men, on the other hand, may have a stronger preference for genres linked with acquiring knowledge and intellectual inquiry, such as science fiction, fantasy, and non-fiction (Thums et al., 2021). However, it is critical to understand that these preferences are not fixed; they vary from person to person and are heavily impacted by cultural assumptions and marketing techniques that promote gendered preferences.

The complex interaction of social and cultural elements has a significant impact on gendered reading practices. Individuals' opinions of what constitutes "appropriate" reading material for their gender are heavily shaped by media depictions of gender-specific reading choices, as well as peer pressure and familial expectations. Media portrayals frequently reinforce the impression that "chick lit" is written for women, whereas thrillers or adventure books are written for males as seen in some e-commerce stores (Barnes & Noble, 2023; Rosenfeld, 2017). Furthermore, the school environment is important in sustaining gendered reading practices. Unintentionally, educators and teachers can promote gender stereotypes by assigning certain sorts of texts to students based on their gender, prolonging and deepening the literary gap.

Furthermore, while the impact of library environments on reading habits has been recognized (Krolak, 2005; Thorpe et al., 2016), there is a scarcity of research on how libraries contribute to the development of gendered reading landscapes. Are libraries well-designed to accommodate different reading tastes and motives among men and women? How can libraries become more welcoming environments that successfully inspire all students to interact with reading materials in personally relevant ways? Addressing these issues is critical for promoting gender equity, establishing a dynamic reading culture, and improving educational performance. Educators, librarians, and policymakers can design targeted interventions to bridge gender-related gaps in reading engagement and create truly inclusive learning environments by unraveling gendered reading patterns within library contexts and identifying the motivations that underpin these behaviors.

Libraries have a long and illustrious history as crucial institutions dedicated to information transmission and the promotion of a reading culture (Musingafi & Chiwanza, 2012). These spaces, dedicated to the pursuit of learning and intellectual advancement, have particular characteristics that have a significant impact on people's reading habits and preferences. One of the most important functions that libraries perform is education. Their shelves include an eclectic mix of reading materials ranging from scholastic tomes to light reading, appealing to a wide range of readers. This inclusiveness is crucial in promoting literacy, facilitating lifelong learning, and

cultivating critical thinking skills development. Libraries, via collaboration with educational institutions, serve as complementary partners to traditional classroom teaching, promoting individual research initiatives and cultivating an exploratory attitude. A library visit reveals an array of expertly organized sections adapted to various reading interests. Libraries entice readers to go on a trip across a vast panorama of themes and genres, from the fascinating realms of fiction to the enlightening realms of non-fiction, and from the topical pages of magazines to the reservoirs of reference resources. This combination of offers not only allows people to extend their perspectives but also to connect with things they may not have discovered otherwise.

The arrangement of materials within library walls contains a sense of serendipity, with surprising literary gems awaiting discovery. This unexpected meeting can pique readers' interest and inspire them to explore unexplored literary terrains and genres that may have previously escaped them. As a result, libraries serve as channels for introducing readers to new ideas and narratives, expanding their reading repertory (Durant & Horava, 2015).

Libraries, beyond their instructional responsibilities, transform into lively community centers that connect individuals from all origins, age groups, and interests (Adetayo et al., 2023). This social feature heightens the importance of libraries as places for studying together and the dynamic interchange of knowledge. However, some higher education students prefer quiet, private learning spaces for individual activities and collaborative study with peers, with less emphasis on public spaces (Beckers et al., 2016). The carefully created setting that libraries provide is an important aspect of their effect on reading experiences. Libraries provide a haven for focused concentration by eliminating the distractions that are common in other places (Yoo-Lee et al., 2013). This regulated environment allows readers to get immersed in their selected texts, encouraging deep understanding and critical reflection. Students in academic libraries prefer study carrels, corner seats, and wall-hugging spaces, with preference for personal space and wall-hugging traits (Min & Lee, 2020). The architecture of libraries, which includes comfortable seating arrangements, well-thought-out lighting, and designated silent zones, all work together to create an environment that is conducive to reading. This is reflected in a study at Andrews University, which found students prefer individual study spaces over group study and social areas in the library, regardless of gender and program level (Oliveira, 2016).

Furthermore, the social ethos fostered by libraries fosters a common reading culture that strengthens readers' devotion to their literary endeavors. Seeing other people reading functions as a subtle motivator, inspiring individuals to devote more time to their own reading pursuits and develop a habit of regular library visits. In essence, libraries transcend their physical borders to serve as keepers of information and catalysts for a reading-loving culture. Libraries exert a complex effect that influences reading practices, broadens horizons, and fosters a lifelong love of the written word as educational havens, community centers, and beautifully managed literary landscapes.

Although there is research on gender and reading preferences, there is a pressing need for more context-specific studies, notably on students' reading practices and the effect of library environments. This study seeks to address this void by investigating students' library preferences and reading reasons, with a focus on the role of gender. This study intends to provide educators, librarians, and policymakers with practical insights into gendered reading landscapes in order to foster comprehensive reading cultures and improve educational experiences for all students.

The central objective of this study is to comprehensively explore university students' library engagement, emphasizing their reading habits, preferences, and gender dynamics. In pursuit of this goal, the research is designed to delve into several specific objectives: investigating the frequency of reading activities among university students within library settings, analyzing variations in reading habits across different library sections, categorizing the types of books that are commonly read by university students in the library, identifying the key reasons that influence students' preference for the library as a reading space, and assessing the influence of gender on specific aspects of students' library engagement. Accompanying these objectives is a research hypothesis positing that gender will have no significant difference on students' reading preferences and motivations in the library.

METHOD

Study Design

A cross-sectional research design was utilized to examine the library preferences, motivations of students, and gender dynamics. The aim was to collect data from a student sample to uncover insights into their reading behaviors and preferences within the library environment. This design was preferred over a longitudinal approach for its efficiency in gathering data on multiple variables at a specific point in time. Though longitudinal studies track changes over time, a cross-sectional design offers a snapshot of the current state of affairs, ideal for this exploratory investigation into students' academic reading culture and issues related to library engagement. This methodology is particularly suited for capturing a wide array of data from a sample population at one moment, making it optimal for understanding library usage frequencies, preferences for resources/spaces, influential factors, and gender variations. Conducted at an anonymized location in Nigeria, where only male and female genders are legally recognized (Suleiman, 2022), the study included only participants identifying as male or female.

Participants

Participants were drawn from the student body of the anonymized institution. The selection process involved two stages: initially, 538 students were randomly selected from a total of 3457, and from these, 373 who preferred reading in the library were finalized for the study. This two-tiered approach ensured a diverse yet focused sample, aligning closely with the research objectives. The final group comprised 51.7% female and 48.3% male students.

Questionnaire Development

The study's questionnaire was crafted after a thorough review of relevant literature on library preferences, motivations, and gender differences, with expert consultations in library sciences and survey design to validate its content.

Questionnaire Structure

Organized into several sections, the questionnaire covered:

1. Demographic Information: Gender and age data were collected.
2. Library Reading Frequency: Questions on how often participants visit the library and their reading habits, with options ranging from "Once a semester" to "Daily."
3. Library Sections: Inquiries about reading habits in various library areas (e.g., main reading room, e-library) were assessed using a Likert scale.
4. Types of Books Read: Participants indicated the kinds of books they read in the library, from personal notebooks to ebooks.
5. Reasons for Library Reading: Reasons behind choosing the library as a reading space were explored.

Pre-Testing and Validation

A pretest with 30 students not involved in the main study was conducted to refine the questionnaire based on participant feedback, ensuring its clarity and validity.

Data Collection

A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to participants, who were given clear instructions and sufficient time for completion. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to promote honest responses. The voluntary nature of participation and confidentiality of responses were communicated upfront.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to analyze reading habits, preferences, and motivations. The Kruskal-Wallis test was

applied to identify any gender-related differences in reading behaviors and motivations. Analysis was performed using SPSS, with a significance threshold set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Frequency of Students' Reading in the Library

Table 1 illustrates the frequency with which students engage in reading activities within the library. Among the 373 surveyed participants, a small percentage reported infrequent library usage, with 3.8% reading once a semester and 8.8% monthly. However, a significant majority demonstrated more regular engagement, with 68.1% reading on a weekly basis and 19.3% daily. The mean frequency score of 3.03, coupled with a standard deviation of 0.657, indicates that students, on average, participate in library reading activities around three times during a given period, with moderate variation in frequency. These data suggest that the library serves as a critical resource for the majority of the student body, underscoring the library's pivotal role in supporting student learning and academic endeavors.

Table 1. Frequency of Students' Reading in the Library

Indicators	Frequency (373)	Percent
Once a semester	14	3.8
Monthly	33	8.8
Weekly	254	68.1
Daily	72	19.3
Mean	3.03	
Std. Deviation	0.657	

Reading Frequency Across Library Sections

Analysis of the reading habits of students across different library sections (Table 2) shows a clear preference for the Main reading room, with a mean score of 3.52 indicating frequent engagement in reading activities in this area. The standard deviation of 0.690 for the Main reading room suggests moderate consistency in student responses about their reading frequency here.

Table 2. Reading Frequency Across Library Sections

S/N	Library Sections	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Mean	Std Dev
1	Main reading room	231 (61.9%)	110 (29.5%)	27 (7.2%)	5 (1.3%)	3.52	0.690
2	Discussion room	50 (13.4%)	173 (46.4%)	104 (27.9%)	46 (12.3%)	2.61	0.869
3	E-library	83 (22.3%)	148 (39.7%)	94 (25.2%)	48 (12.9%)	2.71	0.954
4	Serial section	50 (13.4%)	144 (38.6%)	116 (31.1%)	63 (16.9%)	2.49	0.926
5	Library Classroom	83 (22.3%)	151 (40.5%)	82 (22.0%)	57 (15.3%)	2.70	0.982

In contrast, the Discussion room and E-library sections are utilized less consistently, with mean scores of 2.61 and 2.71, respectively, indicating that students generally use these areas for reading on an occasional basis. The higher standard deviations in these sections (0.869 for the Discussion room and 0.954 for the E-library) point to a greater variation in how often students read there, reflecting diverse student needs and preferences.

The Serial section and Library Classroom are the least frequented for reading purposes, with mean scores of 2.49 and 2.70, respectively. This suggests that students rarely use the Serial section and occasionally use the Library Classroom for reading. The relatively high standard

deviations for these sections (0.926 for the Serial section and 0.982 for the Library Classroom) indicate a significant range of reading behaviors among students in these library areas.

Overall, the findings highlight varied student engagement across different library sections, with a pronounced preference for the Main reading room. The diversity in reading frequency from one section to another underscores the importance of tailoring library spaces to meet the varied academic needs and preferences of students. This information is invaluable for library management aiming to enhance the utility and attractiveness of different library sections, thereby fostering a more conducive environment for student learning and research.

Types of Books Read by Students in the Library

Table 3 elucidates the preferred book types students engage with in the library. It reveals that "My notebooks" are the most frequently read, with a mean rating of 3.72 ($SD = 0.526$), indicating regular use. This underscores the importance of personal notes in students' study routines within the library. Following closely are "My personal textbooks" with a mean of 3.51 ($SD = 0.662$), suggesting that students often turn to their textbooks for library reading sessions, highlighting the relevance of personal study materials.

Table 3. Types of Books Read by Students in the Library

S/N	Book Types	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Mean	Std Dev
1	My notebooks	281 (75.3%)	82 (22.0%)	8 (2.1%)	2 (0.5%)	3.72	0.526
2	Library textbooks	155 (41.6%)	174 (46.6%)	36 (9.7%)	8 (2.1%)	3.28	0.723
3	My personal textbooks	222 (59.5%)	120 (32.2%)	29 (7.8%)	2 (0.5%)	3.51	0.662
4	Ebooks	80 (21.4%)	152 (40.8%)	104 (27.9%)	37 (9.9%)	2.74	0.907

Conversely, "Library textbooks" present a mean reading frequency of 3.28 ($SD = 0.723$), showing occasional engagement by students. This suggests a moderate reliance on library-provided textbooks, possibly for reference or supplementing personal study materials. "Ebooks" are read with the least frequency, exhibiting a mean of 2.74 ($SD = 0.907$), which points to sporadic usage. Despite this, the average score above the midpoint indicates a significant, albeit occasional, engagement with digital formats within the library setting.

The variation in standard deviations across book types sheds light on the consistency of reading habits among students. Lower standard deviations for "My notebooks" and "My personal textbooks" suggest a relatively uniform pattern of use, whereas higher deviations for "Library textbooks" and "Ebooks" imply more diverse reading behaviors. This diversity in preferences and reading habits underscores the need for libraries to cater to a broad spectrum of student needs, ranging from traditional printed materials to digital resources, to effectively support their academic endeavors.

Reasons for Choosing Library as a Reading Space

Table 4 elucidates the motivations behind students' preference for utilizing library spaces for reading. The tranquility of the library emerges as the most valued aspect, with the highest mean score of 3.84, underscoring the library's role as a haven for focused study. The breadth of available reading materials also significantly contributes to the library's appeal, reflected by a mean score of 3.67, highlighting the value of having diverse resources at students' disposal.

Table 4. Reasons for Choosing Library as a Reading Space

S/N	Reasons	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Std Dev
1	It's silent	314 (84.2%)	57 (15.3%)	2 (0.5%)	0 (0%)	3.84	0.385
2	There are many options of books to choose to read	256 (68.6%)	113 (30.3%)	2 (0.5%)	2 (0.5%)	3.67	0.514
3	Availability of assistance from librarians	173 (46.4%)	169 (45.3%)	25 (6.7%)	6 (1.6%)	3.36	0.681
4	Less distractions compared to other places	285 (76.4%)	84 (22.5%)	4 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	3.75	0.456
5	The library environment motivates to read	263 (70.5%)	103 (27.6%)	6 (1.6%)	1 (0.3%)	3.68	0.515
6	Opportunity to meet new friends	94 (25.2%)	155 (41.6%)	101 (27.1%)	23 (6.2%)	2.86	0.867

The presence of librarian support is appreciated with a mean score of 3.36, indicating positive student recognition of librarian assistance, albeit to a slightly lesser degree than other factors. The comparative absence of distractions in the library, as opposed to other study environments, garners a mean score of 3.75, suggesting that the library's environment is conducive to concentration and productive study sessions. Furthermore, the library's ambiance, which fosters a motivation to read, receives a mean score of 3.68, indicating that the setting itself plays a crucial role in encouraging students to engage with their readings.

Conversely, social opportunities within the library, while still perceived positively, rank lower in importance with a mean score of 2.86. This response indicates that while the chance to meet new friends in the library is valued, it is not as critical a factor in choosing the library as a reading space as the other reasons mentioned.

These insights reveal a multifaceted appreciation for library spaces, where the emphasis is on the environment's conduciveness to study through silence, resource availability, and minimal distractions. The library's role as a social venue is acknowledged, though it is secondary to its primary function as an academic resource. This understanding of student preferences can guide efforts to further tailor library environments to meet their needs effectively.

Gender Differences in Library Reading Sections, Types of Books Read by Students in the Library, and Student Preferences for Reading in the Library

Table 5 examines gender differences in how students rank their usage of different library sections, employing the Kruskal-Wallis test to determine statistical significance. The analysis reveals that no significant gender differences exist in preferences for the Main reading room and the Library Classroom, as indicated by the asymptotic significances (Asymp. Sig.) of .255 and .678, respectively. These findings suggest that both male and female students are equally likely to utilize these spaces for reading.

Conversely, significant gender disparities are noted in the Discussion room, E-library, and Serial section, with asymptotic significances of .046, .003, and .036, respectively. These results highlight that male students demonstrate a higher propensity than female students to utilize these specific library sections for their reading activities. Specifically, males are more inclined to engage in reading within the Discussion room, E-library, and Serial section, suggesting gender-based differences in the utilization of library resources and spaces.

Table 5. Gender Differences in Library Reading Sections

Gender	Section	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Female	Main reading room	193	192.27	1.298	1	.255
Male		180	181.35			
Female	Discussion room	193	176.96	3.964	1	.046
Male		180	197.76			
Female	E-library	193	171.68	8.893	1	.003
Male		180	203.43			
Female	Serial section	193	176.26	4.381	1	.036
Male		180	198.51			
Female	Library Classroom	193	189.13	.172	1	.678
Male		180	184.71			

Such distinctions in library usage between genders can inform targeted enhancements to library services, ensuring that the spatial and resource needs of all students are met effectively. Understanding these patterns enables libraries to optimize their environments to support the diverse study habits and preferences present within the student body.

Table 6 analyzes gender-based preferences in the types of books read by students within the library, employing the Kruskal-Wallis test to determine statistical significance in these preferences.

Table 6. Gender Differences in Types of Books Read by Students in the Library

Book Types	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
My notebooks	Female	193	192.34	1.744	1	.187
	Male	180	181.28			
Library textbooks	Female	193	176.60	4.505	1	.034
	Male	180	198.15			
My personal textbooks	Female	193	189.87	.376	1	.540
	Male	180	183.92			
Ebooks	Female	193	170.69	10.172	1	.001
	Male	180	204.49			

The findings reveal no significant gender differences in the usage of "My notebooks" and "My personal textbooks," with the Chi-Square values of 1.744 (Asymp. Sig. = .187) and .376 (Asymp. Sig. = .540) respectively, indicating a uniform preference across genders for these types of reading materials.

In contrast, significant gender differences were observed for "Library textbooks" and "Ebooks." The Chi-Square values for "Library textbooks" (4.505 with an Asymp. Sig. of .034) and "Ebooks" (10.172 with an Asymp. Sig. of .001) suggest that male students are more inclined to utilize these resources compared to female students. Specifically, males showed a higher preference for engaging with library textbooks and e-books, highlighting distinct gender-based patterns in the selection and utilization of library materials.

These significant findings underscore the influence of gender on students' reading preferences and behaviors within the library, particularly concerning digital resources and library-provided textbooks. Recognizing these differences can aid libraries in tailoring their collections and services to better accommodate the diverse needs of their student population, ensuring equitable access and usage across all genders.

Table 7 examines gender-based differences in student preferences for reading in the library. This analysis uses the Kruskal-Wallis test to explore gender differences in students' preferences for various aspects of the library as a reading space. The results indicate no significant gender differences in appreciating the library for its silence, the diversity of books available, the availability

of librarian assistance, or the fewer distractions compared to other places, with Asymptotic Significance (Asymp. Sig.) values above the .05 threshold.

Table 7. Gender-Based Differences in Student Preferences for Reading in the Library

Reason	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
It's silent	Female	193	193.28	3.393	1	.065
	Male	180	180.27			
There are many options of books to choose to read	Female	193	191.36	1.008	1	.315
	Male	180	182.32			
Availability of assistance from librarians	Female	193	179.97	2.106	1	.147
	Male	180	194.54			
Less distractions compared to other places	Female	193	191.12	1.077	1	.299
	Male	180	182.58			
The library environment motivates to read	Female	193	196.59	5.033	1	.025
	Male	180	176.72			
Opportunity to meet new friends	Female	193	171.27	9.539	1	.002
	Male	180	203.86			

However, significant differences were observed in two areas: "The library environment motivates to read" and "Opportunity to meet new friends," with Asymp. Sig. values of .025 and .002, respectively. These results suggest that females are more influenced by the motivational aspect of the library's environment, while males significantly value the library as a space for socializing and meeting new friends.

This gender-based divergence in preferences highlights the multifaceted roles libraries play in students' academic and social lives. Understanding these differences is crucial for library management and programming, emphasizing the need for creating spaces that not only support focused study but also foster social interactions among students. This balance can contribute to enhancing the library's appeal and utility for all students, ensuring it meets a broad range of needs and preferences.

DISCUSSION

The study unveils significant insights into the frequency of students' reading within the library, emphasizing the enduring importance of libraries as pivotal spaces for academic engagement and support. It was revealed that a considerable segment of students frequently utilizes the library for reading, with a majority engaging on a weekly basis and a substantial number adopting daily reading habits. This underscores libraries' critical role in bolstering academic pursuits, aligning with prior research that highlights libraries as essential for study, research, and accessing a myriad of resources (Adetayo, 2022). The data suggests that libraries serve as key venues for students to satisfy their informational needs, secure a conducive study environment, and access learning materials.

Moreover, the observation that many students consistently engage in weekly library reading underscores the strong bond between students and libraries. It is likely that these students have recognized the myriad benefits of regular library usage, incorporating its resources and services into their daily academic routines. Factors contributing to their frequent library use might include a preference for a quiet study atmosphere, access to specific resources, or the availability of supportive library staff. Conversely, a minor fraction of the study population reported less frequent library usage, indicating a potential lack of awareness or utilization of the library's resources and opportunities.

An analysis of students' reading habits across different library sections reveals distinct preferences and engagement levels in varied areas. This analysis highlights differences in reading activity frequency across these sections, pinpointing which areas see more use and which are less

frequented. The Main reading room stands out as the most preferred section, echoing previous findings on the importance of creating comfortable and conducive reading spaces within libraries (Cunningham & Tabur, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2013b). Conversely, sections like the Discussion room, E-library, Serial section, and Library Classroom are less popular for reading activities, suggesting a lower inclination to use these areas for reading. This aligns with research indicating that students' preferences for certain reading spaces can be influenced by factors like noise levels, lighting, seating options, and proximity to resources (Cole et al., 2021; Hendrix, 2019).

Specific findings on the discussion room suggest it is used more for group discussions or collaborative work than solitary reading activities. Similarly, occasional use of the library classroom indicates an acknowledgment of the benefits of group spaces (Mathews & Soistmann, 2020), despite findings suggesting a general preference for individual over group study (Oliveira, 2016). The E-library's characterization as an occasionally used section implies it may not be as favored for reading as the Main reading room. Moreover, the infrequent reading in the serial section aligns with a decline in print serials' popularity and a shift towards electronic resources (Phelps, 2016), reflecting libraries' adaptation to digital resource prevalence.

Insights into students' reading preferences and the types of books they peruse within the library highlight frequent interactions with personal notebooks, indicating a prevalent practice of referencing personal notebooks in the library. This supports research underscoring the significance of personal notes and study materials in students' learning processes (Friedman, 2014; Mayer et al., 2020; Scoulas & De Groote, 2022), suggesting that students consider their notes a crucial study and reference resource. The relatively high engagement with "Library textbooks" demonstrates students' frequent interaction with available textbooks in the library, underscoring libraries' traditional role in providing textbook access and supporting academic endeavors (Adetayo, 2022). This accessibility allows students to use necessary resources without individual purchases, marking the library as a valuable academic asset.

Additionally, the high frequency of reading personal textbooks in the library indicates a preference for using personal textbooks as supplementary resources alongside library textbooks. This suggests an inclination towards creating a personalized learning environment (Solari et al., 2022). Conversely, the lesser frequency of ebook reading in the library, despite their growing popularity (Ofgang, 2021; Picton, 2014), suggests students may have specific preferences or habits for reading digital materials within a library setting, possibly preferring personal devices in other locations. Furthermore, a preference for reading academic materials in print is noted (Mizrachi et al., 2018).

Exploring students' motivations for choosing library-based reading reveals the perceived benefits and intrinsic characteristics of the library environment. A notable number of respondents emphasized the library's tranquility, corroborating previous research on the value of a quiet library atmosphere for concentration and study (Beckers et al., 2016; Pew Research Center, 2013a). The appreciation for the library's diverse book options supports its role as a repository for varied academic needs and interests (Ajayi et al., 2021), enhancing information access and encouraging exploration.

The positive view of librarian assistance highlights the recognized value of librarians in aiding navigation of library resources, finding relevant materials, and developing research strategies (Adetayo, 2021; Williams-Ilemobola et al., 2022), contributing to students' information literacy and enriching their library experience. The preference for the library's less distracting environment compared to other locations aligns with the notion of the library as a controlled space minimizing external interruptions (Bennett et al., 2005), fostering an academic-conducive setting.

Lastly, the favorable response to the library environment as a motivational factor for reading aligns with studies on the physical environment's impact on motivation (Bennett et al., 2005). While the lower response rate for the "Opportunity to meet new friends" indicates a perception of the library as a less social space, the recognition of potential social interactions within the library suggests opportunities for networking among students (Adetayo et al., 2023;

Bryant et al., 2009; Merga, 2021), highlighting the need for libraries to accommodate both individual and collaborative activities.

The examination of potential gender-based variations in reading habits and preferences reveals no significant gender differences in preferences for the main reading room and library classroom, suggesting a uniform engagement with these sections across genders (Summers, 2013). However, observed gender differences in the usage of sections like the discussion room, E-library, and serial section indicate gender-specific library use patterns, potentially influenced by communication styles, collaborative learning preferences, and subject interests (Coffman & Marques, 2021; McKenna et al., 2012). This suggests gender may play a role in shaping students' library section preferences and usage patterns, enriching the discourse on gender differences in library reading behaviors and information literacy (da Silva & Olinto, 2016; Huang et al., 2013).

Regarding book types, the absence of significant gender differences in preferences for personal notebooks and textbooks suggests a shared approach to using these materials, potentially reflecting their personal and individualized nature. Nevertheless, gender disparities in engagement with library textbooks and ebooks highlight differing reading preferences and patterns, possibly influenced by subject inclinations, study methodologies, and digital literacy (Picton, 2014).

Furthermore, the study's exploration of gender differences in motivations for library-based reading unveils gender-specific perceptions and preferences regarding the library's environmental and social aspects. The lack of significant gender differences in appreciating the library's silence, book options variety, librarian assistance, and distraction-free environment suggests these factors universally contribute to the library's appeal as a study space. Conversely, significant gender differences in motivations related to the library's inspirational environment and opportunities for social interactions point to gendered influences on library reading preferences, underscoring the importance of considering gender dynamics in understanding reading motivations and behaviors (Espinoza & Strasser, 2020).

Furthermore, females were found to be more motivated by the stimulating library environment as a reason for reading in the library compared to males. This finding highlights the importance of the physical and psychological aspects of the library space in influencing females' reading motivations. The library environment, with its ambiance, resources, and atmosphere, may provide a sense of inspiration and stimulation for female students, enhancing their engagement and enjoyment of reading activities. These findings partially resonate with prior scholarly investigations, which have consistently demonstrated that women ascribe elevated importance to the diverse attributes exhibited by urban spaces. Among these attributes, the presence of off-leash dog areas, well-designed lighting, children's playgrounds, aesthetically pleasing vistas, accessible drinking fountains, provisions for safety, and recreational zones emerged as the most cherished elements among women (Braçe et al., 2021).

This study elucidates the multifaceted nature of university students' library reading habits, highlighting the library's indispensable role in academic support, the diversity of library space usage, and the nuanced interplay of gender in shaping library engagement preferences. These insights not only affirm the library's centrality in academic life but also advocate for continued adaptability in library services and spaces to meet the evolving needs of a diverse student population.

CONCLUSION

This research provides a comprehensive examination of students' reading habits within libraries, highlighting the regularity of library usage for reading, preferences for specific library sections, types of books read, and reasons for choosing the library as a reading environment. A significant portion of students engages in regular library reading, with a preference for the main reading room but lesser engagement in other sections like the discussion room and e-library. The study suggests libraries should create diverse and comfortable reading spaces and maintain a varied book collection, including personal study materials and digital resources. The importance of a quiet, distraction-free library environment conducive to academic pursuits is also emphasized.

Recommendations include enhancing the appeal of various library sections, diversifying book collections, and ensuring libraries offer a tranquil environment with accessible librarian assistance. The findings underscore the need for libraries to cater to diverse student needs and preferences, considering gender dynamics in library usage.

The study has implications for library practice and policy, advocating for inclusive services and space design that accommodate different learning styles and preferences. Regular assessment of library spaces and collections is advised to align with student needs, alongside initiatives to foster a reading culture.

Limitations noted include reliance on self-reported data and the study's cross-sectional nature. Future research could expand to include more objective measures, longitudinal analyses, and consider other variables influencing reading behaviors to further inform library services and resources development.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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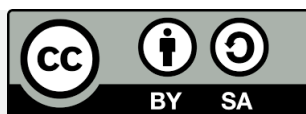
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