

*The Value of Leisure Reading Among the Youth in A Higher Education Institution
in South Africa*

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Abstract

Some young adults like reading, but others struggle. They may not have learned the value of reading or how to read throughout their early schooling. Many children may grow up without local or worldwide information if they don't read. Due to their bad social group, not reading may keep them busy and out of trouble. This article examined young adult-leisure readers at a South African university. The study purposely selected 12 young individuals. The study employed individual and focus group interviews. According to studies, early exposure to books and other leisure readers at home and school can encourage kids to read. Listening to captivating stories as a child improves concentration and listening skills. Reading is a life-changing, intellectually helpful hobby. Due to a lack of adequate leisure literature, some people read topic material (science textbooks) over the holidays. Others read subject content because they were interested in it (history and political science textbooks). They wanted to study, but not for a test. Leisure reading may revolutionize early schooling, according to the findings.

Keywords: Leisure reading, Leisure-Readers, Transformative Learning

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Introduction

While some youth like reading, others struggle. They may not have learnt the benefits of reading in early education. Without reading, children may develop a lack of local or global knowledge. Due to their limited social circle, their inability to read may keep them distracted and out of touch with current events. This study evaluated the leisure reading habits of South African university students. Researchers selected 12 adolescents on purpose. Individual and focus group interviews were conducted as part of the research. Research indicates that early home and school exposure to books and other leisure readers promotes reading. Listening to intriguing tales helps children concentrate and pay attention. Reading is both educative and transformative. Some tourists read technical textbooks due to a dearth of suitable recreational reading material. Some readers are drawn to specific topics (history and political science textbooks). They desired to learn without an examination. According to research, recreational reading may influence early education.

Youth dislike or cannot read, despite its necessity. Some adolescents find reading difficult or tedious. Non-readers are required to read for school or job. Lack of early education or reading instruction at home may cause children to despise recreational reading. Reading is simplified by technology. Reading on a screen differs from reading on paper or in print (Mkhabela, 2022). Many children may never learn to read. Rumours may be the only source of erroneous information for isolating children. Reading keeps youths occupied. This case study analysed young adult leisure readers in higher education in South Africa, where many young adults avoid reading.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What factors influence young adult-readers' interest in leisure reading?
- What perceptions do young adult-readers hold about the importance of leisure reading?
- How do young adults experience leisure reading?
- What benefits do young adults think can be gained from leisure reading?

The Context of the Study

In the context of this study, the researchers believed that little is known about the leisure reading and higher institution experiences of young adults. The researchers were interested in examining the value and experiences of young adult readers at a higher education institution to uncover any issues or impediments that young adults have that hinder their love for leisure reading. They would be able to offer measures to encourage young adults to read for pleasure if the data support this conclusion. Efforts must be made to assist initiatives to promote leisure reading.

In addition, they desired to discover and characterize the value of leisure reading to influence policy. This is because reading for pleasure is not only enjoyable for young adult readers, but also contributes to lifelong learning. In addition to being self-satisfying, leisure reading adds to the acquisition of new information (Ross, 2000 as cited in Moyer, 2007:66). In following their reading passion, keen readers may experience a range of additional educational benefits (Wilkinson et al 2020:157).

Leisure reading may be a method for enhancing text consistency. Thus, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of reading books in South Africa (SABDC, 2016). Through the

Programme to Support Pro-poor Policy Development (PSPPD), Van der Berg, Spaull, Wills, Gustafsson, and Kotze (2016:59) provided several efforts to improve the reading culture in South African schools. The objective was to prepare early childhood educators to teach young children to read. Torppa, Vasalampi, Eklund, and Niemi (2022:16-22) demonstrate that reading with children throughout their early stages of development has a direct effect on their reading motivation and understanding as they get older. For this culture of reading to grow, Faircliff (2017) says that the joy of reading must be instilled to children at a young age and fostered until adulthood. Even though the focus is on leisure reading among young adults, this study intends to contribute to the body of information concerning the advantages of reading. At this stage of development, it may be assumed that young adults' brains and attitudes should be open to reading extensively. However, the reality on the ground in South Africa is that only a small number of young adults pursue reading for leisure.

Problem Statement

The study determined that the higher education system in South Africa does not spend enough time encouraging and educating young adults about the benefits of leisure reading. McClure (2011) discovered insufficient leisure reading among school-aged, racial minority adolescents in Johannesburg. Most black South African homes and schools avoided leisure reading for different reasons, resulting in the absence of a reading culture. Another study demonstrated that leisure reading has been neglected in many South African educational studies (Rimensberger, 2014:01). Tsekpo (2008) cautions that the country's educational, economic, social, and other progress may be hindered by residents who are ignorant, misinformed, and lack the bravery to compete with outsiders.

Researchers predict young people would fail to achieve tertiary reading requirements later in their academic careers if no treatments are offered (Lukhele, 2013). Thus, the research regarding students' experiences and the benefits of leisure reading (le Roux, 2017; Phasha et al., 2012; Tlou & Snyman, 2020) indicates that policies and strategies must be established to address the intergenerational problem of a shortage of leisure reading.

Since 2006, the leisure reading of South African people has decreased by 75–70 percent. SA Book Promotion Council (2016). 43 percent of young adults in South Africa read for pleasure, making it the eighth most popular leisure, according to Faircliff (2017). The author demonstrates that 59% of post-matriculated students, 47% of matriculated high school students, 38% of selected high school students, 19% of elementary school students, and 3% of non-students are avid readers. Mpumalanga, South Africa, has not performed any investigation to determine if a problem exists despite these tiny numbers. The researcher believes that Faircliff's findings are exaggerated or anecdotal. The researcher's reading has diminished.

The internet of things and technology have caused young people to spend hours on their smartphones. Digital culture has affected the culture of reading. Some digital technologies make it possible to read books online, although many young people do not. They surf the Internet, converse with family and friends, watch films, play video games, and listen to music. Reading fell to second place.

The researcher and a recent study identify the consequences of bad reading. Reading benefits college students and beyond (Chireac, Olivares & Arbona, 2022:231). Therefore, non-readers will fail in several aspects of life. The authors related reading abilities to effective

communication and personal contentment. Therefore, the well-being and social functioning of young people can be enhanced by promoting and supporting reading. This research aimed to address the following questions.

Research Questions

The central question of the research was:

How do young adult-leisure readers at the Institution of Higher Learning describe the value of leisure reading?

The sub-questions explored were as follows:

- What factors influence young adult-readers' interest in leisure reading?
- What perceptions do young adult-readers hold about the importance of leisure reading?
- How do young adults experience leisure reading?
- What benefits do young adults think can be gained from leisure reading?

Objective of the Study

To reach the aim of the study, the following objectives were applied:

- To explore the factors that influence interest in leisure reading amongst young adults.
- To identify the perceptions that young adult-readers hold about the importance of leisure reading.
- To determine any obstacles that young adult-readers encounter that make leisure reading difficult to maintain.
- To establish any benefits in leisure reading for young adults

Theoretical Framework

This article used Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, which filled a gap in adult learning theories and helped educators grasp adult education philosophy and enhance adult education training and practice (Cranton, 2017). A theoretical framework helps explain the phenomenon under inquiry (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2003:51).

Mezirow (1997:5) believes that learning is transformational and may change one's perspective, hence the Transformative Learning Theory was best suited to explaining young people's lack of interest in leisure reading and fostering positive change. This transformation may assist adult educators promote constructive leisure reading, according to Cranton (2017).

The Transformative Learning Theory states that learning is a process that transforms one's frame of reference and shows how young adults experience modifications to assimilate new learnings into their worldview (Mezirow, 1997; King, 2011). Learning challenges assumptions, perceptions, ideas, and values, according to Cranton (2006). Taylor (2017) adds that transformational learning alters one's perspective and cognitive structure. In this study, young adults might benefit from transformational learning.

This research study is on adult education and learning therefore Transformative Learning was crucial since adults and young adults learn differently than children (Cranton, 2016). Young adults, according to Mezirow (2000), require fresh views to grasp old things as they change. Mezirow (1997) says that young adults may use their previous experiences to teach and learn to improve their present. Hence Mezirow (1997) believes critical contemplation and evaluation can help young adults grasp fresh ideas.

Thus, this study will allow young adults to critically evaluate their leisure reading habits and attitudes. This research should help young adults see leisure reading in a fresh light and learn how to maximize its advantages.

Franz (2007) and Mezirow (1997) encourage transformative learning in adult and higher education. The Transformative Learning Theory prompted young men and women at the Institution of Higher Learning in South Africa to reconsider leisure reading and change their unproductive habits. The researchers feel that participating in the research would provide participants a chance to learn and create a new meaning that challenges their past experiences (Mezirow, 2000) so they can appreciate leisure reading, one of the study's aims.

Implications of the Theory for Leisure Reading

Through discourse and self-reflection, the researchers anticipate that young adults may discover several meanings in their leisure reading, which may alter their perspective. This new viewpoint may increase their enjoyment of reading.

Taylor (2017) assumed that a frame of reference is comprised of cognitive and emotional components, namely mental habits, and a point of view. Mental habits are shaped by assumptions. Attitudes, views, value judgements, and interpretations are indicators of mental habits. Therefore, young adults must alter their behaviour to read for pleasure.

Young adults may be unwilling to examine alternative viewpoints. King (2011) believes that having an opinion might cause young adults to doubt their values. After evaluating their frame of reference, adolescents and young adults may adopt an inclusive, self-reflective, and integrative frame (Mezirow, 1997), so altering their perspectives. This action can help individuals accept alternative viewpoints without abandoning their own.

According to the study, young adults will discover alternative interpretations of leisure reading through debate and self-reflection. This new perspective may increase their desire to read for pleasure.

Taylor (2017) asserted that a frame of reference consists of cognitive and emotional components, such as mental habits and a point of view. Assumptions are general, non-specific, and guiding. Attitudes, viewpoints, value judgements, and interpretations reveal mental habits. To encourage young adults to engage in recreational reading, their attitudes and behaviors must alter.

Young adults may get so committed to their own ideas that they disregard those of others. Having an opinion may cause young adults to reassess their values and beliefs, according to King (2011). After reviewing their terms of reference, adolescents and young adults can shift their perspectives by adopting an inclusive, self-reflective, and integrative frame of reference

(Mezirow, 1997). This can help individuals accept the perspectives of others without abandoning their own.

Research Design and Methodology

This study was motivated by constructivism. The actual experiences of young adult leisure readers require constructivism. Regarding constraints and possibilities, constructivism stresses experiential, social, and subjective reality. As required by Creswell (2014) and constructivist philosophy, the constructivist researcher focuses on the subjective leisure reading experiences of the participants.

This research is qualitative in character. According to Khan, qualitative research prioritizes feelings and impressions above facts (2014). It seeks to characterize the investigated issue through understanding the life experiences of individuals. In a qualitative study, researchers observed occurrences in the natural settings of individuals to better comprehend their life meanings (Shokane, Makhubele and Blitz, 2018). This study employed qualitative technique once more since it is fluid and unstructured and may be utilized to explore and define participants' understandings of leisure reading, as opposed to quantifying them (Johnson and Christensen, 2017).

It was applied research (Fouché and De Vos, 2011) that aimed to address the apathy of young adult readers in recreational reading. According to Kumar (2011: page?), applied research aids in issue resolution by enhancing comprehension and problem-solving skills.

In a South African institution, exploratory and descriptive study was undertaken on young adult readers through a case study. Case studies are empirical examinations of contemporary occurrences in their specific contexts (Yin, 2014). The case study method enabled a comprehensive investigation of unusual or intriguing events, such as the leisure reading habits of a group of young people (Phelan, 2011). Because the researchers wanted a group of young people who engaged in leisure reading to investigate its advantages and disadvantages, limitations and potential, a collective case study approach appeared most appropriate (Mouton, 2011).

The study comprised reading-inclined college students from South Africa. "Population" refers to all individuals or study groups with the to-be-researched characteristics (Hanlon and Larget, 2011). Because investigating the whole population was impractical, Shokane et al. (2018) utilized snowball and purposive sampling. 12 young adults (18–35) who loved reading and attended or worked at a university in South Africa were surveyed.

Data Collection

On the main campus of the university, two focus groups of six people each were engaged in discussion. Using a semi-structured interview schedule, twelve participants from a separate campus of the same institutions participated in in-depth individual interviews and two focus group interviews. To confirm the information gathered from focus group discussions, in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the 12 candidates.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The field-collected data were manually analysed and reported in text format. Thematic analysis is a methodology for systematically discovering, organizing, and comprehending data meaning patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step data analysis procedure (2006). Additionally, the researchers employed a variety of extensively explained measures to assure trustworthiness.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the value of leisure reading among the youth in a higher education institution in South Africa. Young adult-readers in a higher education institution expressed their perceptions why their peers dislike reading, and what are the reasons for that, expressed their views why they thought leisure reading is valuable. Lastly, they also suggested ways to attract more leisure readers. To make the analysis manageable the data were pruned, arranged, and discussed under the following themes:

Theme 1: Why Many Young People Lack Reading Skills

This theme contains claims that other young adults do not read along with speculation on why that may be. These include a lack of interest and distracting technology. Participants had this to say, and it was reproduced verbatim.

... my mother she never read any book for me while I was growing up.

It was just something that we just never did.

The majority are not interested.

Like they are not used to the whole idea of reading books just for the fun of it.

According to Akanferi, Aziale, and Asampana, young people are too tech-focused to read conventional novels (2014: 19-20). Baker and Johnson (1993) proposed family literacy as a means of breaking the cycle of illiteracy. Their moniker was "the aspirational family literacy program." For centuries. Reading-challenged parents may put their children at a disadvantage. This combats illiteracy. Family literacy is a paradigm for reading, according to the writers. It is used by librarians, parents, and carers. Totmeyer (2009) discovered that many perceived reading to be instructive. Some college and university students dislike reading or are too preoccupied to do so. Teachers, lecturers, facilitators, and librarians should promote leisure reading (Jansen, 2019)

According to the World Youth Report (2003:213, cited in Lloyd, 2005:326), adolescents and young adults who do not read are more likely to engage in dangerous behaviours such as substance abuse, unprotected sexual activity, and other forms of delinquency. Youth may unwind. Free time can lead to drinking, smoking, sexual activity without protection, and criminal behaviour. Utilizing discretionary time effectively is beneficial for the individual and others. According to Pasha et al. (2012), most young adults exclusively read for school. Mahala (2010) proposes extracurricular reading and evaluation.

Theme 2: What Makes Many Young People Dislike Reading

This theme contains claims that other young adults dislike reading along with speculation on why that may be. The participants' perceptions include digital distraction, academic pressure, perceived boredom about reading and competing activities.

people hate opening a book...

Because once you tell them about like books, they find it weird.

...we are more consumed into social media; we are more consumed into listening to music.

... most of us are outgoing, so they would rather spend time doing something else...

Yes, they do not do leisure reading, except when they are obliged by studies, and they have to.

Digital distractions have proliferated because of digital entertainment, social networking, video games, and streaming platforms (Liu, 2022; Sridhar, 2021; Spjeldns & Karlsen, 2022). Young people prefer these activities to reading. Academics, extracurriculars, and social responsibilities leave young adults with little time for leisure reading. Young people emphasize other activities above reading for pleasure (Packialakshmi et al 2021; Yusof, 2021, & Ahmad et al, 2021). Some young individuals may also view reading as uninteresting or obsolete (Kil et al, 2021). In a world brimming with entertainment and amusement, reading for pleasure may sometimes struggle (Ross, 2021; Loh & Sun 2022).

Theme 3: The Value of Reading for Socio-Economic Life

This theme explores the importance of reading in social and economic life. Incentives, book groups, interest-based books, and making leisure reading trendy are often suggested. The participants suggested the following:

...but one that I can think of is you know giving prizes to people who are reading.

...and also developing a culture of reading clubs.

So, a reading class would be better and also maybe to investigate what is there in our libraries that can attract young people.

I would say writing more stories about the youngster experience, more books about that and also ja, if there were more books about that, then I believe that people would read more.

Incentives or rewards to read, join book clubs, and make leisure reading popular by giving books based on interests were typical ideas. Book clubs read a book together monthly (Álvarez-Álvarez, 2016). The rules of any book club are up to them. A well-run book club may help young adults enhance their literacy, explore new concepts, get new life experiences, develop analytical skills, and respect others' viewpoints (Álvarez-Álvarez, 2016).

Leisure reading by young adults is important for their development and society's long-term benefits. Mbali-Ann promoted social advances like leisure reading (on the talk show). On Radio 702 (10.07.2020), Mbali warned Manyathela that our cultures are stereotyped and ethnically uncomfortable. Leisure reading helps young people transcend tribalist, racist, and patriarchal attitudes.

Theme 4: Ways To Encourage Leisure Reading Among the Youth

This theme explores strategies to encourage leisure reading. How participants encouraged leisure reading. Participants recommend using virtual book clubs, audio books, and blogs to attract leisure readers.

we can create book clubs through social media platforms.

and then I have this hash tag, “#reading is fun to mental”, which means it is an entertainment for your brain...

created audio books, because like most young people they hate to go to a library and like open like a hardcopy book....

I would say more blogs on books that encourage reading uhm (pause) ... and I would say platforms where books are shared.

To encourage reading, join book clubs, and make leisure reading current, incentives or prizes were offered. Book clubs meet monthly to read a book. Any book club can establish rules. A good reading club may assist young adults learn new things, gain life experience, develop analytical skills, and respect others' viewpoints (Álvarez-Álvarez, 2016).

Leisure reading is important for young people' growth and society's long-term benefits. Mbali-Ann encouraged leisure reading (on the talk show). Mbali informed Manyathela on Radio 702 (10.07.2020) that our cultures are stereotyped. Leisure reading helps young adult readers overcome tribalist, racist, and patriarchal biases.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the study was that young adult leisure readers encounter reading difficulties, such as access to reading material while they are not attending institution of higher learning. The study also revealed that young adult leisure readers must be nourished and cared for to have a positive leisure reading experience. Reading is seen as less vital by other higher education students. Some young adults might not find reading entertaining. In addition, leisure reading increases language and knowledge. Reading for pleasure increases self-esteem and helps individuals resist peer pressure. Reading allows individuals to escape harsh situations and gain fresh perspectives. According to the presented statistics, exposing children to reading at a young age has the potential to benefit them later in life since it keeps them interested in reading. Additionally, if recreational readers are rewarded for their reading, enhanced library access may attract new reader populations.

Recommendations

- Reading communities for teens to share their reading suggestions. Organize family reading sessions or book clubs.
- Inclusive reading places for diverse learners. Audiobooks, graphic novels, and multimedia may fit varied preferences.
- Reading challenges and rewards to encourage youth reading. Encourage reading through awards, book vouchers, or recognition.
- Provide flexible reading options for busy teens.
- To connect leisure activities and reading by using popular culture, such as movie or video game books.
- Use social media to recommend books, reading challenges, and reading-related information to young people.
- Provide inspiring and engaging literature for young adult readers in libraries.
- Foundation-phase reading course for teacher preparation.
- Government should create additional libraries in marginalized neighbourhoods.

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