Reading Habits and Academic Performance:  
A Study of University Students in Cambodia

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Abstract
Reading is essential for learning and becomes more critical when turning into habits. The study aims to understand the reading habits among university students in Cambodia through conducting survey to different level and major of students in both public and private university. The study confirms that the reading habits affect the academic performance which is agreed by more than 80% of respondents. The study also reveals the reading perception, reading materials, frequency of reading, schedule of reading, activities during reading, motivation for reading, system of reading and difficulties in reading. Therefore, this research shed light for further study on promoting reading habits among university students in Cambodia.

Keywords: Reading habit, academic performance, university student

I. Introduction

Reading is a vital factor in knowledge creation, and reading habit plays an important role in producing a literate society (Palani, 2012; Oppenheim, 1962). It is widely recognized that most of educational programs require reading. As Arkansas State University (2017) believed, “reading skills are necessary in all subjects.”

Reading is an essential tool to get emotional stability, create enjoyable moments, share experiences which are found in books and to keep up-to-date information in the world (Ogunrombi, 1995).

In this regard, however, previous studies found that reading habit declines in recent decade (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007; Gambrell, 2005). Likewise, there is an adress on the lack of reading culture in Cambodia among students from primary school to high school which requires interventions from many stakeholders such as government sector (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports of Cambodia), non-government organization, parents, teachers, and students thmeselve (The Cambodia Daily, 2010; Siv, 2016). Therefore, understanding the reading habits among these
students are very critical to get a clearer inclusive situation for promoting reading culture in Cambodia. To look at another dimension of reading habit among Cambodian students, this research aimed at exploring the reading habit of university students in Cambodia in both public and private universities. These results may strengthen the study on the relationship between reading habit and academic performance as well as providing a better reading habits and their challenges among university students in Cambodia.

II. Literature Review

Reading refers to the process of acquiring knowledge that involves decoding symbols to meaning (Bormuth, 1973; Sandhu, 2016) while habit is defined as the repeatedly and automatically action (Clark, 2000). Therefore, reading habit means the repeatedly and automatically process of acquiring knowledge through decoding symbols to meaning. It can be growth and decreased by time, and a good reading habit is defined when the reading behavior becomes regular and intentionally as a part of daily activity (Iftanti, 2015). A good reading habit, however, may not consider as an effective reading habit leading to a better result.

Many studies also agree that reading habit is very critical factor for learning. Students are encouraged to read not only to broaden knowledge, but also to pass the examination. For instance, many researches proved that reading habit has relationship with academic performance (Acheaw, 2014; Krashen, 2004; Gallik, 1999). Previous studies also seek to understand the reading habits among various students such as colleagues students, EFL students, undergraduate students, and secondary school students (Oppenheim, 1962; Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2009; Palani, 2012; Vandenhoek, 2013; Acheaw, 2014; Iftanti, 2015). These researches aim to understand the amount of time of spending on reading, types of materials (printed book, e-book, newspaper, magazine, drama etc.), availabilities of reading sources, techniques on promoting reading, factors influence reading, system of reading, and so on. Different location, environment, level of educations, seniority, and income status among students may results in different reading habits and its effectiveness as well as the impact on academic performance.

Therefore, there are still many more rooms for researchers to figure out the different reading habits and to test the relationship between the reading habit and academic
performance among different context. In this regards, reading habits in Cambodia is not yet conducted among university students who are the potential new blood for the development of Cambodia.

III. Research Method

The objectives of this study are:

- To understand the reading habit among university students in Cambodia
- To explore the methods used to improve reading skills
- To find the relationship between reading habit and academic performance

This study was conducted by using questionnaire to collect the data which is aligned with Acheaw’s methodology (2014). Snowball sampling was employed in sampling design which 115 respondents from both public and private universities in Cambodia. Among of them, there were 23 respondents are Master’s degree students whereas the remainings are Bachelor’s students. These university students were from different backgrounds, different majors, and different levels of education.

IV. Findings

Figure.1. Reading Perception

The study showed a surprised results that more than 50% of respondents gives positive feeling on reading including very much enjoy and enjoyable reading while about 32% of respondents just feel okay on their reading preference. It also illustrates that there are 13% are very enjoy in reading while another 8% are not enjoy at all. In conclusion, it is more likely to have positive results in reading perception among Cambodia which is a good sign for reading culture as well as reading habit among university student in Cambodia.
The study revealed that students prefer to read website and printed book the most while 18% reads lecture note and 18% reads e-book. Magazine and newspaper become the least popular among reading materials of university student in Cambodia. However, the above results did not show really high deviation from one’s reading material to another which explains a fairly distribution of reading materials accounted by university students in Cambodia. It can be concluded that technology become more vital among university students which is a good sign for Cambodia’s human resource to be ready for Industrial revolution 4.0. As a result, technology is a critical factor in promoting reading habits in this context.

Table 1. Frequency of Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Reading</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 2 times a week</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 3 times a week</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 - 4 times a week</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 5 times a week</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every days</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>115</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Number of books read/month      |           |                |
| Not finish any book             | 35        | 30%            |
| One book                        | 29        | 25%            |
| Two books                       | 16        | 14%            |
| Three books                     | 26        | 23%            |
| Four books                      | 2         | 2%             |
| More than four books            | 7         | 6%             |
| **Total**                       | **115**   |                |

Spending time on reading (in average per day)
The above table illustrates that more 23% of respondents read everyday and another 23% read from two to three time a week while only 3% doesn’t read at all. On the other hand, the number of books that respondents read last month is very small. The result found that 30% of students don’t finish any book and 25% finish only a book. Moreover, 31% of respondents read more than three books. This data shows the high frequency of reading among university students while the number of finishing book is not really high. Also, students are mostly spend in average per day between 15 minutes to 30 minutes on reading book which account for 43% follow by the daily average of time consuming on reading book from 30 minutes to 60 minutes per day, 37%. The findings also showed that the amount of students who read less that 15 minutes per day and read more than 60 minutes per day are likely equal. The study believe that the above information shed a bright side for reading habit among university students in Cambodia.

**Figure 3. Schedule of Reading**

The study also found that university students read the most, 58%, at night before sleep while 14% in the early mornig and 25% in daytime. Unfortunately, only 3% of respondents read before class. This results may reflect the most favorable time to read is at night which may providing the quiet environment for them to concentrate.
Activities During Reading

The research found that most students, 54%, prefer to find a quiet area to read which reflect the above finding that they love to read at night before sleep. Beside that, 30% of them listen to music during reading while few of respondents watch movie and eat snack during reading. The study also found that some students like to drink coffee or milk during their reading.

Figure.4. Motivation for Reading

The study found that to gain more knowledge play an important factor in motivation for reading which is 42% among other factors. Beside that, the need for information personally and to pass examination or assignment are the top second and third respectively. The least motivational factor is to read for pleasure.

Figure.5. System of Reading

The study found that reading various section thoroughly, reading cover to cover, and skimming and taking note are more popular among university students in Cambodia which is 23%, 20%, and 20% respectively. Some students would like to concentrate on one section only which account for
11% while the least students would like to read conclusion only.

Table 2. Difficulties in Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulties in Reading</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficult vocabularies</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting book to match interest</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties in understand context</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No any difficulties in reading</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the above table, students agreed that difficult vocabulary were the most difficulty, 43%, in reading and 24% says that they found difficulties in understand context. This is probably because of most reading materials in English. Therefore, English language is still very critical in reading to gain knowledge. Other hand, the difficulty in concentration and getting books to match the interest account for 14% and 12% respectively. Finally, 7% of respondents believed that they don’t have any difficulty in reading.

Improving the Reading Skills

The study gets many suggestions from the respondents on how to improve reading skills. They suggest to:

- Read your interesting topic (Choose your favorite book)
- Read in your favorite environment (Natural Place or Silence or Good decoration space)
- Read in your free time and or your fresh time
- Read until become a habit (Day by day)
- Read the book that fit to your level of language
- Read with someone that you like or some music that you want and Read and relax every 30 minutes.
The above figure shows that 58% of all respondents are strongly agree that reading habit have influence on academic performance while 24% agree and only 18% belief that it doesn’t affect their academic performance. Since academic performance is a key to most university students who want to graduate or get good appraisal during their educational life, this research proves this positive correlation among reading habits and academic performance.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The study pointed out surprised results that many universities students in Cambodia have positive feeling on reading which leading to a good sign for promoting reading habits in this country. In contrary, the previous study in another country found that only 10% of students believed reading is enjoyable and 50% feels that reading is boring task (Acheaw, 2014). As a result, the study confirmed that reading perception of university study varies to difference countries.

In addition, the least reading of magazine/newspaper resulting from the questionnaires among university students in Cambodia draw similar results to the previous study (Ogunrombi, 1995; Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2009; Acheaw, 2014). However, some study sugested that reading magazine/newspaper is a motivating factor because it is not only providing knowledge, but also creating pleasurable moments for readers (Ogbodo, 2010). Therefore, this result addresses a warning sign for policy maker on the lack of reading magazine/newspaper in Cambodia. On the other hand, the study also show that technology plays an important role in promoting reading habits in Cambodia.

Even though there are many students say that they read almost every day with about 15 minutes to 60 minutes per day, the number of books that respondents read last month is very small. Hence, this data revealed the high frequency of
reading among university students while the number of finishing book is not really high, which is similar to Iftanti’s study (2012). This study on university students in Cambodia on the amount of time spending on reading is also higher than the study of Gallik (1999). Therefore, the research can conclude that it is another positive sign for reading habits among students in Cambodia.

Beside that, the results of this study may reflect that the most favorable time to read is at night which may provide the quiet environment for them to concentrate following by another results that more than 54% of respondents preferred reading in a quiet area. However, some studies suggested that students should read before class in order to understand the organization of lecturer, understand the topic, be fully participate and to show respect (Kuther, 2017). Therefore, this research call for university policy makers to double activities on promoting reading before class among university students in Cambodia. Because the study found that the big motivator for student to read is to gain more knowledge, the need for information personally and to pass examination or assignment, there is still a positive way for promoting reading habits before class as well as to get better academic performance.

The study confirmed with Oppenheim’s study (1962) that students preferred to read various section thoroughly during their reading rather than to focus on section by section. This may show the high possibility of reading more documents with low probability of getting deep understanding from the reading materials. This habits may also lead to least specialization among univeristy students while it may broaden the general knowledge among them. The study also reach to the point that the most difficulty among university student is to read documents in English which they face very difficult in vocabulary and in understanding context. This result plays a very important role to prove that English as a foreign language among university students in Cambodia is still the biggest challenge for them to create reading habits as well as to broaden their knoweldge. In this regard, however, the study found that in order to improve reading skill, student should choose their favorite reading material with familiar level of knowledge to read, find a favorable environment, and keep reading continuously until it becomes a habit.
Last but not least, this research becomes another evident to confirms with the study of Acheaw (2014), Krashen (2004) and Gallik (1999) that there is positive correlation between reading habits and academic performance in which agreed by most of respondents. Therefore, the more student read, the higher academic performance is. This study called for all stakeholders and policymakers to connect the reading habit with spirits to boost the high quality of education in Cambodia as well as the high performance in academic achievement among university students in Cambodia.

**Conclusion**

The study confirmed that 82% of respondents acknowledged that reading habit has strong influences on their academic performance. Even though more than 50% university students enjoy reading, about 28% of them choose to read website, 24% choose to read printed book while reading newspaper or magazine is the least popular. The study also found that there is a high percentage of reading materials everyday which account for 23% same as reading materials from two to three times a week.

However, the amount of book finished reading within previous month is very few comparing to the average daily amount of time they spend on reading. Moreover, the study noted that university students in Cambodia prefer to read at night before sleep to get quiet environment rather than read before class which the most motivation for them to read is to gain more knowledge with account for 42% of other motivation factors. In addition, university students in Cambodia would like to read various sections thoroughly when their most difficulty in vocabulary which English is very critical to be improved. Finally, the researcher found some suggestions to improve reading skill such as reading the interesting topic with a favorable environment and so on.

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