

## A PRELIMINARY SURVEY OF THE READING INTERESTS OF ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**ABSTRACT:** *This preliminary survey of the reading interests of A.A.U. students is a descriptive study based on questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Addis Ababa University students were the target subjects of the study. However, instructors, librarians and personal observations were used as additional sources of data. The result of the study indicates that most of the subjects do read materials outside their courses in their free time. However, the amount of reading is very small. They appear to have no specific reading interests largely due to lack of variety in the reading materials they manage to read. Their leisure reading in English has a utilitarian purpose. That is, they read in English both for language improvement and for pleasure.*

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## INTRODUCTION

It has long been recognized that reading is of paramount importance to foreign language learners. This is particularly true in situations where a foreign language is used as a medium of instruction. In situations like these, reading plays an extremely important role because the learning of almost all subjects requires reading in the foreign language.

English is a medium of instruction in both secondary and tertiary levels of education in Ethiopia. However, it is generally agreed that the English language proficiency of students even at the tertiary level is lower than the level required of them to function in English effectively. There are reasons for this. Clearly, our students are learning in a language they do not read or speak widely outside the academic contexts. Too often, they have limited access to written and spoken media in English. Besides this, there are various individual factors such as motivation, family background, lack of awareness, etc. that may contribute to the students low language proficiency.

In such contexts, wide reading in English both in and outside academic contexts, will undoubtedly, promote the English language development of the students. Reading for pleasure during their leisure time is one opportunity that helps students to realise the various functions of the foreign language outside academic contexts. Therefore, this preliminary survey has been designed with the intention of assessing and bringing to light the reading habits and preferences of A.A.U. students.



## THE VALUE OF READING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CONTEXT

In situations where English is used as a medium of instruction, such as ours, reading in English plays a significant instrumental role. Reading in English is a vehicle that facilitates the process of academic learning.

Many reading researchers including Williams (1984), Carrell (1988), Hedge (1985) Wallace (1992) agree on the important role reading plays in both foreign language learning and academic studies. Carrell (1988:1) in particular is quoted as saying:

In second language teaching/learning situations for academic purposes, especially in higher education in English medium universities or other programs that make extensive use of academic materials written in English, reading is paramount. Quite simply, without solid reading proficiency, second language readers cannot perform at levels they must in order to succeed, and they cannot compete with their native English-speaking counterparts.

From nine years experience in teaching English in secondary schools this researcher has, however, observed that many students at the secondary level in Ethiopia have low reading proficiency in English.

Williams (1984) on his part identifies two important roles of reading in a foreign language context. He states that learners need to read:



- (a) so that they can make sense of texts that enable them to extract the information they need and
- (b) they read to get enjoyment through reading.

Elaborating further the purposes of reading, he writes:

These two purposes - reading for information and reading for pleasure or interest - are in fact similar to those of the fluent native speaker reader. However, for the foreign language learner, ignorance of the language can be an obstacle to understanding, no matter how highly motivated a person may be (p.16).

In this case, the foreign language teacher's task lies in enabling the learner to handle texts independently, that is, in providing the students with the necessary reading skills and strategies. This 'learning to learn' strategy is achieved in the foreign language classroom by providing suitable texts and designing purposes for their reading. Williams (p.17) summarises this as: "In short, what is needed is either an interesting text or an interesting task." In views of Greenall and Pye (1993) and Glendinning *et al.* (1992) texts of real taste to students also develop the students involvement and confidence in reading.

In this regard, Martz's (1971:4) comments based on the Ethiopian situation seem relevant. She says:



The development of continuing education in Ethiopia depends upon available books and a citizenry who can and will read. Providing the skills is only one part of the job. Providing the books is another part. Providing the motivation is essential.

Classroom lessons and course materials can introduce new vocabulary and structure of the foreign language to the students. However, the main way to get a relative mastery of the foreign language is through extensive reading in the language. Extensive reading in English as a foreign language enables the students to see words in different textual contexts. This, in turn, enables them to comprehend the meaning and possible uses of words in various ways. Wilkins (1972), quoted in Hedge (1985:23), emphasises the value of reading in a foreign language learning situation as:

Through reading the learner is exposed to the lexical items embedded in natural linguistic contexts and as a result they begin slowly to have the same meaningfulness for him that they have for the native speaker.

Apart from giving the learners the opportunity to learn new words and structures, extensive reading helps them to consolidate what they have learned in the classroom and helps them to appreciate different functions of structures. This promotes a growing understanding of the students' language use and language structure, which in turn, enhances their academic achievements in the classroom.



In classroom situations where students especially learn only a set of sentences that demonstrates rules of grammar and a range of vocabulary, such as in our secondary schools, reading various texts enables them to recognize the different functions of written English. That is, the students will learn how to use the language to tell story, to describe objects, to explain processes etc. In Hedge's opinion extended reading gives a wide opportunity to students to learn how different texts are made from sentences. Hedge (p: 25) states:

Sentences combine in many different ways to form paragraphs and paragraphs follow to form on another in different ways according to whether they are developing, for example, a story, a biography or a technical description. It is important that students have the opportunity to read a wide variety of text types. They will then become familiar with the ways in which language is structured at a higher level than that of a sentence.

Hedge's observation has wide implications for teaching especially writing courses at A.A.U. That is, when instructors support their classroom instructions with students external reading and reporting assignments on different types of texts including description, argument, exposition, etc. they can promote the students share of responsibility for their own learning. Being responsible for one's own learning is, in fact, a step forward to success.

In Hedge's view, reading has a significant place in the general education of foreign language learners. As educators and subject specialists, teachers, especially foreign language teachers, are



responsible for the development of the learner. In this sense, Hedge stresses that making students aware of the role of reading in learning as well as in life is part of the development of the learner. Thus, training students to read both for pleasure and for information is part of the desirable objectives of the curriculum of English in English as a foreign language situation.

Hedge further notes that reading materials dealing with various specialist and technical themes such as engineering, sociology, medicine, etc. can be used along with more general factual books. This can promote the learners' knowledge of both factual and technical languages. To make the combination of extra reading and academic reading meaningful, Hedge emphasises the importance of designing motivating activities. He says:

Teachers can train students to look things up, locate useful information and use it for a realistic purpose. For example, students can be asked to give a very simple short talk or to write an account-challenging but worthwhile tasks for intermediate students. In this way readers can contribute to general curricular objectives and activities within the school and develop the kind of study skills in English that some students will need later (p.35).

Similarly, Greenall and Pye (1993) Sonka (1981) advocate the value of integrating classroom instructions with external reading in the foreign language.



Nuttall (1982) is another advocate of the value of reading in academic contexts. Nuttall believes that intensive and extensive reading should occupy the central place in the foreign language classroom. Similarly, Williams (1984) also emphasizes the significance of extensive reading in promoting the learners' reading of both English for academic and special purposes. It also satisfies the students need to read for pleasure. In this connection, Williams (p:69) observes:

A random and catholic exposure to written texts offers a linguistic and schematic base for demanding reading of good contemporary fiction, the classics and academic and specialist text.

### DEVELOPMENT OF READING INTERESTS

Many researchers in the field of reading have the notion that early age is very crucial in the development of interest in reading. Children at an early age are curious to listen to amusing stories told at home. Curiosity for listening to stories at an early age is a rudimentary sign of interest in reading in later life.

Undoubtedly, people who make frequent contacts with young children, particularly mothers in Ethiopia, have big responsibility for establishing their children's reading interests. In this regard, it is needless to emphasise the unique role of reading parents. Here, Martz states: "As more educated young people establish homes and pursue reading in sight of their children, reading interests will change" (p. 4).



Schonell *et al.* (1975) have a high regard for early age in the development of interest in reading. In their opinion, the ages between 8-15 are very important for two purposes. On the one hand, children develop interest in reading to satisfy their immediate individual curiosity between the ages of 8-15. On the other hand, it is a convenient period for children to develop a lifelong love for literature. To emphasise the periods, the authors write, "It may, with some looseness, be called the 'now or never' stage in helping children to develop attitudes of reading for leisure and searching for knowledge" (p. 159).

Most Ethiopian parents, mothers in particular, have no formal education. In fact, mothers and grandmothers tell amusing stories to children by the fireside. What is missing is the link between oral and written literature. Thus, young children in Ethiopia develop a strong oral tradition in literature and story telling that could provide a strong base for reading. Unfortunately, no link is created between the oral tradition at home and the reading tradition at school.

Many young children have little opportunity for reading in their first language stories that would strengthen the oral tradition and encourage them to pursue to read for entertainment in their leisure time.

Hedge (1985) and Williams (1984) speak strongly about the link between reading in the mother tongue and in a second or foreign language. Wallace (1992) stresses the importance of the link between



the students reading for pleasure in their mother tongue and in the foreign language they learn. He writes:

And if readers do not read for pleasure in their mother tongue, they are unlikely to do so in a second or foreign language. An important by-product of reading for pleasure in any language is fluency. This can create a vicious circle. Unless a reader gains fluency, that is speed and ease of reading, the reading of any material for whatever purpose is likely to be tedious. This, in turn, decreases motivation to read anything other than essential 'survival materials' - the minimum required to function in school or the work place - and fluency never gets a chance to develop (p. 7).

Wallace's comment is a confirmation of our observation especially in secondary schools in Ethiopia. Many students have very little motivation to read in English in secondary schools. This is partly due to a lack of reading habits in their mother tongue. Apart from native Amharic speakers and very few others, many secondary school students have had no chance of reading in their mother tongue.

Like home, school is a significant factor that influences the development of reading interests. Many researchers on reading including Nuttall (1982), Robinson and Charlotte quoted in Karlin (1973) and Deboer (1970) emphasise the teacher, the school reading program, the library and educational visits as factors pertaining to the students' interest in reading at early ages.



Next to the home, school is a place where students spend most of their time. The teacher is the person next to parents to make frequent contacts with children. Therefore, both the school and the teacher have no less a role to play in developing and sustaining the children's reading interests than the home and parents. Charlotte cited in Karlin (1973:322) describes the teacher's role in developing the students' reading interests as:

If we teach a child to read yet develop not the taste for reading, all our teaching is for naught. We shall have produced a nation of illiterate - literate, those who know how to read but do not read.

Similarly, Robinson (1971) has the notion that the development of reading interest is as important as the development of reading skills and strategies. She holds the view that the development of personal interest in reading should be incorporated in the goals of reading instruction. Robinson (p. 131) elaborates her position as follows:

One of the most important goals of reading instruction is to develop a personal interest in reading. Personal reading enhances interest, encourages children to choose reading in preference to other attractive media, and serves as a student's purposeful motive to improve a reading competence. Interest in reading should begin early and be nurtured throughout the school years if it is to continue into adulthood.



To sum up, the link between reading for pleasure and reading for general academic purpose helps the teacher to promote in the learners, the development of competence in the foreign language. Clearly, assessing the learners' leisure reading interests helps the teacher to provide the students with materials of their reading preferences. Also he can equip them with the necessary reading skills and strategies that suit the learners different purposes of reading. In this case, reading for study purposes requires different strategies and skills from reading for pleasure. Besides this, the teacher can also identify and teach forms of the foreign language that the students find difficult to understand while they read for pleasure. Relating some aspects of the academic topics to the themes the students like to read in their leisure time will also make both the lesson and the leisure reading successful. This is a further confirmation of the implication of reading for pleasure for teaching methods, designing the curriculum and selecting teaching materials for a foreign language classroom.

## **PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON READING INTERESTS AND PREFERENCES**

### **Outside Ethiopia**

Wallace (1992) reports a study made to assess the reading interests and preferences of students who were non-native speaker of English. The survey included students from China, Thailand and Indonesia. In the study, the students were asked to indicate their reading



preferences. The result indicated that the students from China chose works of fiction of political intrigue; the students from Thailand favoured the Reader's Digest and fairy tales; and the students from Indonesia liked simplified classic and romantic fiction. The study generally indicated that the most active readers preferred to read thrillers, romantic fiction or comic stories irrespective of their languages. Thus, Wallace concludes that themes that appeal to universal aspects of human nature are not strictly culture-bound.

Similarly, Skiotis (1981) made a study aimed at surveying the reading habits and preferences of secondary school students in Greece. The study was conducted by means of a questionnaire. The subject of the study were 1424 pupils selected from both private and government schools. The subjects were provided with 14 reading topics and were requested to indicate their reading choices in a rank order. Of the 14 reading topics, adventure, crime, social problems, novel and politics were reported as the first five reading choices of the respondents.

Elliot and Linde cited in Gorden *et al.* (1979) also made a study to assess the reading interests of 1000 students of grades 10, 11 and 12 in Mid-Western U.S. The subjects were provided with 40 reading items categorized under books, magazines and newspapers. Analysis of the data indicated sex-based differences in reading preferences. The subjects grade level were reported to have no relations with their reading interests. Almost all the subjects had strong interests in newspapers. Male students had less interests in books than female students. Girls had less taste for reading about sports and sex than boys.



Waples and Getzles, as cited in Emans *et al.* (1967) took interest in surveying motives of students' reading for pleasure. The researchers identified four motives: information, self-identification, aesthetic and recreational and required high school students to indicate the particular motive they had for leisure reading. The study also aimed at assessing the influences of social class, sex and age on the students' motives for reading. The result of the study showed that boys ranked 'seeking information' higher than girls. Younger students had recreational motives higher than older ones. Aesthetic was the last chosen motive for reading by boys and girls. Intellectually low students favoured self - identification as the prior motive for their recreational reading.

### Ethiopia

Regrettably, almost no reading interest survey has been conducted in Ethiopia at any level of education. The only available survey is the one made by Martz in 1971. In fact, many changes have taken place in the country since then.

Martz surveyed the reading interests of secondary school students in Addis Ababa. The study was initiated and designed by the Department of Library Science for an inter-disciplinary seminar of the Faculties of Arts and Education in the former Haile Selassie I University. The subjects of the study were 1111 (906 boys and 205 girls) of grade 12 students sampled from six secondary schools in Addis Ababa. The secondary schools were; Teferi Mekonen (now Entoto Comprehensive); Prince Bede Mariam (now non-existent);



Prince Mekonen (now Addis Ketema); Kokebe Tsibah; Medhane Alem and Minilik II.

Martz used a questionnaire to gather data for the study. In the study, the subjects were provided with a list of titles in fiction and non-fiction and were asked to show their reading choices. They were also asked to write names of newspapers and magazines they chose to read. The data indicated that 60% of the respondents showed great interest in news magazines such as the Times and Newsweek. The study showed that school libraries, friends, reading rooms of foreign governments and the respondents' homes were sources of their reading materials. Martz reported no significant sex-based reading interests. In this connection, she states:

One interesting observation is that the difference in boys' and girls' tastes is not so great as is the difference observed in some other countries. This variation may be due to the dearth of books of special interest to girls, to difference in culture mores, or to the limited number of girls questioned (p. 4).

Although their purposes were not to assess the students' reading interests, many M.A. theses made especially on freshman students of A.A.U. in the 1980's give us insight into A.A.U. students' reading in English. For example, Mekonen Disasa's (1984) study confirmed that most of the freshmen his study covered lacked sufficient English reading background. That is, more than 50% of them did not read even one book in one year in their free time during their high school days.



According to Barbara Morris's (1983) findings from the study made on A.A.U. students, reading is the second most important language skill (listening being first) especially for first and second year student. However, she concluded that the then English service courses did not help to promote the students' reading. A similar conclusion was reached earlier by G.P Mosback (1977) as cited in Halle Michael Abera (1984). Both conclusions confirm the need for classroom teaching materials that can promote the students reading in the target language.

### METHODOLOGY

The target population of this descriptive study was second to fourth year students of A.A.U. According to the information obtained from the Office of the Registrar of A.A.U., there were 13 departments that have a four-year degree offering program in the College of Social Sciences.

Lists of the students in the departments were obtained from their respective departments. The lists obtained indicated that there were 1834 students registered (between 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> year) in the social science departments in the first semester of the 1992 academic calender (see Table 1 below). Of the total of 1834 students, there were only 253 female students. The wide discrepancy between the number of boys and girls is a reflection of the ratio in the secondary schools in the country. According to the information obtained from the statistical office of the Ministry of Education, the recent highest percentage of girls as against boys in Ethiopian government secondary is 39%. Females in Ethiopia are sadly far behind boys in their formal education and the higher the level the more they are under-represented.



**Table 1: Distribution of the Target Population According to Departments and Years**

Department/Faculty	II Year			III Year			IV Year		
	M	F	Total	M	F	T	M	F	T
<b>1. Business &amp; Economics</b>									
1.1 Accounting	103	12	115	97	23	120	115	26	177
1.2 Economics	-	-	-	99	23	122	107	24	131
1.3 Management	-	-	-	103	12	125	134	15	149
<b>2. Educational Faculty</b>									
2.1 Business Education	24	6	30	14	6	20	16	5	21
2.2 Educat. Administration	-	-	-	52	-	52	35	1	36
2.3 Educational Psychology	19	2	21	7	2	9	12	-	12
<b>3. College of Social Sciences</b>									
3.1 Geography	39	1	40	30	-	30	34	1	35
3.2 History	34	6	40	22	-	22	26	3	29
3.3 PSIR	29	3	32	19	1	20	16	1	17
3.4 SOSA	30	1	31	15	3	18	17	3	20
<b>4. ILS</b>									
4.1 Eth-Lang. & lit.	38	8	46	32	4	36	30	3	33
4.2 FL & Literature	55	20	75	49	10	59	64	23	87
4.3 Theatre Arts	13	2	15	7	-	7	9	3	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>61</b>		<b>546</b>	<b>84</b>		<b>651</b>	<b>108</b>	

Of the total population of A.A.U., a sample of 185 (10%) were selected using a random sampling technique. Second year students of the Department of Economics, Educational Administration and Management were not included in the study because their name lists were not ready when the data for the study was collected. This study



also did not include freshman students because of the change in the 1991/92 academic calendar.

Questionnaires, interviews and personal observation were used to gather the data for the study. Three sets of questionnaires two in English and one in Amharic - were used for data collection. The sample subjects of the study were A.A.U. students. However, for further confirmation of the data obtained from the sample population, supplementary sources of data (interviews and questionnaires for instructors and librarians together with personal observation) were used. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with the sample population.

In the discussion, no separate section is given to the data obtained from the supplementary sources. That is, only the salient points of the data were selected and used to verify the replies obtained from the sample population.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Obviously, leisure reading is only possible when there is leisure time. Therefore, it is important to make sure if the subjects of this study had leisure time. When asked in the questionnaire whether or not they had leisure time, 95% of them replied they had leisure time. On average, the amount of leisure time they had ranged from less than 1 hour to 5 or more hours every day. Nearly two-thirds of them had between 2-4 hours free from work everyday.



As indicated earlier, this study was designed to survey the leisure reading interests of A.A.U. students. To achieve this purpose, the subjects of the study were asked whether or not they read materials not directly related to their academic courses in their leisure time. The replies to the question are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Whether or not the Respondents Read for Pleasure in their Free Time**

Item II	No. of Respondents			
	Yes	%	No	%
Do you read materials not directly related to your academic work in your leisure time?	155	88	20	36

As indicated in the Table 88% of the respondents said they read for pleasure in their free time.

In order to verify the students' replies responses from librarians, instructors and personal observations were used as additional sources of data. Librarians, particularly those who work at the circulation desk, in the Ethiopian collections and in the periodicals sections of the Main Library in A.A.U. are in a position of becoming familiar with the students' reading habits. Therefore, in the questionnaire, the librarians were asked if A.A.U. students really used the library for



reading materials such as fiction, magazine, newspapers, etc. In response to the question, six of the eleven librarians said many students went to the library either for spot reading particularly in the periodicals section or for borrowing reading materials such as fiction. The number of readers according to the data obtained increases at the beginning of semesters and during inter-semester breaks. This is mainly due to the less academic work the students have during these times. Similarly, replies obtained from the 3 section heads during the interview sessions and the researcher's personal observation confirmed that many students go to the library to read or borrow materials not directly related to their academic courses.

Instructors were the other sources of data for further verification of the students' responses. In this connection, it should be noted that one purpose of teaching a foreign language, English in this case, is not only to promote the learners out of the classroom independent reading in English but also to follow up and monitor their reading. For example, students' home work, assignments, classroom discussions, etc. are all feedback to instructors whether or not the students read extensively.

Thus, 19 instructors from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature were asked to judge from the students' performances in language classes if the students read in English materials outside their academic reading requirements. Of the instructors asked, 10 said their students had positive attitudes towards reading materials



outside their academic reading requirements while the remaining gave different answers.

To sum up, analysis of the data gathered from all sources implies that the subjects of this study read in their free time, though not as much as they should, materials not directly related to their academic reading.

**Table 3: Kinds of Reading Materials**

Item 12	Kinds of Reading Materials	No. of Respondents	
1	Books only	18	12.6%
2	Magazines only	12	7.7%
3	Newspapers only	7	4.5%
4	Books and magazines only	11	7.0%
5	Books and newspapers only	13	8.3%
6	Magazines and newspaper only	24	15.4%
7	Books, magazines and newspapers	70	45.5%

Nearly half of the respondents (45.5%) read books, magazines and newspapers. Magazines and newspapers only also have a significant percentage of readers. During the interviews made with the students



they also pointed out that they spent more time reading magazines and newspapers. Availability and accessibility of magazines and newspapers together with the length of their articles were the reasons why they chose to read these materials. The respondents also said magazines and newspapers have more interesting and timely topics than fiction.

In an attempt to investigate the amount of their leisure time they spend on reading in relation to other competing leisure time activities, 87% of them said they took part in sports, music, theatre, cinema and T.V. watching. However, of those who said they had other hobbies, half of them said they spent half or more than half of their leisure time on reading. The probable truth of this was further verified by the data obtained from the students during the interview sessions.

To identify the order of their reading preferences, the subjects were provided with a list of 8 kinds of reading materials and were required to indicate the order of their first 5 reading preferences. The 8 kinds of reading materials were available in the Main Library. Table 4 indicates the replies.



**Table 4: Order of the Respondents' Reading Preferences**

Reading Materials	1 <sup>st</sup> No. of Respondents		2 <sup>nd</sup> No. of Respondents		3 <sup>rd</sup> No. of Respondents		4 <sup>th</sup> No. of Respondents		5 <sup>th</sup> No. of Respondents	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Novel	39	25.2%	21	13.5%	22	14.6%	22	14.9%	17	12.2%
2. Newspaper	28	18.0%	23	14.8%	27	18.0%	25	17.0%	21	15.1%
3. Magazine	23	14.8%	44	28.3%	28	18.6%	24	16.3%	15	10.7%
4. Religion	23	14.8%	10	6.4%	15	10%	15	10.2%	13	9.3%
5. Short story	20	12.9%	39	25.1%	30	20%	23	15.6%	15	10.7%
6. Technical/professional	15	9.6%	8	5.1%	5	3.3%	11	7.4%	15	10.7%
7. Science fiction	5	3.2%	6	3.8%	16	10.6%	17	11.5%	20	14.3%
8. Biography	2	1.3%	4	2.8%	7	4.6%	10	6.8%	23	16.5%

The table indicates that novels, magazines, short stories, newspapers and biographies are the first 5 reading preferences of the respondents. However, it should be noted that their responses indicated in Table 3, show that only 12.6% of them read books while 15.4% of them read magazines and newspapers. Replies obtained from the follow-up interviews made with the sample population also confirm that most of the read magazines and newspapers because of their availability and accessibility to the students. Thus, the fact that novels come first in the list of their reading preferences may indicate their desire to read novels.

In a questionnaire, the librarians in the periodicals section were provided with a list of 12 'popular journals' and newspapers available in the library and were required to identify those read only by boys; those read only by girls; those read by boys and girls and those demanded by either sex. This list was not given to the sample population as students had no direct access to the journals and the



newspapers which were issued only for spot reading against the students' identification cards. The list included:

1. Addis Zemen (Sunday edition)
2. Africa Confidential
3. African Report
4. Ebony
5. The Ethiopian Herald
6. National Geographic
7. Newsweek
8. Reader's Digest
9. Selamta (English magazine)
10. Tseday (Amharic magazine)
11. Yezareitu Ethiopia
12. Time

The replies indicated negligible sex related reading preferences. This could be partly due to the small number of girls involved or due to the lack of variety in the reading items provided. **Ebony** was the only reading popular among girls. Others were equally read by both boys and girls.

The respondents were also asked to write names of authors or titles of works of fiction they had read in the last 4-6 years. More respondents gave Amharic books or authors than English ones. Amharic works, such as Baalu Girma, Haddis Alemayehu, Mamo Wudneh, Berhanu Zerihun and Sisay Nigusu were among the reading preferences of the respondents. Ten favourite English authors listed by the respondents were: Agatha Christie, Arther Haily, Chinua Achebe, Erving Wallace, George Orwell, Harold Robinson, J.



Austen, J. Susan, Robert Ludlum and Sidney Sheldon. Things Fall Apart, Animals Farm, The Other Side of Mid-night, The Man and Wind Mills of the God were some of the books the respondents listed as their favourites.

Follow-up interviews made with the sample respondents revealed no significant differences between the kinds of themes that interest them most. They generally had the feeling that crime, detective, adventure, modern thrillers and love stories satisfied their reading curiosity. The replies suggest that the present respondents have had little opportunity to develop specific reading interests.

In connection with the language in which they read, 69.6% of them said they chose to read in English. However, judging from the titles of Amharic books (authors) listed by students as their favourites and the interview replies obtained from the students and from the librarians the respondents replies to this question are a little exaggerated.

Day to day observation of their English language proficiency indicates that most of the students have poor reading habits outside the academic context. Thus, apart from newspapers and journals, their reading of books in English during their free time is sporadic. However, given appropriate opportunities such as an open stack library system, simplified readers, etc. this sporadic reading habit can be shaped into a permanent reading habit for pleasure.

Regarding their reason for choosing to read in English, 60% of them said they read in English mainly to improve their language. Besides language improvement, in the follow-up interviews, the respondents noted they chose English even when they read for pleasure because



the Ethiopian literary culture does not entertain modern thrillers, sensational themes and love stories as overtly as the European literary culture. This basically implies that the respondents read in their free time for both language improvement and self-entertainment.

An attempt was also made to assess their reading background in English. Following is the average number of books the respondents said they read in 4 years in secondary school and in one year at A.A.U.

**Table 5: Average Number of Books Read by the Respondents in 4 Years in Secondary Schools and in one year in A.A.U.**

Item 19			Item 20		
Secondary School	No. of Respondents		A.A.U	No. of Respondents	
1-5 books	14	11.7%	1-3 books	51	38.6%
6-10 books	18	15.1%	4-6 books	38	28.7%
11-15 books	12	10.0%	7-9 books	20	15.1%
16-20 books	18	15.2%	More than 10 books	23	17.4%
More than 20 books	57	47.8%			

A comparison between the respondents' replies to the two item in Table 5 shows continuity in the reading habit of the respondents. However, no encouraging differences were observable. For example, 26.8% (11.7% + 15.1%) of them read ten or less than ten books in



the four years stayed in high school. That is, they read less than 3 books in one year. Similarly, 36.6% of the respondents said they read 3 less than 3 books in one year in A.A.U.

In a follow-up interview the students confirmed that they read on average less books in one year in secondary schools but more newspapers and magazines now. Accessibility, length of articles, simplicity of language, theme of articles, etc. were, according to the replies obtained during interview sessions, mainly their reasons for choosing newspaper and magazines.

When asked if A.A.U. libraries provided them with various reading materials of their preferences, nearly half of them (49%) replied that the libraries did not provide them with the materials they wanted to read during their free time. However, more significant than shortage of reading materials of the students' preferences is the closed stack system adopted by most libraries.

The closed stack system gives the students no opportunity for browsing books on library shelves. As students go close to books they get attracted by the color of the book, cover pictures and commentaries on cover pages. Books shelves also seem to have attracting power. Unfortunately, A.A.U. students do not have this opportunity.

When asked in an interview why they have adopted the closed stack system, the librarians replied that the closed stack system guarantees the security of books. In their opinion, the catalogue system is available to the students to compensate for the closed stack system. However, the students' skill in using the catalogue system is open to question.



In this regard, the recent development in the ILS library is very encouraging. As of the beginning of the 1993/94 academic year, the library has kept its shelves open to students. Daily observations indicate that there are a lot of students who are constantly using the library either for spot reading or for borrowing novels.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A close observation and critical analysis of the replies obtained from the main and supplementary sources generally appear to suggest that most of the present respondents read in English materials outside their academic reading requirement. They read a combination of reading materials including novels, newspapers, magazine, religion, short stories, etc. However, magazines and newspapers seem to be their most frequent reading preferences. This could largely be due to their availability and accessibility to the students.

Their leisure time reading has a utilitarian purpose. That is, they read both for language improvement and for recreation. However, language improvement is the purpose of leisure reading for the majority of the present respondents. They appear to have not yet developed a specific reading preference.

Therefore, to promote the students' involvement in reading for pleasure, schools at all levels, libraries and teachers should make particular endeavours. For example:

1. They should continuously assess the students' reading habits and preferences in order to make proper provisions for the students' reading interests.



2. They should make reading materials, including graded readers, available to the students. Teachers and students can take a common share in collecting the materials at school level.
3. Instructors at A.A.U. should make a strong link between teaching reading skills in the classroom and reading for pleasure outside the academic contexts. Both reinforce each other. This can partly be done by relating instruction with themes the students enjoy reading.
4. Teachers can bring books to the attention of the students through dramas, books exhibitions, bulletin board displays, school T.V. and radio programmes. This is particularly possible in elementary and secondary schools.
5. Teachers, at elementary and secondary levels of education, should raise the awareness of the students, motivate, encourage and guide them to read for pleasure in their mother tongue. In this case, the present situation is encouraging because many students are getting the opportunity to read in their mother tongue at an elementary school level. Reading skills and habits developed in the students' mother tongue could thus be transferred into reading in the foreign language.
6. Libraries, especially A.A.U. libraries, should keep their shelves open to students.



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