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Scope & Editorial Policy

Scope

The journal seeks to stimulate and promote a cross fertilization of scholarly research and academic discourse among media educators and researchers in the fields of mass media/media studies, specifically broadcasting, speech communication, relations, marketing, development communication Public /journalism, publishing, creative writing/children's literature, indigenous communication and cross cultural communication.

Well researched articles employing qualitative and/or quantitative methods and critical analytical articles providing enriching insights are particularly sought. Occasionally, there will be special editions dedicated to a selected theme. For such editions, a guest editor may be invited to coordinate the call for papers, assessment, selection and final editing of submissions.

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Beyond Gratification: Investigation of Academic Benefits of Recreational Reading Among University of Ibadan Undergraduates

Babatunde Raphael Ojebuyi¹, PhD and Nkechinyere Augustina Nwunze².

Abstract

Studies have shown that reading and literacy are directly connected, and there is a link between academic success and reading ability. But the extent to which recreational reading can lead to academic success requires further investigation. Recreational reading is a form of reading that provides pleasure and other forms of gratification for the reader. However, beyond this, it is believed that recreational reading can foster social progress, ensure broader knowledge, enhance academic competence, and militate against illiteracy. This proposition requires further empirical proofs. Anchored on the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), and Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study employed survey and in-depth interviews as the research methods. A total of 1,350 undergraduates of the University of Ibadan selected through stratification, convenience and proportionate sampling techniques responded to the questionnaire while 13 students purposively selected from all the faculties formed the interviewees. Findings show that undergraduates of the University, to a large extent (n=1166; 86.4%), exhibit favourable attitude towards recreational reading. Also, the students affirmed that recreational reading, besides providing pleasure, serves as the source of information and knowledge applicable to real life situations, boosts their academic reading efficacy, enhances their understanding of general textural information, and builds their vocabulary competence. The study, therefore, provides evidence that the value of recreational reading is more than generation of pleasure or gratification; it also enhances overall academic success.

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Key Words: Academic Success, Gratifications, Literacy, Reading Attitudes, Recreational Reading, University of Ibadan

Introduction

There is a general feeling that reading culture has declined in the Nigerian educational context (Ifedili, 2009). Students no longer engage in pleasure reading while just a handful bothers to use available libraries for study. Ifedili's study (2009) reveals that only 21% of students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria buy novels to read for knowledge and pleasure. In addition to this, Nweke (1987) notes that despite efforts of the various governments in Nigeria to promote reading habits, Nigerians have been slow in embracing reading as a lifelong educational process. But it has been established that reading plays some important roles in an individual's life such as: providing welfare, social progress and international understanding; providing skills, right knowledge and pleasure. There are some identified disadvantages of poor reading culture which include high failure rate, increase in students' dropout rate, continuous high rate of unskilled manpower, poverty, frustration, loss of self esteem, illiteracy among others (Ifedili, 2009). Igbokwe and Obidike (2012) citing Okeke (2000) believe that the art of reading is a priceless instrument for everyone. It is one of the most important activities of life through which we enter into the life and experiences of others and extend our knowledge, scope of experiences and enjoyment. This description of reading rightly points to the gain of recreational reading, which is the primary focus of this study. Reading for pleasure is regarded as one way for building students' reading attitudes; however, pleasure reading is not given the same status as basic skills in learning institutions. This creates an obstacle for lifelong love for reading (Sanecore, 2000 as cited by Parker, 2004).

The importance of academic reading has attracted the attention of various scholars (Parker, 2004; Lukhele, 2006; Adeniji and Omale, 2010; Ifedili, 2011), but the relationship between recreational reading and academic performance has not been given enough scholarly attention. It, therefore, becomes imperative to study how well students read not only academic

materials but also out-of-class or pleasure reading books, the reading habits that reflect the attitudes of these students to recreational reading, and the benefits of recreational reading to the students in respect of their academic competence. According to Gilbert and Fister (2009), undergraduates have a higher regard for books and they acknowledge the pleasures of reading them. It, however, remains unresolved as to whether Nigerian students have a high regard for reading as most of them would probably watch television and hang out with friends during their free periods. And if they do read, it is necessary to investigate the likely feelings that these students attach to recreational reading and the possible academic benefits that they get through pleasure reading. In other words, we intend to investigate the attitudes of the University of Ibadan undergraduates towards recreational reading, and the academic benefits of recreational reading to the students. This is the gap this study aims to fill. The following research questions will guide the execution of this study:

(1) What are the attitudes of the University of Ibadan undergraduates to recreational reading?

(2) What are the academic benefits that the students derive from recreational reading?

Literature Review

Concept of Recreational Reading

Du Toit (2001) describes recreational reading as a kind of reading that learners do of their own free will, mostly in their own free time, because they derive pleasure from it. In other words, as Du Toit elaborates, recreational reading is the kind of reading that is chosen and that if well reinforced, becomes a lifelong habit. The phrase "Recreational Reading" refers to a reading that an individual does with an anticipation of the satisfaction that he will derive from such a reading exercise. It is a reading that is born of free will and could also refer to a form of prescribed reading by a friend that can only be continued as the reader develops an interest in the ext while reading. Reading for pleasure involves making choices of materials to read; a reflection of a reader's need in the choice of a book and a place suitable for the reading.

Literature is imperative for successful living, and it is enriching to

adults and children alike (Dubow and Tucker as cited by Du Toit, 2001). Also, Ubahkwe (2003) acknowledges this by imputing that recreational reading is a potential skill a reader—especially a second language learner—can use to improve language acquisition. Recreational reading has some benefits. Apart from the fact that it plays major roles in the educational sector, it also facilitates the enhancement of reading skills and strategies.

Students' Reading Attitudes

Reading attitudes exhibited by students could be as a result of how favourable and unfavourable they perceive reading. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) define attitude as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object. Sainsbury and Rebecca (2008) describe attitude in the form of a positive self-concept of a reader, a desire and tendency to read and a reported enjoyment of or interest in reading; and its opposite, a negative self-concept as a reader, a desire and tendency to avoid reading and a reported dislike of the activity. To these scholars, attitude is a form of personal feeling either positively or negatively implied that a learner may develop towards reading. It, however, appears that positive reading outcomes assist in the development of a positive attitude, whereas negative outcomes of reading tend to discourage further ventures into reading resulting in the development of a negative attitude (McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth, 1995; Fayehun, 2012). McKenna et al in their model of reading attitude acquisition suggest that each reading experience makes a difference regarding one's attitude towards reading and one's beliefs regarding reading outcomes.

Attitudes here also relate to how students feel with regard to recreational reading. Do they value reading for fun or not? If students do, what are the likely feelings they attach to recreational reading? The importance of understanding students reading attitudes remains a phenomenon to understand and cherish. The commission on Reading in its summary of a research project concluded that "becoming a skilled reader requires learning that a written material can be interesting" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson as cited by McKenna and Kear, 1990:1). These scholars further argue that emotional response to

reading is the primary reason that most readers read and could probably be the primary reason why most non-readers do not read. Most importantly, McKenna and Kear (1990) citing Wixson and Lipson acknowledge that the students' attitude toward reading is crucial to reading performance.

Differences in attitudes of students to recreational reading are portrayed in either positive or negative forms. Most students would rather socialize, watch television, and hang out with friends than read novels and other recreational books. These categories of students could be regarded as students with negative attitudes to pleasure reading or any other type of reading in general. A number of students are said to value reading and can read any article ranging from academic down to non-academic materials. These set of readers are said to exhibit favourable attitudes to reading of any kind. However, as stated earlier, reading outcomes influences students' attitudes to reading. Avid readers who perform better when it comes to class grades are known to show favourable attitudes to recreational reading and other types of reading while reluctant readers would rather watch television and they watch a good amount of television than avid readers in a day. If this latter category is the case, we can conclude that the students have developed the negative attitudes towards recreational reading. In some cases, the type of attitudes student develop towards recreational reading may be a function of the nature of school atmosphere. For example, Gilbert and Fister (2009) posit that colleges unknowingly erect barriers to voluntary reading despite the quest for more reading by students. The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in the United States in a reading survey proposes that the measurement of attitudes holds the potential to contribute to the understanding of reading comprehension and reading difficulties (McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang and Meyer, 2012). It is, therefore, important that school authorities carry out reading survey to determine the prevalent reading habit and attitude among the students and take necessary steps if the attitudes are not encouraging.

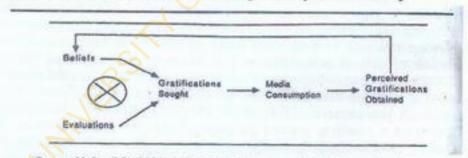
Theoretical Framework

The theories that we consider relevant to this research are the

Expectancy-Value Theory which was propounded by Martin Fishbein in the 1970s, and the Uses and Gratifications Approach Theory. These theories apply to the core aspects of this study which are the attitudes of students to recreational reading, how these attitudes determine their engagement in recreational reading, and the benefits derivable from recreational reading.

According to Martin Fishbein's Expectancy-Value Theory (Fishbein, 1961; Cohen, Fishbein & Ahtola, 1972; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), the rewards derived and the expected gain of an audience from a particular medium influences the continuous use of that medium. McQuail (2000:389) sees the rewards gained from using a particular medium as a motivating factor for the reuse of the medium, he puts it this way: "Essential to most theory concerning personal motivations for media use is the idea that the media offer rewards which are expected (thus predicted) by potential members of an audience, on the basis of relevant past experience". Palmgreen and Rayburn (1980) cited by McQuail (2000) propose a model of the process involved in the Expectancy-value theory as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Expectancy-Value Theory



Source: McQuail, D. (2000). McQuail's Mass Communication Theory. London: Sage Publication

McQuail (2000:310) has this to say of the model, "In general the model expresses the proposition that media use is accounted for by a combination of perception of benefits offered by the medium and the differential value of these benefits for the individual audience member". McQuail's model reinforces the propositions of the expectancy-value theory by stating that the use of any medium can mainly be as a result of perceptions and beliefs that

will lead to a kind of favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the further use of such a medium. Expectancy-value theory suggests that people orient themselves to the world according to their expectations (beliefs) and evaluations.

The uses and gratifications theory also attempts to explain the uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups, and society in general. There are three objectives in developing uses and gratifications theory. These are (1) to explain how individuals use mass communication to gratify their needs; (i.e. what the masses do with the media); (2) to discover underlying motives for individual's media use; and (3) to identify the positive and the negative consequences of individual media use. The core tenet of uses and gratifications theory lies in the assumption that the audience actively seek out the mass media to satisfy individual needs. Therefore, a medium will be used more when the existing motives to use the medium leads to more satisfaction (Watson, 2003; Sambe, 2005; McQuail, 2007; Baran and Davis, 2009; Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

The questions that come to mind drawing insight from the propositions of these theories are: (1) Do students see the values and benefits that can be derived from recreational reading and help them to develop positive attitude towards reading? (2) Have students identified or discovered some uses which in turn may constitute a motivation for their further engagement in recreational reading apart from the fact that they want to read for relaxation? These questions form the basis of this study, and justify the relevance of these theories to the current study.

Review of Empirical Studies

A study on reading attitudes of middle school students in U.S survey towards recreational reading in print settings, in digital settings; academic reading in digital and print settings discovers that the attitudes of females were more positive than those of males to print settings; however, for attitudes towards recreational reading in digital settings, the patterns reversed (McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang and Meyer, 2012). Adeniji and Omale (2010) in their study, "Teaching Reading Comprehension in Selected Primary Schools in Oyo State

(Nigeria)" discover that the major cause of student's poor performance in English and other courses lies in student's inability to read effectively. This, they say, is largely as a result of students' attitude to reading.

Onukaogu and Ohia (2003) citing Adetugbo in their study, point out four language skills used in learning- listening, writing, speaking and reading. However, Onukaogu and Ohia believe that the teaching of language can be enhanced if teachers should see the need to pay attention to the relevance, meaning making, meaning construction, meaning negotiation, and risk taking. Also, to these authors, literature should be well implemented in school systems. This is because literature is believed to equip readers with the skills of reading beyond literal meaning, improves comprehension level and builds students level of reading. Conversely, students who study mainly books on English or how to acquire linguistic competence end up reading at the frustration and instructional levels (Onukaogu and Ohia, 2003); they can easily recite rules governing word formation, sentence structure, spelling conventions and so on but their reading comprehension level is hardly beyond literal. When it comes to writing, they are neither smooth nor accurate.

Parker (2004) in studying the relationship between attitude and ability of grade 1 to 5 discovers in contrast to what other researchers have said, that there is almost no relationship between reading attitudes and reading ability. However, the researcher acknowledges that attitudes influences performance.

Lukhele (2006) comes up with a supporting finding in comparison with parker's (2004) findings. Lukhele's study on the relationship between reading Ability, Attitudes, Behaviours and Academic Performance of teacher trainees in Swaziland discovers that there is no relationship between participants' attitudes to extensive reading and their reading ability against an already established hypothesis that both attitudes and abilities are related. The reason given is that the participants' attitudes to leisure reading in the investigation are positive; yet their reading ability is not as developed as one would expect. However, the researcher discovers that there is a link between academic achievement and reading ability. The general trend from the foregoing studies poses a

dilemma in the understanding of the usefulness of recreational reading to reading students. This, therefore, suggests that there is a need for further research in this study area.

Methodology

In order to generate the required data (both quantitative and qualitative) for the study, the survey and the in-depth interview research methods were adopted. The population for this study was the undergraduates of the University of Ibadan. The undergraduates of the University of Ibadan were selected as the study population because they represented a literate segment of the Nigerian society believed to engage in reading activities for both academic and recreational purposes.

From the students' population of about 13,408 (according to the records from the University's Admissions Unit), a sample size of 1,350 respondents was drawn. This constituted about 10.1% of the population. The sample was drawn through stratification, proportionate and convenience sampling techniques. In addition, 13 students—one from each Faculty—who affirmed that they engaged in recreational reading, were purposively selected for the in-depth interview sections. Wimmer and Dormnick (2011) assert that to achieve representativeness in a large population, the sample size should not be less than 400 to 500. Consequently, a sample of about 10% (n= 13,408) of the population was considered representative enough for this study.

The research instruments used for this study were a questionnaire, and an in-depth interview guide. Data got via the questionnaire were coded and analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages. Also, responses from the interview were descriptively analysed, and the two sets of data were used in a complementary mode to answer the research questions.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

To present and discuss the findings, we used two themes constructed from the two research questions. These themes guided our discussion in a manner that aptly captured the core variables that formed the focus of the study:

1. Attitudes of the University of Ibadan Undergraduates to

Recreational Reading

Before exploring the benefits of recreational reading, we first examined the attitudes of the students towards reading for pleasure. Quantitative data generated through the questionnaire were complemented with the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews. The quantitative data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Attitude of Undergraduates towards Recreational Reading

S/ N	ITEM	SA	A	UD	D	SD	TOTAL
1.	Recreational reading is a very pleasant activity	530 (39. 3%)	636 (47.1 %)	67 (5.0%)	108 (8,0%)	9 (0.6%)	1350 (100%)
2.	Reading for pleasure is time consuming, therefore I don't like to read them even when I am on break	*	98 (7.3%)	66 (4.9%)	808 (59.9%)	378 (28.0 %)	1350 (100%)
3.	If you really wanted to hide something from me, tuck it in a book	50 (3.7 %)	124 (9.2%)	175 (13.0 %)	552 (40.9%	449 (33.3 %)	1350 (100%)
4.	I don't see a need for recreational reading as a student	28 (2.1 %)	48 (3.6%)	110 (8.1%)	559 (41,4%	605 (44.8 %)	1350 (100%)
5.	1 prefer spending time outdoors with my friends to reading a novel, newspaper and other recreational books	88 (6.5 %)	156 (11.6 %)	360 (26.7 %)	571 (42.3%)	175 (13.0 %)	1350 (100%)

The research findings as shown in Table 1 above give an insight into the attitude of respondents towards recreational reading. Majority of the respondents (n= 1166; 86.4%) held positive attitudes towards recreational reading as 530 (39.3%) strongly agreed and 636 (47.1%) agreed to the proposition that recreational reading is a pleasant activity. This was further confirmed by the responses (n= 1186; 87.9%) to the second proposition that recreational reading is time consuming thus making people not to engage in it. Most of the respondents disagreed (n= 808; 59.9%) and strongly disagreed (n= 378; 28.0%) with the proposition. Respondents also revealed that they have strong passion for reading as there was a general disagreement (n= 1001; 74.2%) to the proposition that anything written in a book could be kept away from them. Findings also revealed a positive attitude towards recreational reading among

respondents with greater percentage (n= 1119; 86.2%) disagreed with the proposition that recreational reading is not helpful to them as students.

Naturally, it is believed that an average human being would always engage in practices that bring pleasurable experience. Therefore, it is not strange that the greatest percentage (n=1,166; 86.4%) of respondents demonstrated a high level of positive attitude towards recreational reading since it (recreational reading), when cultivated as a habit, confers a high level of pleasure. This is the opinion of an interviewee from the Faculty of law with regards to his attitude to pleasure reading:

I am positively inclined to recreational reading. It adds finesse to my reading ability; helps me to get familiar with new words and improves my pronunciation of words and I have learnt to incorporate the information from pleasure reading into my academic writing.

Obviously, respondents have shown that recreational reading is not new to them and by agreeing to the statements that reinforces the gains of recreational reading, it could be said that respondents understand fully the concept of recreational reading. About 1,166 respondents representing 86.4% of the sampled population view recreational reading as a pleasant activity. This finding correlates with Du Toit's (2001) assertion that pleasure reading is for pleasure and is often engaged in for the sake of personal needs. Furthermore, the Commission on Reading in its research has observed that becoming a skilled reader requires learning that a written material can be interesting (McKenna and Kear, 1990). This perspective buttresses the hypothesis that through recreational reading, one stands to enhance one's level of literacy as one derives pleasure from the text. The findings here lend credence to the core tenets of the Uses and Gratification theory, and the Expectancy-Value theory. People use a medium to derive certain benefits or gratifications; a medium will be used more when the existing motives to use the medium leads to more satisfaction; and that the rewards derived from, and the expected gain of, an audience from a particular medium influence the continuous use of that medium (Sambe, 2005; McQuail, 2007; Baran and Davis, 2009). One of the core propositions of Martin

Fishbein's Expectancy-Value Theory, is that the rewards derived and the expected gain of an audience from a particular medium influences the continuous use of that medium. McQuail (2000:389) reiterates this proposition as he sees the rewards gained from using a particular medium as a motivating factor for the re-use of the medium. The finding here thus corroborates the foregoing theoretical propositions.

1. Benefits of Recreational Reading: More than Gratification

Findings of the study as shown in Table 2 give a breakdown of respondents' perception on the academic benefits inherent in recreation reading. As indicated by respondents, recreational reading serves as a platform for information acquisition, application of knowledge gained in solving real life problems, enhancement of academic reading efficacy, understanding of other textural information that might not be recreational in nature, and building of vocabulary power. For instance, majority of the respondents (i.e. 376 + 475 = 851; 63.1%) admitted that they were able to build their word power through recreational reading.

Table 2: Academic Benefits of Recreational Reading among Respondents

s/ N	ITEMS	Very true of me	True of me	Occasi onally true of me	Rarely true of me	Not at all true of me	TOTAL
1	I can understand contents of a novel easily, therefore, I am able to read academic books without much difficulty	(31.9	(41.0%)	(19.6%)	(6.4%)	(0.45)	1350 [100%]
2	Reading for pleasure helps me to see academic materials as less boring		504 (37.3%)	318 (23.6%)	202 (15.0%)	11 (0.8%)	1350 (100%)
3	I am able build my word power through recreational reading.	376 (27.9 %)	475 (35.2%	372 (27.6%)	123 (9.1%)	4 (0.3%)	1350 (100%)
4	I use the knowledge from leisure readings to address real life situations		537 (39.8%)	220 (16.3%)	192 (14,2%)	10 (0.7%)	1350 (100%)

Also, majority of the respondents (i.e. 315 + 504 = 819; 60.7%) affirmed that reading for pleasure helps them to see academic materials as less boring. Qualitative data from the interview provided a more exploratory insight into the benefits the students derive from recreational reading. The interviewees stated that pleasure derivable from recreational reading could motivate further engagement in reading and lead to further benefits beyond mere pleasure. One of the interviewees from the Social Sciences said that:

My motivation (to engage in recreational reading) is the need to derive pleasure from reading other people's experiences, to gain new knowledge and to have an edge over others in terms of skills in writing and other academic study skills.

Another interviewee from the Faculty of Law commented on his attitude to pleasure reading, and the benefits he derived apart from pleasure or gratification:

I am positively inclined to recreational reading. Apart from giving me pleasure, it adds finesse to my reading ability; helps me to get familiar with new words and improves my word pronunciation. I have learnt to incorporate the information from pleasure reading into my academic writing.

A second year undergraduate from the Faculty of Pharmacy, provided a similar response with regard to her motivation to engage in recreational reading:

My motivation to read non-academic books is firstly on pleasure I stand to enjoy from the books content and sometimes on the writer of such books. Of course, the fact that I am able to gain more knowledge, improve my use of English and learn from writer's wealth of experience motivates me to always engage in recreational reading whenever the opportunity calls.

The findings from the questionnaire items presented in Table 2 conform with findings in other studies that disclosed that recreational reading contributes a lot in building vocabularies, boosting academic reading efficacy, increasing speed and fluency

in reading and speech; generating new ideas, challenging the capacity to reason among others (Du Toit, 2001; Onukaogu and Ohia, 2003; Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Adeniji and Omale, 2010; and Clark and De Zoysa 2011). Also, the findings validate Igbokwe and Obidike's (2012) assertion that the art of reading is a priceless instrument for everyone as it allows readers to enter into the life and experiences of others and extend the reader's knowledge, scope of experiences, and gratifications. The finding here also conforms with one of the tenets of the Uses and Gratification theory which is to discover underlying motives for individual's media use; and that of the Expectancy-Value theory, which states that that media use is accounted for by a combination of perception of benefits offered by the medium (McQuail, 2000). Apart from reading for relaxation, the respondents affirmed that they derived other academic-related benefits whenever they engaged in recreational reading.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Undergraduates of the University of Ibadan—although different from the population studied by Ifedili (2009) and Nweke (1987)—have also shown favourable attitudes to reading activities. The students indicated their love for pleasure reading by the amount of time they spend reading. Besides, most of the students disclosed that they read books outside of their prescribed academic materials. Here, the Uses and Gratification theory and Fishbein's Expectancy-Value Theory become applicable in this study as the value students attached to pleasure reading, its perceived benefits and the relevance to the success of their reading from a more general perspective, therefore, are likely to constitute enough motivation for them to continue to engage in reading.

Basically, it is assumed that people engage in recreational reading for gratifications—entertainment, relaxation or enjoyment. However, as it is established in this study, recreational reading has more benefits beyond gratifications. Both the questionnaire respondents (as shown in Table 2) and the interviewees disclosed that engaging in recreational reading really enhanced their linguistic competence, and academic success.

As established in the literature, difference among competent readers and non-competent readers is evident in the level of academic attainment and worldview of each group. In order to help the less competent group among students, the university managements should provide affordable and strategic means for improving students reading accomplishment. The language-based departments in the University of Ibadan (e.g. Departments of Communication and Language Arts, Classics, English, and Linguistics and African Languages) should intensify training of students to become efficient and prolific readers. Besides, proper implementation of reading strategies contributes a lot to academic success. Therefore, curriculum developers, education experts and all stakeholders should give priority to teaching and learning programmes across all levels of education.

Since the English language serves as the bridge or vehicular language (Lingua Franca) and the language of educational instructions in Nigeria, the acquisition of the language becomes a necessity for survival in the country. The Nigerian Universities, especially science oriented institutions, must encourage their students to take some fundamental English language-based courses which include reading literary works that both provide pleasure and enhance vocabulary competence of the students. This would ensure that students have the right attitude to reading by developing their reading interest through extensive studies.

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