

Futo Journal Series (FUTOJNLS)
 e-ISSN : 2476-8456 p-ISSN : 2467-8325
 Volume-3, Issue-1, pp- 64 - 76
 www.futojnls.org

Research Paper

July 2017

Extensive Reading in English: A Study of the Reading Preferences of the Freshmen at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study investigated the 2015/2016 freshmen admitted into the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria (FUTO) in order to determine the extensive reading materials they preferred most and also, find out whether gender has any significant effect on their reading preferences. Consequently, out of a total of 5,400 freshmen admitted into the various schools and departments of FUTO for the 2015/2016 academic session, 200 (120 males and 80 females) were randomly selected and investigated, using the instrument of questionnaire. The data generated through the questionnaire were analysed, using frequency count and simple percentage. The analyses revealed that the freshmen preferred reading such materials as novels, newspapers and magazines. The revelation further hinted that the freshmen preferred reading fictional and non-fictional novels/short stories on science and technology, romance, adventure and crime, and sports. It was also revealed that gender had significant effect on the reading preferences of the freshmen. Based on these findings, the implications to the reading teachers, librarians, parents and researchers were highlighted.

Keywords: Extensive reading, reading preferences, freshmen, gender, FUTO

1. Introduction

Extensive reading (ER) is one reading mode that has engaged the attention of some linguistic scholars for some time now because of the perceived significant role it plays in the process of language learning and acquisition, especially in a second language situation. According to Bamfords and Day (1998), "ER is an approach to the teaching and learning of second language reading in which learners read large quantities of books and other materials that are well within their linguistic competence". Similarly, Benettayeb (2010) posits that, "an ER suggests reading for general language improvement and pleasure on topics that interest the learner". According to the source, ER increases the motivation of learners and gives them a more positive attitude towards the target language because as the learners read for pleasure, they would be eager to see what happens next and would, therefore, try to read more rapidly. Generally the more learners read extensively, the faster readers they become.

ER as contrasted from intensive reading (IR) has been described in diverse ways. While some scholars refer to it as reading for pleasure, others see it as leisure reading. According to Litanas, *et al.* (1999), many names have been given to ER programmes,

including book flood, uninterrupted sustained silent reading (USSR), drop everything and read (DEAR), silent uninterrupted reading for fun (SURF), and extensive reading and information literacy (ERIL). The diverse names notwithstanding, there is a consensus among linguistic scholars that ER enhances effective acquisition of language skills such as reading, writing and other language components like vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and so on. This view is supported by several research findings (Stotsky, 1983; Aboderin, 1985; MacGowen-Gilhooly, 1995 and Ikonta, 2004).

The specific benefits of ER are manifold and wide-ranging. They have been cited by many scholars, researchers and teachers who have been deeply involved in this instructional approach for a long time. The following benefits of ER are reported (Nation (1997), Waring (1997), Day and Bamford (1998), Hill (2001) and Prowse (2003):

- i. Extensive reading builds automaticity of word recognition.
- ii. Automatic recognition of words allows lexical access – the automatic calling up from memory of a word's meanings and its phonological representation.
- iii. Extensive reading builds vocabulary knowledge.
- iv. Comprehension and fluent reading depend on automatic word recognition and vocabulary knowledge, and thus are advanced through ER.
- v. Fluent reading allows the reader to move from word-by-word decoding to the processing of ideas, which is essential to higher level reading and thinking skills.
- vi. ER builds awareness of grammatical structures and the ability to quickly and accurately process sentence structures.
- vii. ER enhances learner's background knowledge.
- viii. ER promotes learners' positive attitude towards reading. It fosters their confidence and motivation to read.
- ix. ER increases exposure to the target language.
- x. ER reinforces a grasp of language that is taught in class. It provides students with an excellent opportunity to consolidate what they have learned, which is an essential aspect of foreign language learning.
- xi. Research studies show that ER improves learner's writing skills, listening and speaking skills and examination results.

For a successful implementation of ER in any language programme, Day and Bamford (1998) lists the following ten characteristics of an ER programme.

- i. Students read as much as possible, perhaps in and definitely out of class.
- ii. A wide variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available so as to encourage reading for different reasons in different ways.
- iii. Students select what they want to read and have the freedom to stop reading material that fails to interest them.
- iv. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding. These purposes are determined by the nature of the material and the interests of the students.
- v. Reading is its own reward. There are few or no follow-up exercises to be completed after reading.
- vi. Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Dictionaries are rarely used while reading because the constant stopping to look up words makes fluent reading difficult.
- vii. Reading is individual and silent, at the student's own pace, and outside class, done when and where the student chooses.

- viii. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower as students read books and other materials that they find easily understandable.
- ix. Teachers orient students to the goals of the programme, explain the methodology, keep tracks of what each student reads, and guide students in getting the most out of the programme.
- x. The teacher is a role model of reader for students – an active member of the classroom reading community, demonstrating what it means to be a reader.

Following the benefits associated with ER and results of researches, linguistic scholars have consistently advocated the need to integrate ER with language teaching and learning programmes, especially in a second language situation as Nigeria. Unfortunately, in contemporary Nigerian context, students at all levels of education tend to exhibit poor attitude to ER. This is why Fagbemi (1997) posits that an average literate Nigerian reads what he/she is forced to read while many will not bother to touch anything outside the professional area. According to the source, students are the worst culprits in this direction. Though they are supposed to read widely, regrettably, a good number of them read only when the exam is close and when they read, textbook may be the beginning and end of reading. The poor attitude of Nigerians in general and Nigerian students in particular to ER is always aptly captured by the joke: “If you want to hide something from a black man, hide it inside a book and place it on the centre table.” This joke is further amplified by Prof. D. Eka (a professor of English at the University of Uyo, Nigeria) while commenting orally on the poor attitude of Nigerian students to reading that “if you want to conceal a question paper meant for students, place it on the notice board. They may not see it because they hardly read, *let alone* things placed on notice boards.”

The researcher had also had cause to believe that Nigerian undergraduates have poor attitude to ER. This writer teaches at FUTO and has always integrated the reading of literary materials such as novels, plays and poetry with the teaching of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing on one hand and grammar and structure on the other hand. On each occasion, it could be noticed that a good number of students hardly read the materials even though, they know that questions would be drawn from the materials for summative evaluation. In some cases, some of the students would request the researcher to summarise the materials for them; the reason being that they could not make out time to read them. But surprisingly, the same students who could not make out time to read the prescribed materials would be found occasionally reading non-prescribed reading materials individually on their own. In fact, on several occasions, some of them are found at newspaper stands skimming and scanning newspapers, especially sports newspapers and other print materials. The two contradictory attitudes of the students were like an enigma to the researcher which were exceedingly difficult to reconcile.

However, in the March 2010 edition of *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy (JAAL)* and the May edition of *The Reading Teacher* all published by International Reading Association (IRA), an advertisement which read: “DON’T LIKE TO READ? THEY HAVEN’T FOUND THE RIGHT BOOK YET” was placed on pages 466 and 655 of the journals respectively. This advertisement is in agreement with the response of a subject, Sam, in Pitcher, *et al.* (2010), who was asked when he liked reading the most, and who responded, “when I like the book and it’s about what I like, like basketball”, and a comment by a subject, “Leon”, in the same Pitcher (2010) who enjoyed reading when he could choose what to read. Besides, one of the characteristic features of ER quoted above for a successful implementation of the ER programme is that the students should

select what they want to read and have the freedom to stop reading the material that fails to interest them.

Juxtaposing the experiences and the issues as highlighted above and evaluating them, it occurred to this researcher that students taught might have consistently failed to read the prescribed literary materials in the “Use of English” classes probably because the materials recommended to them did not interest them and/or that they were not allowed to choose what they wanted to read by themselves.

Against this background, the purpose of this investigation is to study the reading preferences of the 2015/2016 freshmen at FUTO. It is expected that the outcome of this study would be useful to several interest groups for the result of this study would assist the reading teachers to determine the reading preferences of their students so that they would design reading curriculum that would help the students to cultivate the habit of reading extensively. It is also expected that this study would help librarians to provide their clients with different reading materials that would adequately take care of their various reading interests. Thirdly, it is expected that the result of the study would go a long way in assisting child psychologists and school counsellors to serve their clients better.

2. Statement of the Problem

It is common knowledge that Nigerian students at all levels of education have poor attitude to extensive reading. From classroom experiences, it is evident that a good number of the students do intensive reading, that is, reading for examinations, and other related classroom work. But when extensive reading materials are recommended for them as a step towards encouraging them to read extensively in order to be more proficient in the use of English, many of the students, in most cases, feel reluctant to read such materials. Surprisingly, some of them on their own are seen reading some extensive materials they have chosen by themselves. It is not unlikely that the seemingly poor communication ability in speech and writing in English noticed among contemporary Nigerian students and the attendant poor academic performance are partly as a result of their poor attitude to extensive reading. If the standard of the Nigerian education must be addressed in order to move it to the next level, this problem of poor attitude to ER should be accorded the necessary attention. It is against this background that this investigation aims at determining the extensive reading materials the 2015/2016 freshmen in FUTO prefer most. The outcome of this study would place classroom teachers in a better position to know the extensive reading materials their students prefer most so that such materials would be recommended for them to encourage them read extensively.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the reading preferences of the 2015/2016 freshmen of FUTO. The study also aims at finding out whether gender has any significant effect on the reading preferences of the study population.

4. Research Questions

This investigation aims at providing answers to the following questions:

- i. What are the extensive reading materials most preferred by the 2015/2016 freshmen of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria.?

- ii. Does gender have any significant effect on the reading preferences of 2015/2016 freshmen of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria.?

5. Scope of the Study

In view of the explosion in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT), reading materials in contemporary times are not only print but also electronic. Therefore, this investigation is limited to print media that are meant to be read extensively.

6. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Extensive Reading Theory. Linguistic scholars have always believed that there is a positive correlation between extensive reading and the acquisition of language skills. This view is reiterated by Phelp-Teraski, Phelps-Gun and Stetson (1983) who pointed that,

“Reading increases exposure to sentence construction, vocabulary, ideas and language fluency. Reading helps students develop their own ideas as well as become familiar or fluent with semantic and syntactic structures. Reading can provide models of expression that the reader may like and wish to imitate”.

The idea behind extensive reading is that the quantity of reading matters. A learner needs a large amount of contact with the foreign language in order to become proficient in it. Reading is one of the best ways to get that contact. Class time is limited; however, students must read on their own. To read on their own, the language encountered through reading must be understandable to the learner at his own current level of comprehension. By reading many books containing thousands of comprehensible sentences, a number of important changes occur in learners.

For a successful implementation of an ER programme, the learners are not only required to read materials that interest them but also have the liberty to select what they want to read. The theory also stipulates that the learners also have the freedom to discontinue any reading material that does not meet their interest or need. Against this background, ER theory provides a formidable foundation for this research since the thrust is to determine the reading preferences of the study population.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research Design: The design of the investigation was survey, since data were collected from a sample of the intended study population.

7.2 Population: The population of this investigation were the freshmen admitted in the seven schools of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri for the 2015/2016 Academic Session. Out of a total of 5,400 admitted in the various departments, a total of 200 students, comprising 120 males and 80 females were randomly selected.

7.3 Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument for data collection used in this study was a questionnaire that consisted of five sections. Section A of the questionnaire comprised questions that were designed to elicit information on the demographic particulars of the respondents. Section B required the respondents to rank their preferences for the stated extensive reading materials while Section C and D asked questions that required the respondents to rank their preferences for the stated fiction and non-fiction reading materials respectively. Section E of the questionnaire contained questions that required the respondents to give information regarding their preferences for the stated columns in newspapers and magazines.

7.4 Data Collection Procedure: There was the need to administer the copies of the questionnaire to the respondents from the various schools and departments. Consequently, the assistance of the “Use of English” lecturers, who taught the individual schools and departments were solicited. A total of 760 copies of the questionnaire at the ratio of 26 copies per department were given out. For the fact that the lecturers that taught the students were used to administer the questionnaire, there was 100% return of the questionnaire. Out of the 760 copies of the questionnaire, a total of 200 copies were randomly selected, ensuring that every school and department were adequately represented. At the end, a total of 120 copies of the questionnaire for males and 80 for females were collected.

7.5 Method of Data Analysis: The data generated through the questionnaire were analysed using frequency count and simple percentage.

8. The Results

8.1 The Extensive Reading Materials Most Preferred by Subjects

The subjects were required to rank the stated extensive reading materials in the questionnaire according to how they preferred them. The responses of the subjects indicated that 50.5 % of them preferred novels most while 23.5 % and 16.5 % opted for newspaper and magazines respectively. The details of the findings are as presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Extensive Reading Materials Preferred Most by the Subjects

SN	Reading Materials	Preferences											
		1				2				3			
		M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%
1	Novels	46	55	101	50.5	28	10	38	19	24	8	32	16
2	Magazine	22	11	33	16.5	39	37	76	38	47	23	70	35
3	Newspaper	41	6	47	23.5	37	23	60	30	30	25	55	27.5
4	Comic	8	5	13	6.5	12	7	19	9.5	19	20	39	19.5
5	Plays	Nil	1	1	0.5	4	3	7	3.5	Nil	4	4	2
6	Poems	3	2	5	2.5	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
	Total	120	80	200	100	120	80	200	100	120	80	200	100

Key: M = Male, F = Female

8.2 The Fiction Genres Preferred Most by the Subjects

In the questionnaire, eight fiction genres were listed and the subjects were required to rank the materials according to how they preferred them. The responses of the subjects showed that 28 % of them preferred science fiction and fantasy most. 20 % opted for romantic stories

while 19.5 % and 18 % preferred adventure stories and mysteries, crime and detective stories respectively. Table 2 below presents the details of the findings:

Table 2: Fiction Genres Preferred Most by the Subjects

SN	Reading Materials	Preferences											
		1				2				3			
		M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%
1	Romantic Stories	13	27	40	20.0	20	7	27	13.5	18	10	28	14.0
2	Humorous Stories	9	5	14	7.0	13	18	31	15.5	19	19	38	19.0
3	Mysteries, Crime And Detective Stories	22	14	36	18.0	21	13	34	17.0	21	13	34	17.0
4	Science, Fiction And Fantasy	44	12	56	28.0	26	12	38	19.0	19	14	33	16.5
5	Adventure Stories	26	13	39	19.5	27	20	47	23.5	25	11	36	18.0
6	Folk Loes	1	5	6	3.0	7	5	12	6.0	8	10	18	9.0
7	Horror Stories	4	4	8	4.0	6	5	11	5.5	10	3	13	6.5
8	Others	1	Nil	1	0.5	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
	Total	120	80	200	100	120	80	200	100	120	80	200	100

Key: M = Male, F = Female

8.3 The Non-Fiction Genres Preferred Most by the Subjects

The questionnaire listed 13 non-fiction materials that could be read extensively. The subjects were required to rank the materials according to how they preferred them. The responses of the subjects pointed to the fact that 22.5 % of them preferred materials on science and technology most. 21 % chose religion and spirituality materials while 16 % opted for materials on sports. 10 % indicated that they preferred love and relationship materials most. The details of the findings are as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Non-Fiction Genres Preferred Most by the Subjects

S/N	Reading Materials	Preferences											
		1				2				3			
		M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%
1	Travel And Food	6	5	11	5.5	7	6	13	6.5	5	9	14	7
2	Hobbies (E.G Photography, Cooking, E.T.C	5	3	8	4.0	3	8	11	5.5	7	9	16	8
3	Science And Technology	38	7	45	22.5	25	12	37	18.5	16	9	25	12.5
4	Money And Finance	6	Nil	6	3.0	13	Nil	13	6.5	14	6	20	10
5	Health And Fitness	6	9	15	7.5	12	9	21	10.5	10	14	24	12
6	Fashion And Beauty	1	11	12	6.0	5	17	22	11	8	9	17	8.5
7	Love And Relationship	8	12	20	10	10	11	21	10.5	16	2	18	9
8	Parenthood And Children	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	4	4	2	6	4	18	9
9	Religion And Spirituality	19	23	42	21	12	8	20	10	10	7	17	8.5
10	Biographies	5	1	6	3	5	2	7	3.5	7	5	12	6
11	War And Politics	3	Nil	3	1.5	5	Nil	5	2.5	13	Nil	12	6.5
12	Sports	23	9	32	16	23	3	26	13	7	6	13	6.5
13	Others	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	Nil	1	0.5
T o t a l		120	80	200	100	120	80	200	100	120	80	200	100

Key: M = Male, F =Female

8.4 Gender and Reading Preferences of the Subjects

The subjects were grouped based on gender: males and females. The reading preferences of the male and the female respondents were compared based on extensive reading materials (Table 4A), fiction genres (Table 4B), non-fiction genres (Table 4C). The result of the comparison showed that the reading preferences of the male and the female respondents differed considerably on the various parameters for the comparison thereby pointing to the fact that gender has a significant effect on the reading preferences of the subjects. See Tables 4A, 4B, and 4C below for the details of the comparison.

Table 4A: Comparison of the Reading Preferences of the Male and the Female Subjects (Extensive Reading Materials)

S/N	Reading Materials	Male		Female	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Novels	46	38.3	55	68.7
2.	Magazines	22	18.3	11	13.7
3.	Newspapers	41	34.2	6	7.5
4.	Comics	8	6.7	5	6.3
5.	Plays	Nil	Nil	1	1.3
6.	Poems	3	2.5	2	2.5
	Total	120	100	80	100

Table 4B: Comparison of the Reading Preferences of the Male and Female Subjects (Fiction Genres)

S/N	Reading Materials	Male		Female	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Romantic Stories	13	10.8	27	33.7
2.	Humorous Stories	9	7.5	5	6.2
3.	Mysteries, Crime And Detective Stories	22	18.3	14	17.5
4.	Science, Fiction And Fantasy	44	36.7	12	15
5.	Adventure Stories	26	21.7	13	16.3
6.	Folk Lore	1	0.8	5	6.3
7.	Horror Stories	4	3.3	4	5
8.	Others	1	0.8	Nil	Nil
	Total	120	100	80	100

Table 4C: Comparison of the Reading Preferences of the Male and Female Subjects (Non-Fiction)

S/N	Reading Materials	Male		Female	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Travel And Food	6	5	5	6.3
2.	Hobbies (E.G. Photography, Cooking, Etc)	5	4.2	3	3.7
3.	Science And Technology	38	31.6	7	8.7
4.	Money And Finance	6	5	Nil	Nil
5.	Health And Fitness	6	5	9	11.3
6.	Fashion And Beauty	1	0.8	11	13.7
7.	Love And Relationship	8	6.7	12	15
8.	Parenthood And Children	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
9.	Religion And Spirituality	19	15.8	23	28.7
10.	Biographies	5	4.2	1	1.3
11.	War And Politics	3	2.5	Nil	Nil
12.	Sports	23	19.2	9	11.3
13.	Others	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
	T o t a l	120	100	80	100

9. Summary of Findings

Based on the two research questions which this study sought to provide answers to, the data analysed in the previous sections helped the researcher to arrive at the following findings:

- i. The 2015/2016 freshmen at FUTO preferred reading novels, newspapers and magazines most.
- ii. The 2015/2016 freshmen at FUTO preferred reading fiction materials on science and fantasy, romantic, adventure and mysteries, crime and detective stories most.
- iii. The 2015/2016 freshmen at FUTO preferred reading non-fiction materials on science and technology, religion and spirituality and sports most.
- iv. Gender has significant effect on the extensive reading preferences of the 2015/2016 freshmen of FUTO.

10. Discussion

One of the basic objectives of the study is to determine the extensive reading materials the 2015/2016 freshmen at FUTO preferred most. The result of the analysis as spotlighted on Table 1 above revealed that the freshmen preferred reading novels (50.5 %), newspapers (23.5 %) and magazines (16.5 %). This finding is in agreement with the result of the investigation carried out by Pedri in Philippine, which revealed that novels, newspapers and magazines were top extensive reading materials preferred by students. This finding is not out of place because among the students, the reading of novels, newspapers and magazines is a common practice. This practice is as a result of the fact that teachers at all levels usually encourage their students to cultivate the habit of reading such extensive reading materials because research findings have consistently pointed to the fact that reading such materials enhances acquisition of language skills (Ajayi, 2002; Chaudhry & Low, 2009). The reading of these materials by students has also been made possible because apart from the fact that they are usually available, they are equally affordable. For instance, students can have access to novels by borrowing from friends and relations. Also, parents in some cases buy newspapers and magazines which their children and wards can easily have access to.

As noted above, the freshmen preferred reading novels. But since there are fictional and non-fictional novels, it became necessary to determine the state of their preferences for the two genres. For the fictional genre, the analysis displayed in Table 2 above pointed to the fact that the freshmen preferred reading science fiction and fantasy (28 %), romantic stories (20 %), adventure stories (19.5 %) and mysteries, crime and detective stories (18 %). In the first instance, their preference for science fiction and fantasy is in agreement with the nature of their academic discipline. Having been admitted to pursue degrees in science and technology, it is natural that they would be experimenting with materials that have to do with science and technology. Secondly, the fact that the students preferred reading romantic and adventure stories is not also strange. The demographic information on the subjects which was revealed through the questionnaire, indicated that their chronological age fell between 16-20 yrs. This is an adolescent age, which psychologists have described as an age of "stress and storm". The adolescents are in the habit of being adventurous, wanting to be inquisitive about life, including the romantic aspect of life, mysteries and crime.

On the preferences of the subjects for non-fictional materials, Table 3 revealed that they read mostly materials on science and technology (22.5 %), religion and spirituality (21 %) and sports (16 %). These revelations are consistent with the prevailing contemporary issues as they concern the youths. First, the freshmen have been admitted to pursue degrees in science and technology, expectedly, they would want to read everything about science and technology in order to excel in their discipline. On religion and spirituality, it is common knowledge that there is a revolution going on as regards that aspect of social life.

Today, religion has turned out to be an instrument for acquisition of material wealth. In fact, today many are earning their living as “men and women of God”. With this development, many youths are now desirous to be “men or women of God” no matter how, because of the perceived gains that are likely to accrue from it. Thus, it is not uncommon these days to see men and women who do not only carry Bible and other religious and spiritual literatures about but also make conscious efforts to read them.

Football is one sport that has caught the fancy of many people, especially the youths worldwide in contemporary time. Consequently, football to some youths is like a god that is fanatically worshipped. They spend much of their time watching football matches transmitted through cable networks. It is not also uncommon to see youths, especially boys, at newsstands skimming and scanning through sports columns of newspapers and magazines and at the same time, discussing and/or arguing about football clubs and soccer stars the world over. In fact, many youths do this with a lot of passion.

Another finding of this study is that gender has significant effect on the extensive reading preferences of the subjects. In Tables 4A, 4B, and 4C, the reading preferences of the male and female informants were compared, using four parameters, namely, extensive reading materials, fiction genres, non-fiction genres, and columns in newspapers and magazines. The results of the comparison in the tables under reference showed that the male and the female respondents differed considerably in their preferences based on the stated parameters. This finding is in agreement with Chen (2007), who argued that gender has significant effect on choice of materials to be read. Given the nature of man and woman and the fact that their ambitions as well as their needs differ to some extent, one cannot but agree with this finding. In the first place, as we noted earlier, sports may interest a good number of men while fashion and beauty may be the concern of a great number of women. Therefore, their reading preferences are most likely to differ.

11. Conclusion and Implications

Against the backdrop of our exposition and analyses as regards extensive reading and the reading preferences of the 2015/2016 freshmen at FUTO, it is hereby concluded that to be able to effectively implement extensive reading in any language programme, it is absolutely necessary to first determine the reading preferences of the learners. Besides, the extensive reading materials preferred most by the 2015/2016 freshmen at FUTO are novels, newspapers and magazines. For the novels, the freshmen preferred reading fictional and non-fictional materials on science and technology, fantasy, romance, adventure, religion and spirituality and sports. Finally, it is also concluded that gender has significant effect on extensive reading preferences of the freshmen.

The outcome of this investigation has a far-reaching implication on the part of the reading teachers, librarians, the parents and of course, the researchers. For the reading teachers, they should take note of the fact that learners read better when they are allowed to choose what they read or when the materials recommended for them are the ones that interest them. Therefore, the reading teachers should always encourage the learners to select what they read. However, if they must recommend extensive reading materials to the learners, they should first determine their reading preferences. The reading teachers' recommendations should be capable of meeting the reading interests of both the male and the female learners. Whether the learners select their reading materials or they are recommended by the teachers, the teachers should keep a diary of the materials read by each student (Ajayi, 2002). In addition, the reading teachers should always invoke their versatility and resourcefulness in implementing extensive reading in any language

programme by making effective use of newspaper and magazine resources within their reach. Relevant newspaper and magazine columns such as sports, fashion/beauty, editorial, health and politics, which by their nature are usually available and affordable, should be fully exploited in teaching language skills.

On the part of the librarians, they should stock the library with extensive reading materials that are capable of meeting the varying needs and interests of the learners. Parents should endeavour to determine the reading preferences of their children and wards and ensure that such materials are made available at home.

Based on the outcome of this investigation, there is a compelling need for a follow-up research in order to find out whether the learners would display positive attitude to extensive reading if they are made to read the materials they prefer and/or the ones they choose by themselves. Since our study focused on fresh students, it is also necessary to carry out a similar research with emphasis on other levels of students. Equally, a similar study could be carried out in yet another university.

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