

## **A Study on Leisure Time Book Reading Preferences among the Students of RAK Medical and Health Sciences University, UAE.**

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**Abstract:** Reading is considered to be one of the best ways to develop, educate and entertain oneself. It broadens creativity and gives the reader an opportunity to explore the world while sitting on his couch. It not only gives a break from the mundane and boring routine of life, but also improves critical thinking and general knowledge which helps in achieving success in both personal and professional life. However, people have their own preferences and reasons when it comes to selecting a book and reaping the benefits. This study was conducted to compare the reading preferences of male and female students studying in RAK Medical and Health Sciences University, UAE, and know their opinion about the effects of reading on their lives and personalities. A questionnaire based survey was given to the students and statistically analyzed. The results showed a difference in reading preferences but majority of the male and female students agreed that reading has had a positive effect on their academic performance, general knowledge and personal lives.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Reading is a life skill with its roots firmly embedded in the early years of schooling. The nursery and primary teachers generally stimulate the interest of the students towards language and literature by telling stories. This develops a positive attitude towards this skill. However, a research was conducted and it was found that male and female students are very different as readers, and they are motivated to read different types of books and texts [1]. This 'gender gap' has been a trigger for research regarding reading preferences among boys and girls. It is due to this gap that both the genders should be made to read at home, in school and in the libraries to define their preferences. Research has confirmed that the time students spend in school reading self-selected materials that are of interest to them not only increases their positive feelings about reading but also gives them success [2]. As a skill, it has multiple benefits- development of creativity, critical thinking, personality and mental capacity of the individual.

The purpose of reading is also consistent with individual preferences. Even the purpose of reading the same text may vary in accordance with individual preferences. One reader can read a text merely for having pleasure, while another one can read it for getting information [3]. There is also evidence that the amount of reading not only impacts reading achievement and educational attainment but also increases general knowledge, social skills, and community participation [4]. Research also indicates that girls are better readers and consequently are more likely to score better grades in the reading tests compared to their male counterparts. [5][6][7]

A survey of literature on academic performance also indicates that girls outperform boys in their exams. This can be related to their reading preferences. Worldwide literacy scores indicate that boys do not perform as well as girls. For example, in Australia, a 1996 survey found that literacy scores for boys declined over a 10 year period.

The goal of the present study is to conduct an analysis of the difference in reading preferences of male and female students studying in all the four constituent colleges of rakmhsu and find their views regarding the effects of leisure reading on their lives.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Duration: 6-9 Months

Study Design: Cohort Study

Study Location: RAK Medical and Health Sciences University, Ras Al Khaima, UAE.

Study Duration: December 2016- October 2017

Study Population: Students (Both Boys and Girls) Studying In MBBS, BDS, B.Pharm. And BSN Courses at RAKMHSU

**Sample Size:** 1267

**Sample Size Calculation:** the sample was estimated at a target population of 1267. We assumed a confidence interval of 5% and confidence level of 99%. The sample size needed was 437 but the sample size actually obtained was 476

**Subjects and Selection Method:** The students were enrolled after briefing the study procedure and getting their consent for participating in the study.

**Inclusion:** All the students studying in RAKMHSU

**Exclusion:** Students who are not studying in RAKMHSU or are not willing to participate

## III. PROCEDURE METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire based survey method was used to collect data for the study.

A structured questionnaire of 10 questions was administered to the students of all the four colleges of RAKMHSU separately in the presence of the faculty. The samples were collected and analyzed as per study design. The participants of the study were the students studying at RAKMHSU, Colleges of Medicine, Dental Science, Pharmacy and Nursing. 476 students participated in the survey, out of which 148 (31%) were male and 328 (69%) were females. The participants belonged to different countries. The maximum students (21.8%) were Syrians, followed by other nationalities and local Emiratis (9.9%) (Figure 1). The variable parameters that have been considered in the study were gender, age, program of study, and nationality.

**Statistical Analysis:** Responses to the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively. Frequencies and percentages for all the items of the questionnaire were obtained. Chi square was used to identify the statistical difference in the responses of the male and female respondents. The statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS software version 18 and a *p* value of less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

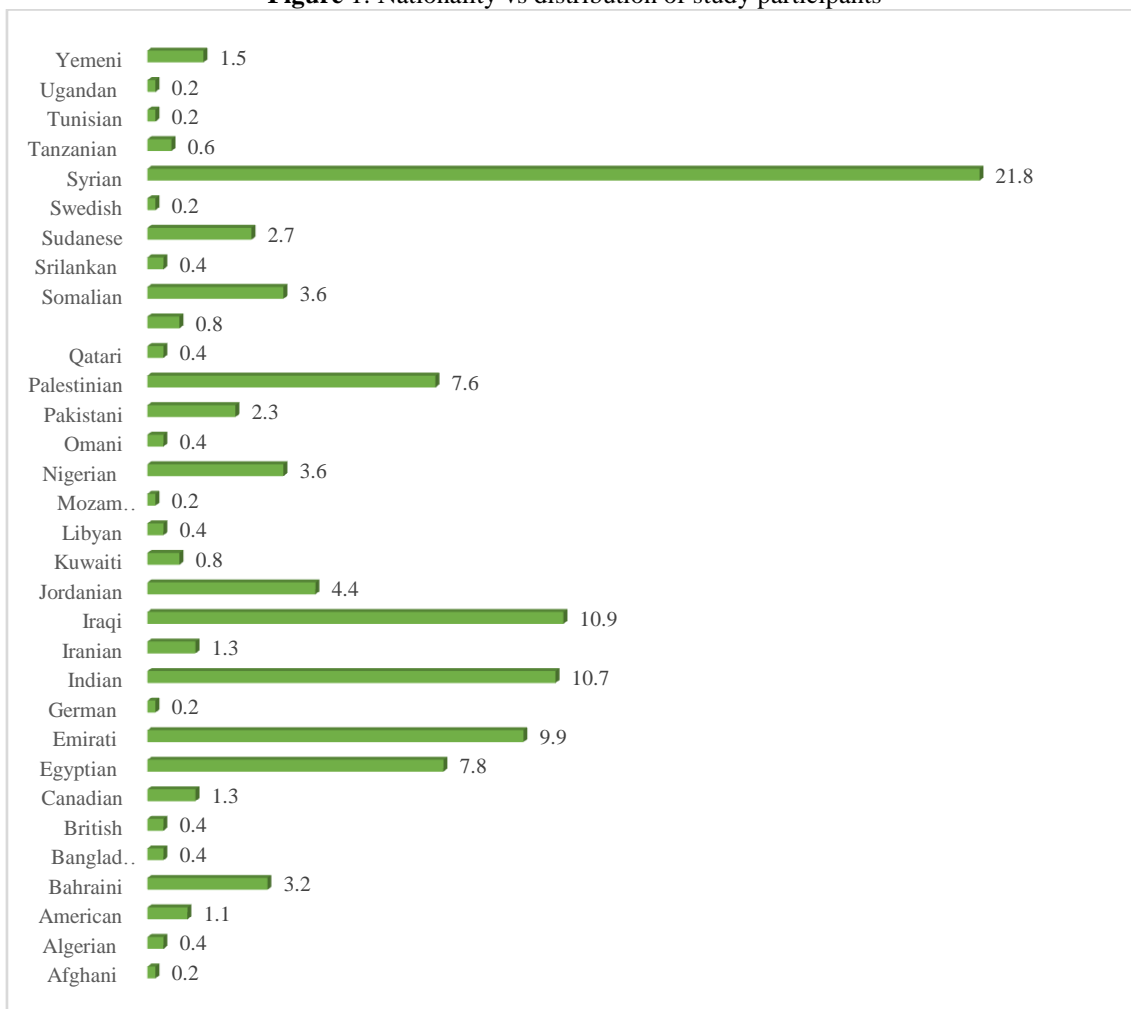
## IV. RESULTS

A total of 476 students from different constituent colleges of RAKMHSU participated in this study. The mean age of study participants was  $20.0 \pm 2.0$  years. Majority [328/476 (69%)] of the participants were females. The demographic details of the study participants are presented in Table.1 and Figure 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Details of the Participants**

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender Distribution	Male	148
	Female	328
<b>Total number of participants</b>	476	100
Mean Age $\pm$ SD	<b>20.0 <math>\pm</math> 2.0 Years</b>	
<b>Academic Program</b>		
MBBS	99	20.8
BDS	142	29.8
B. Pharm	158	33.2
BSN	77	16.2
<b>Year Of Study</b>		
First	202	42.4
Second	111	23.3
Third	69	14.5
Fourth	94	19.7

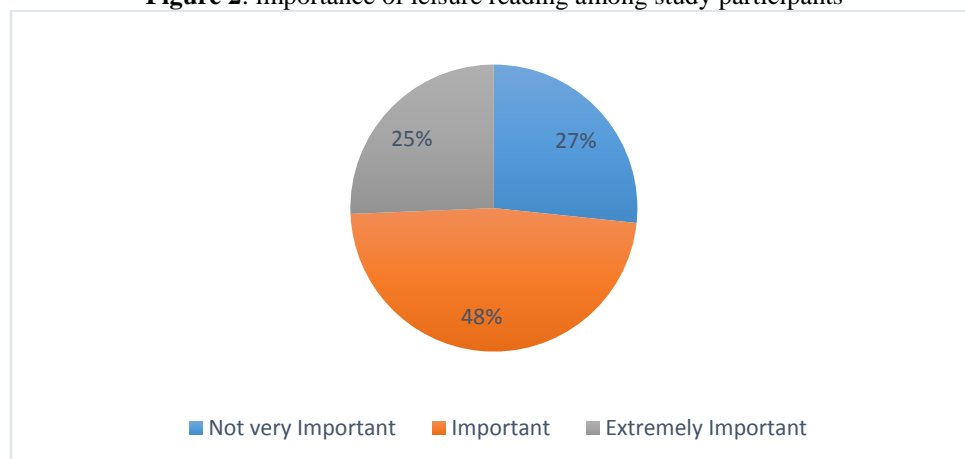
**Figure 1: Nationality vs distribution of study participants**



**Responses to Questionnaire:**

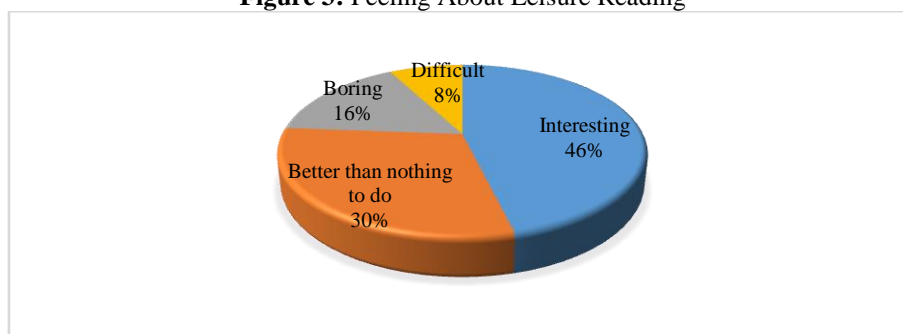
Majority (48%) of the study respondents think that “reading books other than school books is “important”, while 25% of respondents consider it as “extremely important” and 27% considered it as “not very important”. The details are presented in figure 2. There is no statistical difference between the genders about this opinion. However, there is a statistically significant difference between the genders who are “actually involved in leisure reading”. Out of 476 respondents 399 were actually involved in leisure reading, the prevalence of leisure reading in our study is 83.8%. It was observed that 88.7% females are more likely to engage in leisure reading as compared to 73% male respondents.

**Figure 2: importance of leisure reading among study participants**



When asked how they felt about leisure reading, majority (46.2%) of the respondents said that leisure reading is “interesting”, followed by 30% who found it “better than nothing to do”, while 16% opined that leisure reading is “boring”, 7.8% of the respondents said it is “difficult”. The details are presented in figure 3.

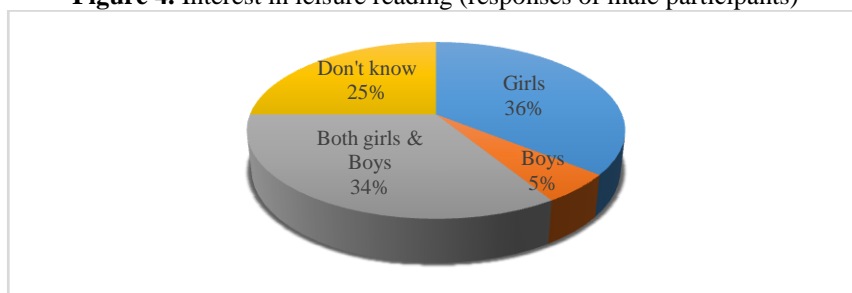
**Figure 3: Feeling About Leisure Reading**



There is a significant difference in opinions between the genders about leisure reading. More female respondents found leisure reading “interesting” in contrast to males who opined that leisure reading is “boring”, “difficult” and “better than nothing to do”, which is statistically significant. This could be one of the reasons why there is a statistically significant difference in “actual leisure reading” between female and male respondents that is observed in the present study.

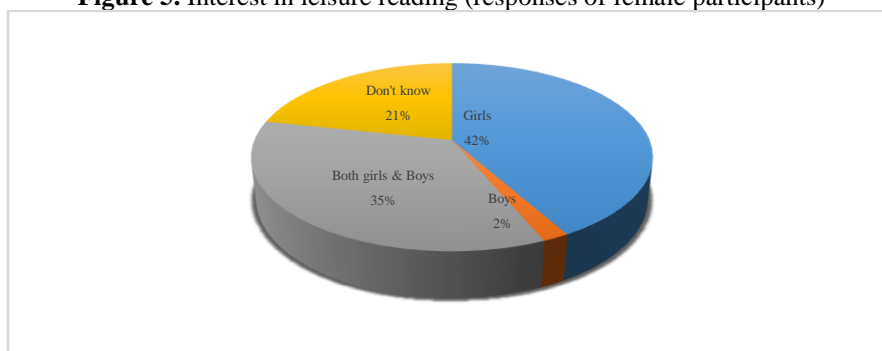
About 36% of the male respondents expressed that ‘girls’ are more interested in leisure reading followed by 34% who said ‘both (boys & girls)’ are equally interested, 25% of male respondents were “not sure”, and only 5% of male respondents declared that ‘boys’ are more interested in leisure reading. Details are presented in figure 4.

**Figure 4. Interest in leisure reading (responses of male participants)**



Majority (42%) of the female respondents presumed that ‘girls’ are more interested in leisure reading followed by 35% who said ‘both (boys & girls)’ are equally interested, 21% of female respondents said that they are “not sure”, and only 2% of female respondents felt that ‘boys’ are more interested in the activity. Details are presented in Figure 5. Though there are different levels of opinions about interest for leisure reading among male and female respondents, there was no statistically significant difference observed between the genders about this opinion.

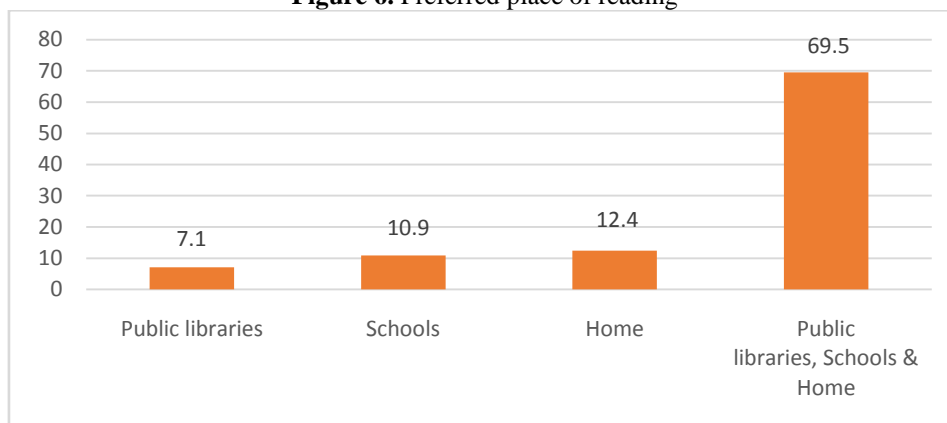
**Figure 5. Interest in leisure reading (responses of female participants)**



When the participants were asked to give their opinion about where the kids should be encouraged to read, majority (69.5%) of the respondents chose all the three options (home, schools & public libraries), followed by home (12.4%), schools (10.9%) and public libraries (7.1%). The details are presented in figure 6.

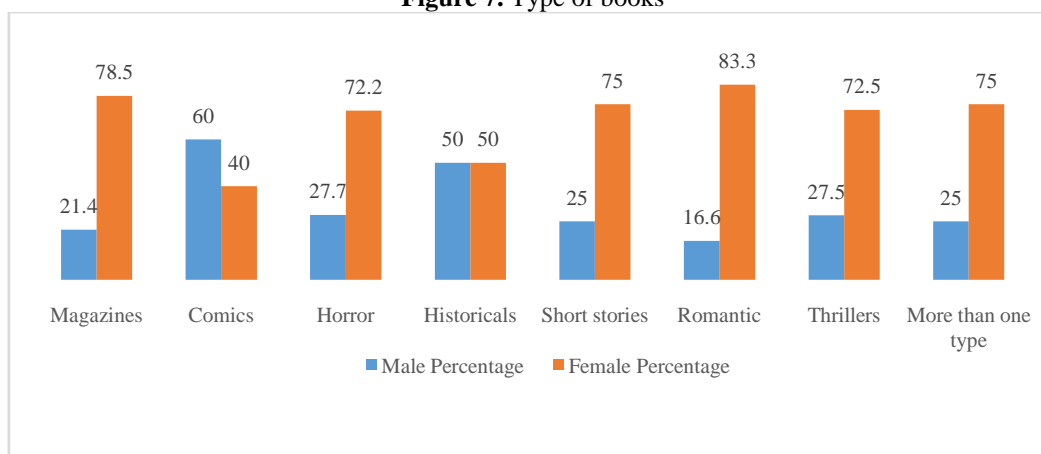
There is a statistically significant difference between the genders about their opinion. We observed that 73% female respondents are of the opinion that kids should be encouraged to read at all the three places viz., home, schools and public libraries as compared to 61% male respondents. While 20.9% male respondents felt that kids should be encouraged to read at home, only 8.5% females thought so. An 11.5% of males were of the opinion that children should be encouraged to read in school compared to 10.7% female respondents, which is statistically significant.

**Figure 6. Preferred place of reading**



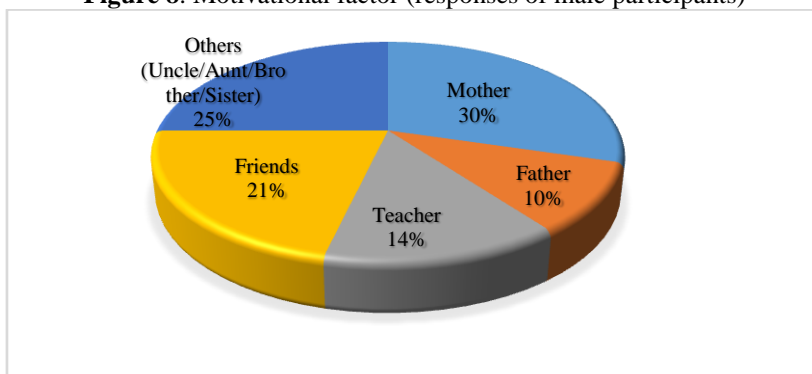
It was interesting to note that a whopping 83.8% (399/476) respondents were actively involved in reading, whereas only 16.4% mentioned that they 'never' read. Majority (83.3%) of the female respondents read romantic books, followed by magazines (78.5). While majority (60%) of the male respondents read comics followed by historical books (50%). The details of types of books read by the respondents are presented in figure 7.

**Figure 7. Type of books**

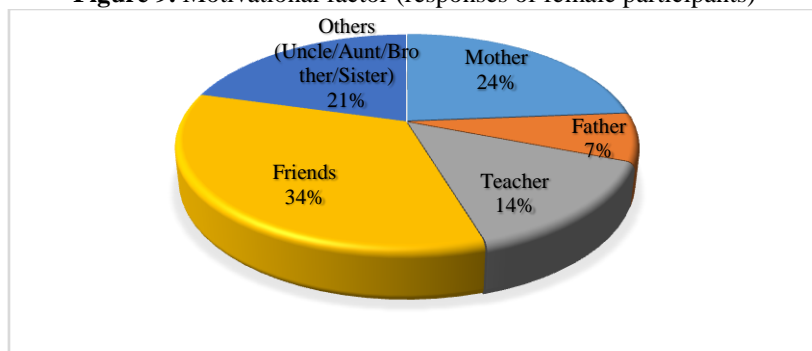


A majority (30%) of the male respondents were motivated to read by their mothers, followed by uncle/aunt/brother/sister (25%). Whereas majority (34%) of the female respondents were motivated to read by their friends, followed by their mothers (24%). Interestingly according to both male and female respondents teachers contributed for motivating their students to read to an extent of 14%. The details are presented in figure 8 (male respondents) and figure 9 (female respondents).

**Figure 8.** Motivational factor (responses of male participants)

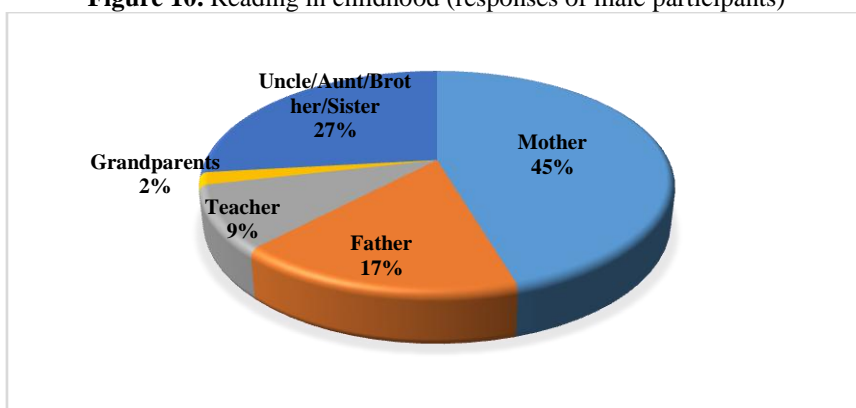


**Figure 9.** Motivational factor (responses of female participants)

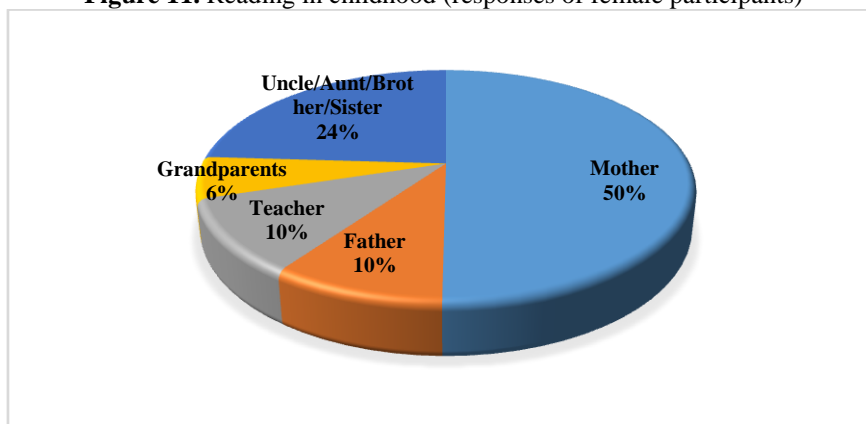


The question “who spent maximum time reading with them during their childhood”, was answered by majority of the male (45%) and female (50%) respondents as their mother, followed by uncle/aunt/ brother/sister for male (27%) and female (24%) respondents respectively. the details are presented in figure 10 (male respondents) and figure 11 (female respondents).

**Figure 10.** Reading in childhood (responses of male participants)

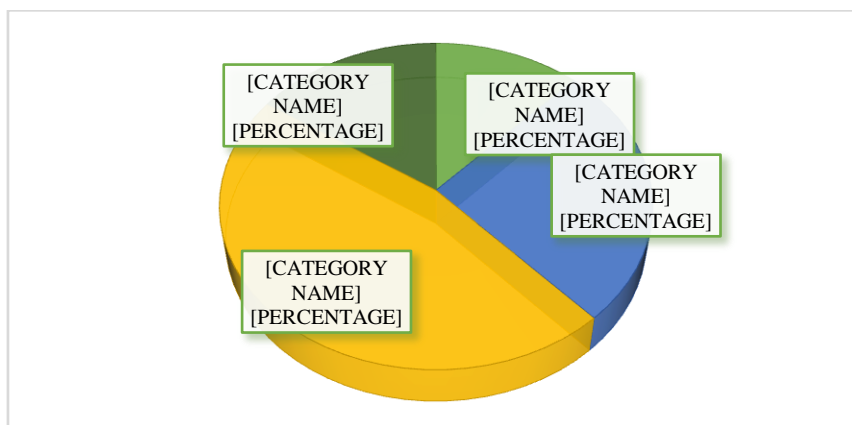


**Figure 11.** Reading in childhood (responses of female participants)



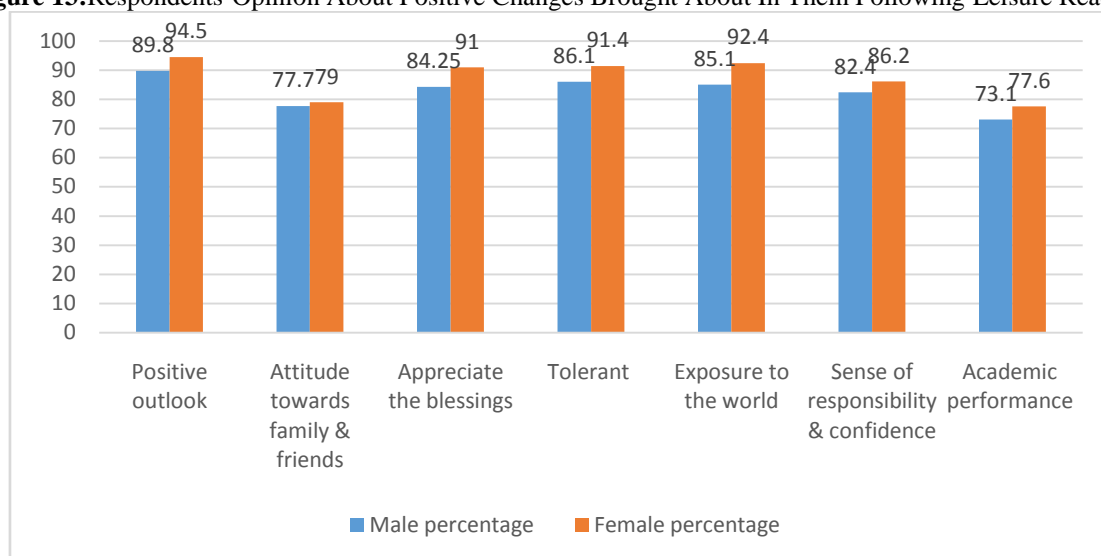
Majority (46%) of the respondents revealed that they do discuss the book they read with others if it is interesting, while only 12% said that they always discuss with others the book they read. However there is no statistically significant difference between the genders with regard to this observation. The details are presented in figure 12.

**Figure 12.** Discussion of books



When the participants were asked to give their opinion about positive changes occurring in them due to leisure reading, the female respondents had a better agreement with the outcomes compared to male respondents. Though there were differences in percentages for each outcome between the genders, majority of the respondents (irrespective of gender) agree that leisure reading has brought positive changes in their lives. The details are presented in figure 13. We also observed that majority (94.5%) of the female respondents agree that leisure reading has brought about positive outlook compared to male respondents (89.8%), which is a statistically significant difference with a p value of 0.028.

**Figure 13:** Respondents' Opinion About Positive Changes Brought About In Them Following Leisure Reading.



## V. DISCUSSION

Many researches have been conducted regarding gender and reading in childhood and adolescence, including the gap in reading achievement indicating how students are socialized in accordance with traditional notions of gender identities. One of the contributing factors to reading ability is the attitude towards reading. A research conducted with elementary school children believed that because boys have a harder time being “good” pupils who sit still and listen well, teachers consequently are more likely to treat boys negatively, leading boys to develop negative attitudes toward school. They also concluded that negative attitude towards school may extend to a lifelong negative attitude toward school-related activities, such as reading [8]

The present survey shows significant differences and similarities regarding the reading preferences of both the genders. As per the demographic information total 476 students from 32 countries participated in the survey. The majority of participants are from Syria (21.8%) followed by Iraq (10.9%) and India (10.7%) the local Emirati students form 9.9% of the participants as per figure. 3.

The results are supported by the findings of previous studies [9][10][11], that there is a relationship between genders and the type of books they like to read. Distinct differences were found between boys’ and girls’ reading preferences [12]. It has also been observed that girls have a wider range of preferences and interests when it comes to choice of books. They have a much greater preference for realistic teen fiction as well as romance and relationship stories, family life, social empathy, interpersonal relationships etc. It is also stated that while boys prefer books with male protagonists, girls prefer either heroes or heroines. [13] [14]

It has been observed that boys tend to read different types of books from girls (fig.7). They prefer brief, informative texts and also enjoy humor and horror. They don’t enjoy reading typical school texts and this might lead to a lower reading level which can affect their performance in all the other subjects. This finding is supported by Sadowski, [15] boys should be encouraged to read, and that we must be concerned with the consequences of low motivation in boys’ engagement in reading and learning. [16]

It is generally assumed that educated parents who motivate the children of both the genders to read, and well equipped libraries that reach out to the students, procure reading material of interest and maintain an updated website, may compel boys to read more and varied kinds of books. In schools both male and female teachers can refer interesting books to the students which can motivate their reading attitude and influence them [17].

Although there were definite discernible gender differences between the participants in this study, it is important to keep in mind that it is unlikely that gender is the only factor that determines people’s reading habits and preferences. There are many other coexisting reasons and influencing factors that may lead a person to gravitate toward a particular type of reading material, including desired reading experience, convenience, or recommendations from trusted sources. [18]

In relation to gender and reading, other researchers, such as Schultheis [19] have concluded that there’s a need for more androgynous characters that appeal to everyone, regardless of the reader’s gender, however the current study does not support this idea.



## VI. CONCLUSION

This study clearly concluded that reading preferences do differ by gender but it is not the only factor. There are other co-existing factors like the biological, societal and cultural that also play an important role in shaping the reading preferences at an early age. It was also confirmed that leisure reading brings about positive changes and improves the students' relationship with their family and friends and instils gratitude, responsibility and confidence in them. Most importantly, it broadens their horizon and helps them appreciate different cultures. This study also endorsed that reading helps in improving vocabulary, expression and comprehension leading to a positive impact on students' lives.

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