



BOBCATSSS 2010 @ Parma, Italy

Dates: *Monday 25th, Tuesday 26th, Wednesday 27th January, 2010*

**Bridging the digital divide:
libraries providing access for all?**

“The importance of a methodology in a research Project based on a survey about Reading habits in the academic scope”: in concrete the Universidad Europea de Madrid case.

Belén García-Delgado Giménez

Universidad Europea de Madrid

Department of Journalism and Humanities,

C/ Tajo, s/n Urb. El Bosque 28670 Villaviciosa de Odón Madrid

0034912115329

belen.garcia-delgado@uem.es

ABSTRACT

The aims of this study are: trying to determine the influence and analyze the importance of Reading habits as a leisure activity among all the existent ones. Quantify the time dedicated to reading, comparing with other activities: Television, radio and so on...

The methodology that we used has been the distribution of a questionnaire very adjusted to the sample characteristics and that can help us to evaluate the variable we want to obtain.

What we have found out with the research is that the profile of the most usual reader in the Universidad Europea de Madrid, is a woman, attending a degree in Communication and Humanities as a freshmen or sophomore. She reads novels and tails (in paper format and in Spanish) once or twice a week and much more during the holidays. She usually watches TV and uses Internet to consult principally the mail. She doesn't read the press everyday and goes to the library mainly to study.

The novelty of this study is that in Spain the studies about Reading habits are very small, as most of them are focused to a different target as children or teenagers and besides, is usually approached to “Reading methods”, as for example the most suitable moment to start the learning and to acquire the ability of reading etc.

It can be interesting for everybody who studies about edition, reading, promotion, new technologies impact on the current society...

KEYWORDS: Reading habit-Spain, Reading habit-University, Reading habit-Universidad Europea de Madrid, Reading habit- leisure time

1.-THE READING HABITS IN THE SPANISH AND EUROPEAN SOCIETY IN THE XXI CENTURY

1.1.- Reading habit concept:

Lately, reading used to be understood as a simple subject, in the learning of which there were some general factors (sensitive or organic and psychological like attention, memory, intelligence and linguistic) or specific (perceptual skills to auditory, visual and bearings

discrimination). However, it is far more complex, it is a slow process that takes a lot of time to be acquired and that is not only influenced by many individual factors but also by contexts and people that can help in the process of becoming a habit.

Context is something essential in the formation of the reading habit, because it fosters the reading habit; thus, we can state that is made up of several aspects: the family background, the use of books in public and university libraries, the educational scope and of course, the current mass media influence.

We can sum up by saying that reading is the aim and the way of spreading culture. As we are in an audiovisual society, culture is not only provided by printed material, but also by images, sensations and general perceptions. That's why when we approach the different cultural options, these can lead us to read either to extend knowledge or to remember those ideas of the cultural event in which we were interested.

1.2.- Reading situation in Europe

Reading rates are proportional to the educational progresses, because they are reflected in the cultural consumption increase and particularly in reading. So, behind a reading country we can find a good educational system supporting it. This is because to read we need the ability of interpreting the reading code.

We realize that the developed countries have not always been able to solve the stagnation or the backwardness of population reading levels. The problem is that policies depend on different contexts and they are not developed in the same way in different countries, so it is difficult to unify them.

The cultural policies developed by the states determine the publishing policies, so they use indicators like the number of volumes that each inhabitant should have, taking always into account the literate population.

But, there are other factors that influence in the level of reading like: the urban development of the society, the type of Religion rooted in a country and also its weather.

We erroneously tend to think that the fact of buying books entails reading those books, when even reading a book does not mean that it has been bought. So, many countries with high reading indexes, have very low purchase rates due to the huge network of public libraries provided. On the contrary, sometimes we find countries that buy books because of the aesthetical

value, as a status symbol, which does not involve the fact of reading.

But we can actually state that habitual library users tend to be book buyers, which is not common with people who do not use libraries. Surveys also tell us that first, people discover a book in the library and then they buy another book of the same author. Therefore, borrowing is more present than we would actually think, since eighty per cent of borrowers declare that borrowing documents allows them to read books that they would never buy otherwise. Thus, this is a service that allows you to discover certain books, whereas the purchase is reserved to those titles you are convinced to own. This fact is closely related to genres, for there is a definite type of books that you would never buy but it is frequently borrowed, such as: romantic novels, art books, comic books and reference books.

What is really clear is that there is a direct relationship between the fact of reading and the purchase, as great/eager readers are the best buyers, and people who read little buy very few books.

1.3.- Reading situation in Spain

Spanish society acknowledges the importance of reading, since it has numerous writers and it is the fourth world power in publishing; however, in spite of it all, our rate of reading is low, we need more libraries, more titles and other cultural resources.

Spain is a developed country, with a high level of literacy, but we don't want to read. Books are presented in different formats, on different materials and distributed in companies and book shops and, at the same time, they are available in all type of libraries: council, public, state or private. etc, where music and Internet is offered at the same time. As we can see our future publishing is buoyant due to the spread of languages like Castilian, in which millions of books are published.

We can differentiate between two types of readers: a traditional reader (a competent reader who reads books, literature, and who also reads on the new reading media), as opposed to the new reader, a consumer who is fascinated by new technologies, hooked on the Net, where he only reads: information, popular science, games, who is in touch with others but who is not a book reader and has never been. He finds it difficult to distinguish messages, to understand some of them and to understand and express abstract thoughts. We are referring to young readers, the new generations that are part of our future, so we must lead our effort to satisfy their cultural needs.

2.-READING IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

2.1.- State of the question

It is clear that university students lack of a solid background in primary and secondary education, that is to say, they have difficulties in spelling, phrasing, and writing skills..., so it would be very useful to detect these problems and their causes.

There are many reasons why students don't work in an autonomous way, like the following:

- Lectures, which are part of the university tradition, although they aren't the ideal type of teaching. They only foster a passive attitude on students,

who merely listen and take notes, with hardly any reflection. Therefore, this type of teaching doesn't encourage students to find the information they don't have..

- Multiple choice questionnaires, are also pedagogically unsound for university teaching, they don't foster students' correct expression and besides, they force teachers to adapt their lessons to the exam, that is to say to a fragmentation of knowledge, a lack of synthesis and careless expression.

- Reference books available for students, which are the same that teachers use for their master classes, are the reason why the student is used to finding information directly. Students are not accustomed to expanding the contents of the different subjects, since it will suppose a great effort, especially if we compare it with the result we can obtain.

- University libraries don not always meet students' requirements, so they won't bother to visit them. If students don't have an easy access to documents, they won't bother to make use of those information units. All librarians and teachers and researchers must collaborate so that students may meet their bibliographic requirements, as we will see further on.

- The habitual use of the Internet has worsened the situation of the student's autonomous work, since students have got used to having access to all type of information easily and quickly. Therefore, the Internet, far from raising intellectual curiosity, has become a means that encourages plagiarism.

All this explains why there is a low reading rate, given that if they don't work in an autonomous way, they won't read in their leisure time either, which implies a series of consequences that are reflected on students' way of oral and written expression and on many other fields that we will see further on.

2.2.- Towards the European Framework of Education

The European Framework of Education intends to instill a type of active teaching, which involves a great personal effort, since it doesn't merely paraphrase or copy something about a subject. But the Internet, as we have already explained above has made matters much worse..

What we must intend to introduce in Europe is the concept of a library as the centre of the campus integrated learning, where information experts and the staff in charge of learning will meet and help when necessary. In order to achieve this, both the faculty and the library must collaborate to share resources and realize a joint task. The unit of information wouldn't go ahead without their mutual support. It is also essential a team of quality librarians, experts on academic disciplines, not multipurpose or multidisciplinary professionals.

Nowadays, the fact that somebody is studying at university doesn't mean that they read , there is no correlation between reading and further education. However, the latter is responsible for promoting and stimulating reading. Thus we can realize that it is at university where we learn how to research, to select books to be read, where to find publications that reflect on reading

3.- OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH ABOUT READING HABITS IN THE UEM

Spain has not paid too much attention to reading habits, and researches have focused on “reading methods”, on the best moment to begin to learn to read and definitely, on the acquisition of reading automatism.

We do not want to confirm the UEM reality, but to analyze the reasons why it has been produced, and also the factors that favour or hinder the UEM students’ reading habits.

So, the objectives that we want to answer with this work are:

- State the influence of family background in reading habits. That’s why we have analyzed the number of books at home, to determine its influence on reading habits.

- Analyze the impact of technological media at home such as home televisions, the Internet with or without broadband connection, etc... on Reading habits.

- Analyze the leisure activities chosen among all the possibilities available, being the Reading habit one of them.

- Quantify the leisure time used to read, compared to the other activities like televisión, radio...

- Analyze Internet activities done on-line.

- Analyze the language and format (printed or electronic) used to read.

- To look for the aspects that instigate the book acquisition or purchase, as an activity closely related to reading habits.

- To establish the library role and use, both for reading and for other activities too.

- Last but not least, we have tried to analyze the genres and types of books read or bought, although there have been difficulties to systematize it.

3.1.-Time, space and size factors selected.

When first considering how to evaluate this work, we realize our limits, therefore, first of all, it is necessary to define all the aspects that can influence the survey in order to clarify the scope where we should make it. So we have to take into account:

- Who should be analyzed: in this aspect we decide to choose the UEM students as a target, excluding teachers, administrative assistants, etc.

- What we should analyze: the Reading habits as well the circumstances that can affect them, such as the environment, technologies, leisure dedication, books purchase and library use.

- Where: obviously in the UEM and mainly to the library users, the most convenient target.

- How: with a multiple choice questionnaire and with a limited number of questions.

- When: during the school timetable in the UEM facilities, trying to promote to fulfill the questionnaire immediately avoiding people taking them away to fill them in at home. We observe that a minimum percentage did not give back the questionnaire if they fulfill at home.

- How much time: as a consequence of what is mentioned above, we decided to set the questionnaire distribution in two weeks time, in the months of March and April, because if we delayed it more we would have repetitive and double answers.

- To how many people: since the error rate would

be very difficult to reduce significantly unless we distributed more than one thousand question sheets, we decide to set the sample between one hundred and fifty and two hundred questionnaires distributed; finally, however, once we have eliminated those which have mistakes, we end up with one hundred and eighty one correct question sheets that can be analyzed.

4.-METHODOLOGY USED IN THE SURVEY EXECUTION

Once we have defined the previous points like the “Topic Selection”, “Objectives” and “Time, Space and Size Factors” we are going to carry out with the methodology used since its execution until its distribution, and also what we have learnt from each of the different stages carried out.

4.1. First stage, where we begin

For the question sheet execution, we have taken as a model the work about Reading habits that is annually made by the Federación de Gremio de Editores de España sponsored by the Ministerio de Cultura, called “*Hábitos de lectura y compra de libros 2006: informe metodológico y de resultados Enero 2007*”. In this way, we have found out the main factors that we should study, to face the research about Reading habits in the Universidad Europea de Madrid.

4.2. Questionnaire design

First of all, we should clarify that what we want to evaluate are the Reading habits related to leisure, not the academic ones.

The questionnaire has been designed in eight parts, that we consider important to study the Reading habits and that we will analyze and comment:

- 1.- Personal data: age, sex, degree and university year.

- 2.- Environment: the interviewee’s family background: the books that the user has at home, the technological media like television, and computers connected to the Internet, that are the great book competitors.

- 3.- Leisure activities: We distinguished between the different ways of using the free time at home like Reading, radio, television, the Internet etc.

- 4.- Reading format and language: We introduce a detailed analysis of the type of Reading format (electronic or printed), and also the language in which we read.

- 5.- Reading motivation and dedication: Both this part and number three try to find out what moves the interviewed people to read, as well as how much time they dedicate to it, the moment in which it is usually done and the type of publication that is usually read (books or periodicals).

- 6.- Purchase of books and publications: We try to know the number of books acquired, the type of books, the reading frequency, the reasons and the influence in the purchase decision.

- 7.- Library use: To know the number of library registrations, something that is very optimistic in this technological age, where libraries are basically identified with printed books and not as an information source that really uses technological advances like databases, etc in deep.

- 8.- Love of writing:

In this point we try to research one step further trying to

find if the interviewers were writers or not; in fact, pragmatism prevails in Technical and Engineering students.

4.3.- Process followed in the questionnaire distribution

To choose a sample for this study, we made a random selection, paying no attention to: the degree studied, the student's age, sex or university year: but selecting only UEM students who happened to be at the University's library studying, consulting documents, borrowing them, giving them back or requiring reference help. Teachers, clerks or even librarians were all excluded.

To invite people to fill in the surveys, we approached students one by one asking them if they could fill in the questionnaire explaining why we were making a research, and of course offering to resolve any questions.

We were able to obtain a huge number of correct questionnaires and very few incorrect.

There were only a few mistaken results, but as a whole all these cases were not representative.

The process followed to collect the complete questionnaires was to pick them up personally, leaving a few minutes for them to complete it.

The final number of valid questionnaires was 181 in a period of ten days.

5.- ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY FOLLOWED IN A RESEARCH BASED ON A QUESTIONNAIRE

What we have observed while elaborating, distributing and filling out the survey has been useful to define the principles to be taken into account before realizing, distributing and analysing a questionnaire. They are the following:

a.- Clear objectives: they should be defined in advance in order to focus all the attention on a correct execution.

b.- Control variables: the fewer the better, we only took into account:

- Sex
- Age
- University Year

- Degree: as there were so many different degrees included in the questionnaires, similar degrees were put together in groups and we finally organised them in four sets:

- Technical Science
- Health Science
- Social Science and Law
- Communication and Humanities

c.-Sequence: although we tried to keep a logical sequence in the questionnaire: background, leisure activities, reading, books purchase and library use; some confusions were produced in the answers about the reasons of reading and of purchasing documents. There is also some incoherence in the answers to the activities done in libraries. Some said that they were not enrolled in a library, but later, they said that they borrowed documents, when being enrolled in the library is a requirement to borrow.

d.- Structure: we should only ask about the topic "reading", but actually, for a better research, we have asked some other questions, which match up with the questionnaire structure (book purchase, formats etc.), in order to obtain more data about the preferences that users have when they read. The result has been satisfactory, so

including more topics has not meant any errors in the answers. When we design a questionnaire we should always make sure that the results are not leading the answers to different subjects.

e.- Questionnaire design: to make the interviewee's reply easier, it would be a good idea to begin the questionnaire with the easiest and least compromising questions. That's why, the questions should not be considered as a way of interfering in the interviewee's private life, which might have a negative influence on him/her, and answers might lack objectivity.

There are also other types of questions that can be understood in a negative way, although they are necessary for the research work like one about the time used for reading, not accepted by the person who doesn't read much; in this case we should try to obtain the information indirectly, and include them at the end of the questionnaire if necessary.

f.- Question phrasing: one of the essential aspects and in this case according to what Payne¹, says, we should avoid making questions like the following:

- Complex and indirect, but simple and direct instead.
- Too long
- Several topics in the same question
- Too many options
- Too open, etc.

When eight or ten options are provided as answers to the questions, the analysis would be difficult and would not guarantee a correct answer, hindering further collection.

g.- Questionnaire distribution: before distributing the questionnaire, we should know where we are going to distribute and obtain the necessary authorisation.

We should also assess the possible result distortion that the distribution channels can provoke and if this distortion can affect the value of the results.

h.- Questionnaire extension: one of the most relevant conclusions that we should draw is that the more simple and concise a questionnaire is, the better. This is because it simplifies statistical analysis. In addition, a questionnaire that includes too many questions can be tedious to fill in. So, we should eliminate the questions that do not provide anything relevant for the interpretation of results from a qualitative and quantitative point of view.

i.- Questions correlation: it is essential to establish a similar structure in each of the different parts of the questionnaire. This is because we should always have a thread in each of them to make a further statistical analysis accurately.

When we consider the topic relevant it is necessary to close the whole question cycle. So, if for example we ask about the number of books read per year, we should also make questions about the number of books bought per year. In this way, there will be coherence and a clear relation between the different questions, which the interviewee can understand.

j.- Previous analysis of statistical variables Firstly, when we design a questionnaire, apart from consulting the different questionnaires made about this topic in other universities surveys, and the yearly reports made about reading habits by the Federación de Gremios de Editores in Spain, between others, we will also ask an statistical

¹ PAYNE, S. (1951): *The Art of Asking Questions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

expert if the questions included can be easily systematized and tabulated, if the number of questions is correct, if the type of questions will be useful to study deeply the variables that we want to reflect on, if the multiple choice section has the possibility of answering more than one option, etc.

A general idea is the survey's competence not only from the documentalist point of view, but also from the statistical view, so that we can avoid skipping concepts that would seem unimportant at first, but could play an important role when we make the statistical study. It would be a way of noticing the errors before actually making them, when it is too late to correct.

k.- Close options: alter making the result study, we have observed that we should always try to make the questions restrictive, which means that the answer options were always Yes or No, or to choose one single answer between the different options (keeping always no more than four options); avoiding then open questions, which are always very difficult to systematize from a statistical point of view.

So, the interviewee only chooses one and makes statistical tabulation easier.

l.- Previous test. We should also consider that once we have designed the questionnaire and before handing it out to the university students, we should make a previous test distributing the questionnaire to a close number of people -parents, brothers, sisters, neighbours, friend,etc- so that they can give us their opinion. It is a way of noticing the errors we may have made, if there are questions that are not understood, or questions to which we can answer to more than one option and if it is too long and then tedious. This would be a way of thinking about the test content, and the reaction provoked in the user. Depending on the results obtained, we will correct the questionnaire and we will distribute it again in our close background, as many times as needed until it is completely correct. Afterwards, we would give it out to the University students. It is a way to avoid correcting the survey once it is distributed to the students, and to give them the appropriate one for them from the first moment.

6. CONCLUSION

We can sum up by saying that to succeed in making a correct research work we have to follow the appropriate methodology, make a detailed analysis, and in addition choose an interesting topic.

So before doing the first distribution of a survey for a research project the things that we should take into account are: we need to have clear objectives, have limited control variables, keep a logical sequence and structure in the questionnaire, design it correctly in order to have no negative influence in the interviewee, make clear and concise questions, keep a logical correlation in the questions, reduce the real and apparent extension, plan where and how we are going to distribute it, analyse if it's statistically viable, keep close options in the answers and even make a previous test with our close people; to check if the questionnaire is correct and understood.

These are some of the recommendations that we should take into account when we make a research Project, because it is essential to assess the importance of methodology in order to apply it in the preparation as well as in the distribution and analysis of a survey.

REFERENCES

ALAMINOS CHICA, A. 2006. *Elaboración, análisis e interpretación de encuestas, cuestionarios y escalas de opinión*. Alcoy: Marfil.

BLANCO MARTÍNEZ, R. 2005. "Lectura bien hecha, lectura honesta". In: *Revista de Educación*, núm. extraordinario: 9-14.

BLANCO REINOSA, Y.. "El 22% de los universitarios reconoce que no lee nunca un libro". 2007, enero, 28. *El Mundo*, [Madrid], p. 1-2.

CERRILLO TORREMOCHA, P. 2005. "Lectura y sociedad del conocimiento". *Revista de Educación*, núm. extraordinario, p. 53-61.

Comisión Europea, [On line Web]. <<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal>>. [Consultation: 1-7-08]

CORDÓN GARCÍA, J. A. 2006. "Lecturas sobre la lectura". In: GONZALO García, C. y Hernández, P.: *Corcillum: estudios de traducción, lingüística y filología dedicados a Valentín García Yebra*. Madrid: Arco/Libros. p. 735-763.

GELI, C. "Se buscan libros y lectores de culto". 2008, enero, 4. *El País* [Madrid] p. 40.

GOLDIN, D. 2006. Encuesta Nacional de Lectura. Informes y evaluaciones. México: CONACULTA.

MERLO VEGA, J. A. 2002. "Las colecciones de las bibliotecas públicas en la Unión Europea". *Informe Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez*. Salamanca: Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez.

MIGUEL DÍAZ, M. 2006. *Metodologías de enseñanza y aprendizaje para el desarrollo de competencias: orientaciones para el profesorado universitario ante el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior*. Madrid: Alianza.

UNESCO,[On line Web]. <<http://portal.unesco.org/education/>>. [Consultation: 1-7-2008].