

Reading Interests and Habits in Lebanon: Explorative Analysis

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Abstract

Reading habits continue to attract the interest of researchers who are trying to assess causes for either decline of the interest in reading or encouragement means to raise the awareness of the importance of developing a reading habit. This study aims to identify the reading habits among the Lebanese residents in general and the educated populace in particular. A quantitative research approach is adopted, relying on a survey questionnaire administered to a sample of 3997 persons, selected conveniently based on their willingness to participate; they belong to different age categories and sexes. Results show that Lebanon has the lowest average reading time among all the countries considered. Findings show that Lebanese dedicate 0.75 hours of reading time. Lebanon is among the countries which are suffering from a decline in reading habits, where a Lebanese reads an average of 5 books per year. Results of this study may help add scope and direction to policy makers in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, to universities and other teaching and learning institutions and the non-government organizations who are concerned in raising the populace interest in reading.

Keywords: Reading habits, Time use, Aliteracy, Lebanon.

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INTRODUCTION

Huang, Capps, Blacklock and Garza [1] contend that children enjoy reading, but as they grow, some may struggle to continue doing so. Further, according to Huang *et al.*, the number of students in tertiary education who read for recreation and academic reading has declined. In addition, literature shows that engagement in reading is affected by the readers' perception that reading has personal relevant reasons [2-4]. The major concern is the lack of reading habits and aliteracy; Scott [5, 6] define aliteracy as "a lack of reading habit especially in capable readers who choose not to read."

Reading habits in Lebanon are subject to similar engagement characteristics; this raises a set of questions which may motivate the current research, including, "Is it true that Lebanese people don't read? Is the number of Lebanese readers diminishing? Is the digital leap taking over the Lebanese reading culture? Is reading considered the lost leisure activity among the Lebanese? Is there any value for reading in Lebanon? Is the book in crisis in Lebanon? Are the Lebanese lethargic to reading books?" These questions, and many others came to mind when on July 8, 2013, numbers reflected a 0.6% response rate to attend a general public book signing event at a major university where more

than 1645 email invitations followed by reminders were issued to all faculty, staff and part-time workers. Of course, many did argue that the low attendance rate can be attributed to holding the event in summer time, topic of the book, or type of event. Given the aforementioned, such response is not expected from an educated university community, though such events are rarely held on a university's campus. The number of attendees attracted by emails originating from the university's president did not exceed ten people. It is this low depressing rate of response that is the main "raison d'être" for initiating the present study to research the reading interests and habits in Lebanon. This state of affairs is also true of the surrounding Arab world. "Arabs need to turn the page on poor reading habits" [7] is the title of an article that bewails the reading habit among Arabs, and calls for the renaissance of the first scared commandment of Prophet Mohammed which was simply "Read" [8]. Moreover, the article expresses the author's disappointment when comparing how his fellow Arabs while on the subway spend their time talking and looking around when most of the western passengers are engrossed in their books and newspapers. Although the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in its report of September 2012 states that in the Arab states, by the year 2015, approximately nine out of ten young adults, between the ages of 15 and 24, are projected to be literate [9]; however, most of the

recently published articles lament the reading crises by claiming that the Arab society does not like to read and has the lowest reading audience in the world [10], or by simply stating survey results that indicate that the percentage of reading people is comparable to the percentages of people who hardly ever or never read [11]. In fact, many have gone to the extreme of pessimism by asserting that for the Arab world, reading has become one of the impossibilities to find [12].

Looking at the aforementioned facts, the objective of this research is to assess the reading habits of a conveniently selected sample of Lebanese individuals of an open age category: of 15 to 60 years.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hoover & Gough [13] contend that reading is constituted of two actions, the first is related to recognition and alphabetic decoding, and the second is the resulting activities such as entertainment and comprehension. The lack of motivation to read is known as aliteracy, which is defined as *“lack of reading habit especially in capable readers who choose not to read”* [5, 14]. It has been shown that reading habits are flourished through the reading skills acquired at the early stages of school education [15]; however, researchers have demonstrated that students in their higher stages of education sacrifice reading time to spend more time per day on the Internet (mean 2.47 hours with a std 1.5 hours) and watching television (mean 1.93 hours with a std 1.21 hours) [16]. Similar results are reported; they indicate that declining book reading habits due to the new digital culture are considered a bad omen [17]. In fact, Wijesiri [18] declares that the economic, social and political health of a country, are highly correlated with citizens that can read widely and apply it practically for development.

To become a “reading nation”, the number of hours that must be dedicated to reading during school years should be something like 2,373 hours; these are based on 30 minutes (half an hour) per day for the thirteen years of school education; i.e. half an hour multiplied by 365 days multiplied by 13 years which gives something like 2,373 hours [12]. In addition, and according to Hanafy [19], statistical surveys related to reading should be considered carefully in the Arab world simply because respondents seek to present themselves as educated readers.

Fearing the consequences of poor reading habits, in 2006, the 13 daily newspapers in Lebanon (ten in Arabic, one in Armenian, one in English and one in French) agreed to work together to promote reading habits after suffering from declines of readership [20]. In fact, the future of reading is very much in doubt quotes Tom Peters [21] where he warns that the habit of reading for learning, for work, and for pleasure is diminishing. Moreover, he warns that soon, within the 21st century, we could reach the stage of “Reading Rest

in Peace”. Later on, Merga [22] links the reading habits of avid readers to motivations such as to improve knowledge, for personal development, for mental stimulation, entertainment and pleasure, mental health, escapism and habit. She concludes that *“at least one of these motivations should resonate with non-reading members of the general public”* (p. 154).

For the last few years, the issue of reading in the Arab world has been an active subject for both news headlines and social media [23-30]. Caldwell [23] succeeded in proving how many can lie with statistics (Huff & Geis, 1954) and pointed out the error associated with the prevailing myth that “Arabs read an average of six minutes a year”. Kechichian [25], presents some statistics where he compares the highest ranked Arab readers in Iraq with nine minutes of reading per day to countries like Finland where the average reading reaches 46 minutes per day. Likewise, Al-Yacoub [26] highlights and associates the modest number of Arabs who visit libraries to the evaluation of reading habits among the generations. On a similar track, Wesleyschwalje [27] states that few statistics do exist on childhood reading and that one of those available was executed in Egypt where the numbers show that 49% of the children do not read. Furthermore, Aboulhoul [28] indicates that Arabs don’t need to conform; they need to read so as to think and avoid being guided to follow the imposed directions. Similarly, Tarren [29] laments the decreasing habit of reading and abandonment of libraries. He recalls that our society does not have any reading culture and raises the fact that children cannot develop the habit of reading when they do not see their elders doing that. Finally, Holland [30] highlights some of the initiatives taking place in some Arab countries like Qatar to overcome the myth of “Arabs don’t read”.

Apart from news headlines and social media, reading in the Arab world in general and Lebanon in particular has been modestly tackled in the professional literature. One of the relatively pioneer works is the 1982 UNESCO report on “Book Production and Reading in the Arab world” [31]. According to the aforementioned report, religion, literature, social sciences and mainly political literature like speeches and statements by heads of states constitute the major production of books in the Arab world, which can be one of the major factors why *“screenagers”* continue to act against the temptation of reading Arabic titles; the reading habit is neither motivated nor acquired, because the UNESCO report [31] highlights the fact that it was not until the late 1960’s that most of the Arab countries began to feel that children’s books is a new factor to be taken into account in book publishing. Moreover, the report mourns the absence of the role of Arab women in both the world of books and reading; in parallel, the scenes of fathers reading in conjunction with mothers and children are rare panoramas within the Arab families.

Ursula Lindsey [32], concluded her article “Why Don’t Arabs Read?” by stating that: “The region has a deep historic relationship with the written word and a rich literary heritage. Books are respected, but what is missing from the reading experience may be something very simple: joy” (Para 11).

On another hand, myth busters’ researchers like Hamouchi [33] argue that “Arabs don’t read” can be easily challenged by the fact that western media groups like Scientific American, National Geographic and Vice are entering the region with quality products that offer Arabic text and content, a fact that supports that Arab on the contrary read.

Surprisingly the myth of reading is not limited to the Arab world but extends to most of the world. The findings of Manuel and Carter [34] assure that opportunities for reading for pleasure are increasingly threatened and diminishing.

The aforementioned raise more questions: Is it the way of life? Is it deprivation that causes people not to read? Research performed in western countries may provide an answer. In fact, a survey administered in England to 1500 adult respondents reveal that 18% of the respondents never read books at all with this figure increasing to 64% among the age category 18 to 30 years. In addition, 27% prefers the Internet and social media to reading books, rising to 56% among 18-30 year olds; and, 45% prefers television and DVDs to reading [35]. This same study reveals the “links between deprivation and not reading books”. The final report shows that in general, those who never read live in more deprived areas, and those who read less are more likely to be males, under 30, and have lower levels of qualifications, happiness, and satisfaction in their lives. Likewise, in a study administered to 115 white and Asian American adults participants with an aim to identify their reading habits [36], it was determined that gender, race and education are significant predicates on the habits. Moreover, the study reveals that 34.85% (40) reads very often, 37.45% of the participants (43) read often, 21.74% (25) sometimes, 6.09% (7) seldom, and 0% (0) never reads.

A study conducted in Spain among 181 students of the “Universidad Europea de Madrid” resulted in a very pessimistic conclusion; the result shows that as time goes by, there is less reading among the students, and that, unfortunately, there are no great expectations for this trend to change [37]. In Argentina, a similar study was conducted on a sample of 158 students from the Faculty of Engineering in the “Universidad de Buenos Aires” [38]. The outcomes of the study reveal an encouraging reading environment among the engineering students, where the average of read books is 4.84 per year. Likewise, this study concludes that, in general, the surveyed students do not

completely lack the reading habits but require an important improvement.

Others have written extensively on the pleasure, engagement, falling in love and dancing with a book [39] “*Like the women in the ballroom waiting to be discovered, books stand waiting in a line along the wall. The eyes glance at them distracted, without making any decision. Then the reaching hand takes a book out of the shelf, opening it. The dance may begin*” (p. 141). Moreover, the pleasure of reading has been studied from the point of toilet reading (TR) where Goldstein *et al.*, [40], report, based on a study administered to a sample of 499 adults, that the percentage of people who practice TR is around 52.7% (the 95% confidence interval is 48.3% to 57.1%).

In Peshawar (Pakistan), Mohammad Ismail and his colleagues [41] brought to light the reading interests and habits of 160 college students. The authors concluded that socio-economic factors have great influence on the reading habits of students in that the majority of college students prefer to read textbooks to comply with their academic duties. Likewise, in Spain and Portugal, Yubero and Larrañaga [42] administered a study on 2,475 university students (10 universities in Spain and 9 in Portugal) to conclude that 13% of the participants do not have the habit of voluntary reading; moreover, the study results show that 16% of the Spanish students and 12% of the Portuguese students never read or simply almost never read. In the USA, 1,265 college students were surveyed to identify the periods of time dedicated to nonacademic reading; the results show that in a week time (168 hours), the average time spent on academic reading, extracurricular reading and Internet are 7.72 hours, 4.24 and 8.95 hours respectively [1]. Similarly, alarmed by the UNESCO report that in reading habits Mexico occupies the next to last place among 108 countries, a study was conducted by Nava and Garcia [43] on 210 university students in order to evaluate their reading habits. The results show that 7% of the respondents almost never read, 80% reads less than one hour daily, and 82% never dedicates any reading time slot to non-academic reading materials.

A USA study done in 1997 revealed that the average time per day that children spend reading, watching television, studying and doing other housework were 45, 168, 63 and 54 minutes, respectively [44]. Obviously, the aforementioned study having been executed in 1997 does not include the minutes spent on digital media since at that time the Internet and its related domains were in their very early stages. A more recent study [45], reveals that leisure time spent on socializing, hobbies and reading by people aged 21 to 65 years, who are not students nor early retirees, has decreased significantly in the United States between 1965 and 2003, while increases have

been reported for entertainment, television watching and sport events.

To conclude, it is totally clear that the statistics differ from a source to another; however, the lack of reading habits and aliteracy appear to be major concerns that confront the world in general and the Arab region in particular.

Objectives

The objectives of the current study revolve around identifying the reading habits among the Lebanese residents in general and the educated populace in particular. The study is primarily explorative in nature where a wide range of questions are administered through a questionnaire in order to assess the reading lifestyles and behaviors.

The 21 questions selected for the survey are classical questions that were used in many other different studies like those of Scales & Rhee [36], Howard & Jin [46], Hughes-Hassell & Lutz [47, 16], Nava Gómez & García Ávila [43], García-Delgado [37], Norberto Cornejo, Roble, Barrero, & Martín [38], Huang, Capps, Blacklock, & Garza [1], Manuel & Carter [34], Erasmus [48], Perrin [49] and Szentgyörgyvölgyi, Novotny, & Szabo [50]. The survey contains the following questions [the sub-categories are not included here]:

1. What do you usually do in your spare time?
2. Do you read when travelling?
3. Do you read digital material like eBooks, websites, or online contents?
4. How many books do you own? (hard copy)
5. How often do you read books (online or print)
6. How many books (hard copies) have you read during the past 12 months?
7. How many books (Online) have you read during the past 12 months?
8. Have you read more or less than last year?
9. What is the greatest obstacle that prevents you from reading books (online or print)?
10. On average, how much time do you spend reading books (online or print) during a week?
11. How well do you think you read?
12. In general, do you like to read?
13. Do you prefer reading Online content or Print Copies?
14. Do you read newspapers? (online or print)
15. Do you read magazines? (online or print)
16. Did or do either of your parents read frequently?
17. Did your parents read to you as a child?
18. Did your parents encourage you to read when you were younger?
19. How much time do you feel should be spent on reading daily?
20. Which of the following do you consider to be the most important reason to read?
21. Yesterday, how much time did you spend reading a printed or online book/magazine/newspaper?

Likewise, the demographics questions were related to:

- Age
- Educational level
- Being a student? Level?
- Occupation. Retired?
- Gender
- Marital status

METHODS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The current research is quantitative in nature based on a questionnaire of 21 questions that cover the reading habits and another six questions related to respondents' demographics. All the questionnaires were filled in paper and the majority were distributed in university undergraduate and graduate classes, with few distributed among population masses in malls, bus stations and cafes.

More than 4200 questionnaires were distributed; however, the number of valid questionnaires after excluding those with jokes and unbelievable extreme figures came up to be 3867 surveys (valid response rate 92.07%). The sample data was collected from Lebanon (3867 valid respondents answered the Arabic or translated English version). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the survey was completed between 2013 and 2014. Data was analyzed using IBM's Statistical Product and Service Solutions version 20 software [51].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Descriptive Statistics

The responses obtained show the most prominent activities done by the 3867 respondents in their spare times. Results reveal that 10.1% of the Lebanese read, 43.4% spend their leisure time on social media, Internet, online games and WhatsApp, 20.6% watches TV, 9.8% sleeps, 7.8% hangs out with their friends, and 6% plays sports.

The aforementioned results do not differ from those of an Australian study [34] where reading a newspaper or reading a book are the least preferred leisure activities compared to hanging with friends, computer games and Internet, music, TV, and others. Moreover, the same aforementioned study shows that reading books ranks as the preferred leisure activity for only one-fifth of the 2000 young people aged 12 to 16 years.

On asking "Do you read when travelling [in this case, travelling refer to long trips abroad since public transport is not used by Lebanese rather they use their cars]?" the respondents' answers indicate that 28.4% of them never read when travelling, 25.3% rarely does, 29.7% occasionally (sometimes), and the percentage of those who surely read when travelling does not exceed 16.6%. In addition, results show that

9.8% of the Lebanese surely read every time when they travel.

Furthermore, the respondents' answers for the question "In general, do you like to read?" the percentage of those who do read frequently is 47.7%, and the percentage of those who never or rarely read is 18.9%. Furthermore, around 34% likes to read and around 33% likes to read sometimes.

The overall results expressed above are quite negative, with nearly half of respondents (51.9%)

stating that they do not enjoy reading. Surprisingly, in a study performed in the USA among 214 middle school [47], students revealed that 37% enjoys reading, 58% sometimes, and 4% states that they never enjoy it.

For the question "How often do you read books (online or print)?" the answers are exhibited in Table-1, where the shocking figure of only 11.6% reads on a daily basis with 10.86% that never reads at all. Table-1 reveals that 36.67% of the respondents fall in the category of "never read or read few times a year", which practically implies that they do not read too.

Table-1: Answers to the question "How often do you read books (online or print)?"

How often do you read books (online or print)?	Frequency	Percent
Everyday	448	11.6
A few times a week	960	24.8
A few times a month	1021	26.4
A few times a year	998	25.81
Never	420	10.86
Missing answer	20	0.53
Total	3867	100.0

Another shocking conclusion is expressed in the answers to the question "Have you read more or less than last year?", whereby respondents admit a decline in the reading habits where 48.8% of the respondents concede that they had read more in the previous year as compared to the current year (2013-2014); and, only 21% declared that they have read more. Also, 25.5% claims that they have read about the same number. Again, this finding runs in parallel with other studies that have raised the warning flag of diminishing reading habits [17].

On asking "How many hard books do you own?" The answers depicted in Table-2 demonstrate the tragic finding that around 13% of the respondents do not own a single paper book and those who own less than 10 books are more than 49% of the respondents, which is again an alarming result which requires serious investigation. Likewise, the average and median numbers of books owned by the respondents are 52 and 10 books, respectively.

Table-2: Answers to the question "How many books do you own? (Hard copy)"

How many books do you own? (Hard copy)	Frequency	Percent
0	510	13.2
1-10	1390	35.95
11-20	567	14.7
21-30	221	5.72
31-40	93	2.4
41-80	273	7.06
81-160	192	4.97
161-320	102	2.6
321-640	35	0.90
641-1280	25	0.65
More than 1280	13	0.33
I don't know	23	0.59
Many	118	3.05
Missing answer	305	7.88
Total	3867	100.0

Furthermore, on asking "How many books (hard copies) have you read during the past 12 months?" Table-3 shows that 19.3% of the respondents have never read a single book during the last 12 months, which is again an alarming figure. Likewise,

16.76% reads one book a year on average. The average and median number of printed books read by the respondents during the past 12 months are 5 and 2 books, respectively.

Table-3: Answers to “How many books (hard copies) have you read during the past 12 months?”

How many books (hard copies) have you read during the past 12 months?	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	747	19.3	19.3
1	648	16.76	36.06
2	624	16.14	52.2
3	392	10.13	62.33
4	266	6.90	69.23
5	238	6.16	75.39
6	129	3.3	78.69
7	72	1.86	80.55
8	61	1.6	82.15
9	31	.8	82.95
10	130	3.36	86.31
11-60	385	9.96	96.27
More than 60	19	0.49	96.76
Many	5	0.13	96.89
Missing answer	120	3.11	100
Total	3867	100.0	

On asking “How many books (Online) have you read during the past 12 months?” Table-4 shows that 38.43% of the respondents had never read a single online book during the past year with the once more upsetting outcome that in the current digital age, only

53.58% of the respondents had read at most one online book in a time span of one year. The average and median number of online books read by the respondents during the past 12 months are 4.5 and 2 books, respectively.

Table-4: Answers to “How many books (Online) have you read during the past 12 months?”

How many books (Online) have you read during the past 12 months?	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	1486	38.43	38.43
1	586	15.15	53.58
2	423	10.94	64.52
3	231	5.97	70.49
4	158	4.08	74.57
5	202	5.22	79.79
6	76	1.97	81.76
7	59	1.53	83.29
8	29	.75	84.04
9	17	.44	84.48
10	142	3.67	88.15
11-60	228	5.9	94.05
More than 60	26	0.67	94.72
Many	44	1.14	95.86
I don't know	6	.16	96.02
Missing answer	154	3.98	100.0
Total	3867	100	

In fact, the results of both Table 3 & 4 reveal that, in general, the median number of books read by all the respondents is 5 for paper books and 2 for online books. These figures are well below the American median extracted from a sample of 1,520 adult respondents which is 4 for all books being online or paper (The American figures per gender are: 3 for men and 5 for women) [49].

Results that correspond to the question “Did or do either of your parents read frequently?” show that 62.3% of the respondents answered yes, 35.1%

answered no, 1.5% answered some times, 0.3% did not know and 0.9% provided no answer. Furthermore, the results that correspond to the question “Did your parents read to you as a child?” show that 63.5% of the respondents answered yes, 33.0% answered no, 1.8% answered some times, 0.9% did not know and 0.7% provided no answer. Other results to the question “Did your parents encourage you to read when you were younger?” reveal that only 21.5% of the respondents admitted that their parents did not encourage them to read, while 77.4% confirmed, 0.1% did not know and 0.9% provided no answer. A research done in England

to study the reading habits of 1,500 adults conducted by DJS Research for Booktrust [52] reveals the "significant" link between a family's reading habits and a child's future attitude to reading, with 89% of the respondents whose parents read to them as children regularly, compared to 72% of respondents whose parents didn't read to them.

On asking "Yesterday, how much time did you spend reading a printed or online book/magazine/newspaper?" Table-5 illustrates that 41.97% of the respondents replied zero minutes, while 21.96% spent 60 minutes. The average and median for yesterday's reading time came to be 49.78 and 30 minutes, respectively.

Table-5: Answers to "Yesterday, how much time did you spend?"

Yesterday, how much time did you spend reading a printed or online book/magazine/newspaper?	Frequency	Percent
0 minutes	1623	41.97
5-25	161	4.16
30	307	7.94
40-50	8	0.21
60	849	21.96
90	39	1.01
120	381	9.85
150	3	0.08
180	161	4.16
More than 180	125	3.23
Missing	210	5.43
Total	3867	100.0

Surprisingly, when the respondents were asked about how much time they feel should be spent on reading daily, Table-6 shows that 41.89% indicated one hour, and 29.04% went to two hours. Does this mean that people are aware of the importance of reading but

are unable to apply that in their life? Well, at least the majority of the respondents are conscious of the importance of reading. Moreover, the average and median for the subjective estimated reading time are 101.22 and 60 minutes, respectively.

Table-6: Answers to "How much time do you feel should be spent on reading daily?"

How much time do you feel should be spent on reading daily?	Frequency	Percent
None	53	1.37
5-29 minutes	65	1.68
Around 30	194	5.02
Around 60	1620	41.89
Around 120	1123	29.04
Around 180	310	8.01
Around 240	182	4.71
Around 300	59	1.53
Around 360	19	0.49
More than 360	8	0.21
Don't know	34	0.88
It depends	98	2.53
Missing answer	102	2.64
Total	3867	100.0

Now based on the aforementioned average of 49.78 minutes for yesterday's reading time and the estimated respondents' daily average reading time of 101.22 minutes, it is worth mentioning that it has been reported that to become a "reading nation", the number of hours that must be dedicated to reading during school years should be something like 2,373 hours; these are based on 30 minutes (half an hour) per day for the thirteen years of school education [12]. Surprisingly, it looks that the numbers of this current study exceed the proposed norms and standards.

Asking about the time spent on reading per week, results reveal that in a week, 21.3% of the respondents never read and nearly 62% of the respondents read between one and four hours. Further, 11.4% reads 5 to 8 hours and 4.8% reaches 8 to 11 hours.

On comparing the aforementioned results with some other findings such as the study performed in Hungary and Serbia [50], nearly one third of the Hungarians interviewed read for 3-4 hours a week for school work, 21% reads 5-6 hours a week, and 19%

reads for 7 or hours or more. The same study reveals that in their free time, 26% of those interviewed spent 3-4 hours reading books, 5-6 hours were ticked by 18.5%, and 7-8 hours by 7.5%. As for the Serbian students, their answers differed a lot with 30.25% of the interviewed Serbians students spending more than 10 hours reading for school tasks, 12.25% reads for 7-8 hours, 14.5% reads for 5-6 hours, and 19.25% reads for 3-4 hours per week. Those who read for less than one hour are only 3%. Additionally, for the Serbian students, the number of hours spent reading in their free time is similar to that of the Hungarian students where 20.75% of those interviewed spend 3-4 hours reading, 21.75% declared 1-2 hours, 10% claimed that they read between 7 and 8 hours during their free time, and the percentage of those who read for less than one hour for pleasure came out to be 11.5%.

Next, the respondents were asked about their rationale for reading. The answers obtained show that the main reasons are to develop knowledge (56.4%) and to comply with academic demands (29.2%). A noticeable figure is that the percentage of respondents

who read for pleasure, entertainment and fun does not exceed 10.4%, and 2.8% do it to pass time.

As for the question "How well do you think you read?" the respondents' answers are as follows: 42.8% declares that their reading ability is excellent, 20.2% average, 4.6 below average, with only 2% admitting to have poor reading skills. Here a clear controversy appears among the respondents who claimed excellent reading abilities (42.8% herein) disagrees first with low reading habits (21.3% never read), and secondly with the desire to read (only 13.9% answered: Extremely I like to read).

When respondents were asked about the major impediments for reading, the answers are as presented in Table 7, which reveals that time is the main obstruction (55.88% indicated that they don't have enough time to read), followed by loss of interest (15.15% informed that there is nothing to read of interest to them). In a study administered to middle school students [47], 30% indicated that they are too busy and do not have time to read.

Table-7: Answers to "What is the greatest Obstacle that prevents you from reading books?"

What is the greatest Obstacle that prevents you from reading books (online or print)?	Frequency	Percent
Not enough time	2161	55.88
Nothing to read that interests me	586	15.15
No one to share books with or to talk to about books	222	5.74
Nothing stands in my way	808	20.90
Other	41	1.06
Home duties and kids	4	0.1
Social media and online gaming	7	0.18
Social duties and political issues	11	0.29
I don't read	5	0.13
Bad reading skills	2	0.05
Health problems	2	0.05
Missing answer	18	0.47
Total	3867	100

Respondents were questioned about their preferences in reading either online content or paper printed material. Answers reveal that the respondents share the same preference for both, online and print, at around 43% each; 3.6% reads both. Again those who insisted that they do not read either came out to be 8.5%.

Being at the core of the digital age, and knowing that 52% of the Arab "screen-agers" have indicated their preference to read on screen as compared with 32% who prefer to read print material [53], it became pertinent to ask the respondents about their digital reading of eBooks, websites and other online contents. The daily frequencies of this reading activity depict that 15.2% never reads, 17.3% rarely reads and 35.2% sometimes does read. On the other

hand, 19.0% reads digital material almost every time and 13.2% every time. Looking at the results carefully, it can be observed that the respondents are evenly distributed among three categories: one third (32.4%) reads digital materials, another third (35.2%) sometimes reads digital materials; likewise another third (32.1%) never or rarely reads digital materials.

To assess the reading habits for pleasure and entertainment, respondents were questioned if they read newspapers and magazines either in print or online. The collected answers are summarized in Tables 8 and 9, which illustrate that 18.75% of the respondents never read newspapers being in print or online; likewise, 17.97% of the respondents never read magazines of any form.

Table-8: Collected answers for the question “Do you read newspapers?”

Do You Read Newspapers? (online or print)	Frequency	Percent
Online	1381	35.71
Printed copies	1289	33.33
Sometimes	93	2.41
I don't read newspapers	725	18.75
Yes	354	9.15
Missing answer	25	0.65
Total	3867	100

Table-9: Collected answers for the question “Do you read magazines?”

Do you read magazines?(online or print)	Frequency	Percent
Online	1278	33.05
Printed copies	1391	35.97
Sometimes	80	2.07
I don't read magazines	695	17.97
Both (Online and Printed)	86	2.22
Yes	298	7.71
Missing answer	39	1.01
Total	3867	100

b. Demographics

The number of collected surveys is 3867. The average age of the 3790 respondents who did report both of their ages and gender (77 did not report either their ages or gender) came up to be 26.34 years (27.36 years for males and 25.43 years for females), the median is 23 years for both genders (24 years for males and 22 years for females), and the mode is 20 years for both genders. Likewise, the standard deviation for the age is 10.63 for both genders (11.38 for males and 9.83 for females). Moreover, Table-10 shows the demographics characteristics of the respondents in relation to gender (46.73% males and 52.7% females), academics (58.80% students and 40.4% non-students), marital status (61.47% single and 33.1% married), educational level attained (32.6% school level and

65.7% higher education), territory (100% Lebanese), and employment (50.1% unemployed).

The demographics figures highlight four main features of the respondents:

- The respondents come from a highly educated sample, since 45.1% of them hold a university level and 20.6% hold a higher postgraduate level, making the percentage of highly educated respondents 65.7%.
- The majority of the respondents are unemployed (50.1%).
- The grand majority of the respondents are students (58.8%).
- The Lebanese respondent's supremacy (100%) is evident.

Table-10: the demographics of the 3997 respondents

Gender	Males: 1807 (46.73%)	Females: 2038 (52.7%)		Missing: 22 (0.57%)
Student	Yes: 2275 (58.8%)	No: 1561 (40.4%)		Missing: 31 (0.8%)
Marital Status	Single: 2377 (61.47%)	Married: 1280 (33.1%)	Others: 87 (2.25%)	Missing: 123 (3.18%)
Education Level	School: 1260 (32.6%)	University: 1744 (45.1%)	Graduate: 797 (20.6%)	Missing: 66 (1.7%)
Territory	Lebanon: 3867 (100%)			
Occupation	Unemployed: 1938 (50.1%)	Education: 450 (11.64%)	Worker: 655 (16.94%)	Missing: 81 (2.1%)
	Medical: 101 (2.61%)	Business: 464 (12%)	Others: 178 (4.61%)	

The four aforementioned features, added to the fact that the average age is 26.34 years, imply that the sample under study is mainly formed of young adults who are highly educated, majority single, unemployed and residing in Lebanon.

c. Gender Cross Tabulations

The Chi-Square Test of Independence (Chi-Square Test of Association) is used to perform a series of cross tabulations among the different survey answers to questions. The assumption of the chi-square test is that the expected value in each contingency table cell is

greater than 5 [51]. Thus, in this study when the expected values are too low, categories will be merged in order to comply with the guidelines suggested by Cochran [54]. Moreover, if the expected values continue to be too low, then a Fisher's Exact test is to be used [55]. However, the chi-square approximation is good if "no more than 20% of the expected counts are less than 5 and all individual expected counts are 1 or greater" [56].

On using the "Fisher exact test", it was observed that a significant association exists between "Do you read when travelling?" and gender ($p = 0.000$), indicating that reading habits while travelling are gender sensitive. In fact, based on the test, the frequency differences expressed in Figure 1 related to "Do you read when travelling?" are significant; so, there is evidence that when travelling females tend to read more than males. The feature that females are better leisure readers than males has been extensively covered in the literature [36, 46, 47, 37, 34, 48, 49].

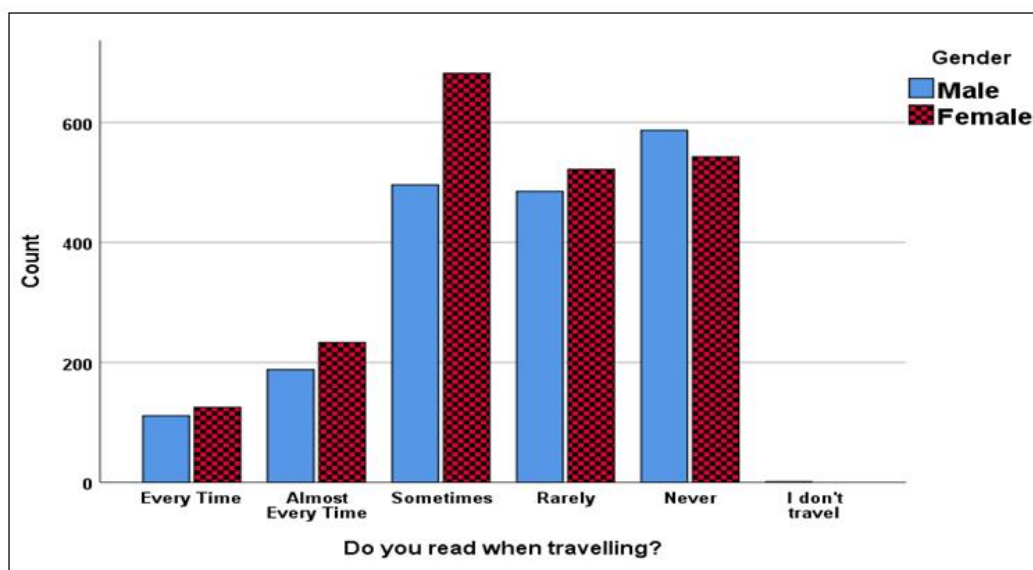


Fig-1: Frequency of responses to "Do you read when travelling" clustered by gender

The Chi-Square Test of Association is used to test if a dependency exists between genders and "In general, do you like to read". The finding is $\chi^2(4) = 58.277$, $p = 0.000$, with 0 cells having expected count less than 5, which indicates that there is significant evidence that females like to read more than males. Again, this is a classical finding in previous works [46].

Likewise, an association is observed between gender and "How often do you read books (online or print)", $\chi^2(5) = 24.581$, $p = 0.000$; with 0 cells having expected count less than 5 (The minimum expected count is 14.10).

Moreover, another association is observed between gender and "Have you read more or less than last year?", $\chi^2(3) = 11.499$, $p = 0.009$; with 0 cells having expected count less than 5 (The minimum expected count is 8.41).

As for the association between "How well do you think you read?" and gender, it is observed to be significant with $\chi^2(4) = 28.256$, $p = 0.000$; also, with 0 cells having expected count less than 5 (The minimum expected count is 36.63). In fact, this evidence implies that females think they read better as depicted in Figure-2.

In fact, the reading gap between genders was reported in the literature with the emphasis that it appears to be widening, and that the reading habit is declining with age [46]. Similar results were reported in a Slovakian study administered to 1808 secondary-school pupils, where considerably more females stated they liked reading [48]. Likewise, the same study reported the results from 389 Czech pupils in which again girls expressed their enjoyment of reading much more often than boys.

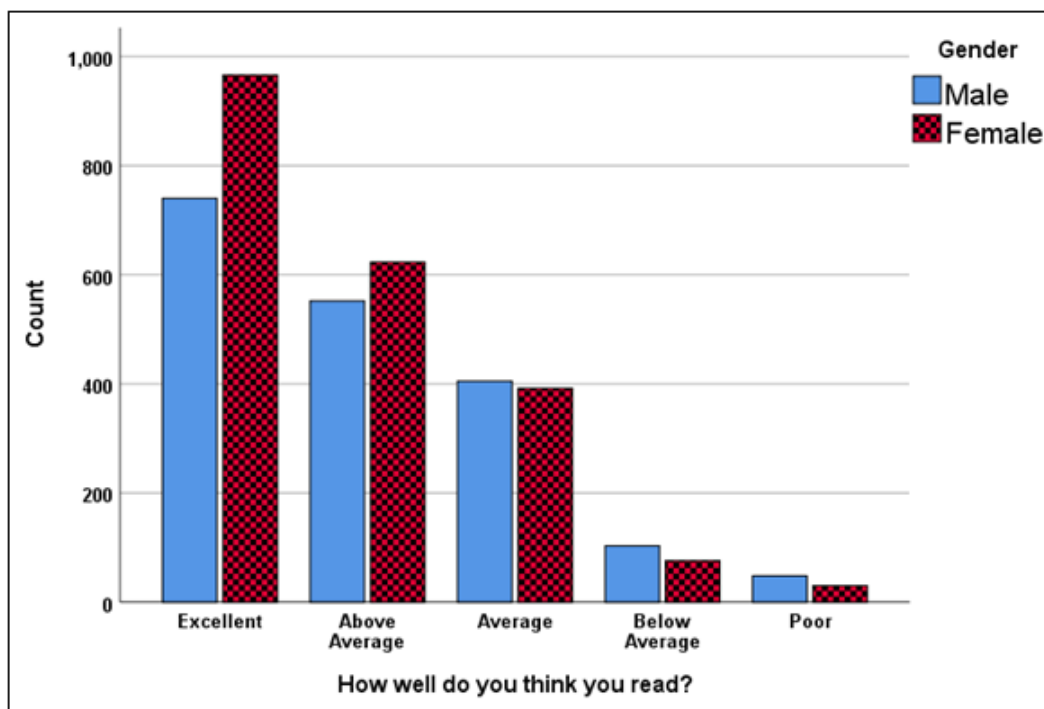


Fig-2: Frequency of responses to "How well do you think you read?"

d. Student status Cross Tabulation

The chart in Figure-3 demonstrates that students possess, in general, less reading habits than non-students. The categories 'Never', 'Rarely' and 'Sometimes' are dominated by students when

compared to nonstudents. To see if this domination is significant, on using a "Chi-square test" for dependency, there is a significant association between "Do you read when travelling?" and being a student ($X^2(5) = 28.850, p = 0.000$).

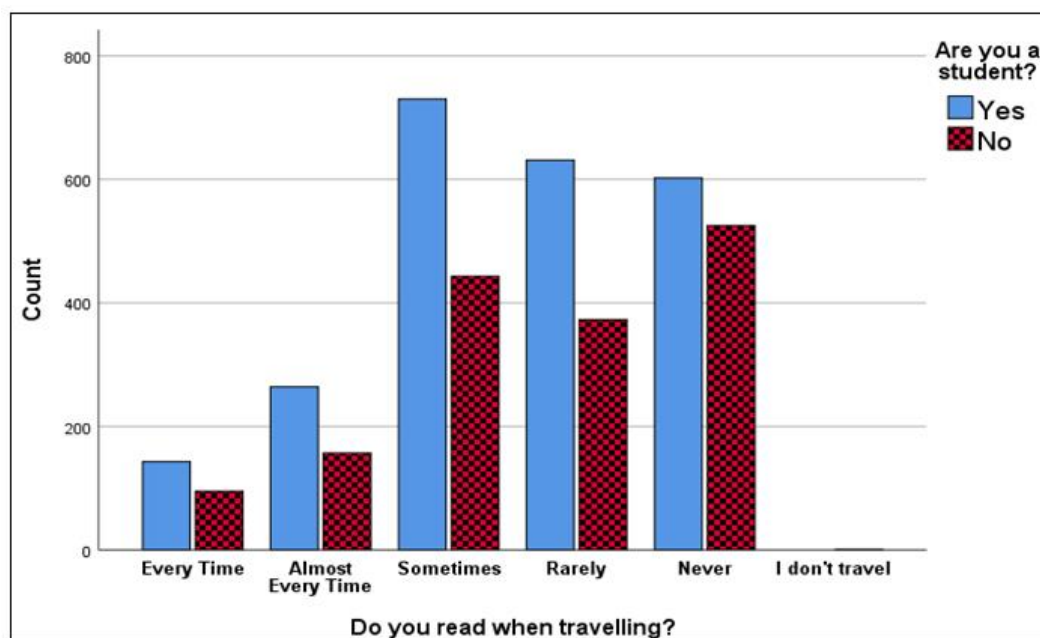


Fig-3: Crosstab results for student status versus "do you read when travelling?"

FINDINGS

At this level of the study, it became evident that an empirical assessment should be made to either support or negate the common statements related to reading habits in Lebanon, in particular, and the

"uncontested notion myth" that Arabs do not read, in general. For this purpose, the findings of this research together with similar results extracted from the literature are displayed in Table-11. Five issues are considered, mainly:

- How much average time do you spend reading during a week?
- Why do you read?
- Tendency of reading as years go by.
- Books read per year.
- The reading habit.

Table-11 presents the findings of this current research together with similar findings from a group of randomly selected countries that have published extensive research on reading habits; these are: Spain, USA, Mexico, Portugal, England, Australia and Canada.

Table-11: Reading habits in Lebanon and selected countries

	How much average time do you spend reading during a week?	Why do you read?	Tendency of reading as years go by	Books read per year	Reading habits
Lebanon (from current study)	0.75 hours	57.2% reads to be well informed and developed; 29.0% for work or school.	51% read less than the previous year, 21.9% more than the previous year.	Mean=4.84 Median=2	11.0% never read
France (study in progress)	4.28 hours	40.8% reads to be well informed and developed; 40.0% for work or school. 10.3% for pleasure.	44.2% read less than the previous year, 39.5% more than the previous year. 15.4% for pleasure.	Mean=9.28 Median=5	3.8% never read
Spain	7.6 hours (Federación de Gremios de Editores de España (FGEE , 2018) [57]. 45.2% of university students never or rarely read voluntarily in a week. 27.9% reads once a week (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2015) [42]	53.6% Entertainment (García-Delgado, 2011) [37].	Decreasing (García-Delgado, 2011) [37].	Among university students, 7.9% never reads, 27.5% reads 1 or 2 books (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2015) [42].	40.3% of the population does not read for leisure (Federación de Gremios de Editores de España (FGEE), 2018) [57]
USA	4.24 hours of extracurricular reading among university students (Huang, Capps, Blacklock, & Garza, 2014) [1].	84% reads to research specific topics of interest (Perrin, Book reading, 2016) [49].	Trend largely unchanged since 2012 (Perrin, Book reading, 2016) [49].	4 books (Perrin, Book reading, 2016) [49].	24% says they haven't read a book in whole or in part (Perrin, Who doesn't read books in America?, 2018) [59].
Mexico	80% reads less than 1 hour a day (Nava Gómez & García Ávila, 2009) [43].	44.3% of readers read for entertainment (Etcheverry, 2017) [60].	Readers decreased by 10% between 2006 and 2012 (Mexico News Daily, 2016) [61].	2.94 books (Mexico News Daily, 2016) [61].	0% never reads and 6.09% rarely reads (Scales & Rhee, 2001) [36].
Portugal	27.9% reads once a week (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2015) [42].	Majority of students ages 13 to 15 read because they have to (LiRe2.0, 2015) [62]. Majority of students aged 18-25 read to get information and keep updated (Yubero,	Reading habits are poor, and affordability may be the main reason (Rendeiro, 2010) [64]	Among university 28.3% reads 1 or 2 books (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2015) [42]	44.8% of university students never or rarely read voluntarily in a week (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2015) [42].

		Larrañaga, & Pires, 2014) [58]. 67.3% of the people in Portugal read for leisure (Spadaro, 2002) [63].			
England	0.73 hours per day (Statista, 2018) [65].	36% of adults don't read for pleasure, rising to 44% for young people (National Statistics, 2015) [66].	Decline in attitudes towards reading (Education standards research team, 2012) [67].	Mean books read for pleasure by adults is 10. Median is around 4 (YouGov plc, 2014) [68].	18% (adults) never reads physical books. Also, 64% among 18 to 30-year-olds (Flood, Mar 2014) [52].
Australia	About seven hours of reading each week (Throsby, Zwar, & Morgan, 2017) [69].	95% of Australians enjoy reading books for pleasure or interest (Australia Council, 2017) [70].	People appear to be spending slightly less time reading books (Throsby, Zwar, & Morgan, 2017) [69].	3.2 books per month (Throsby, Zwar, & Morgan, 2017) [69].	10% of school students never read voluntarily (Manuel & Carter, 2015) [34]. 92% are classified as readers, and 68% would like to read more (Australia Council, 2017) [70].
Canada	1.43 hours per day (Government of Canada, 2015) [71].	84% of teens read for pleasure. (Howard & Jin, 2004) [46].	Gender reading gap widening. Adults and teens reading less (Howard & Jin, 2004) [46].	16% of teens never read any book (Howard & Jin, 2004) [46].	Among teens non-readers 26% boys and 6% girls (Howard & Jin, 2004) [46].

Comments on Table-11

- Practically, Lebanon has the lowest average reading time among all the countries considered. The finding of this current research of 0.75 hours of reading time is well below the world figures, where in an article titled "Which Countries Read the Most?" [72] India occupied the first place with an average of 10.42 hours of reading per week, followed successively by Thailand (9.24 hours), China (8 hours), and Philippines (7.36 hours). Mexico is not in a better reading status. In fact, the newspaper La Jornada [73] indicated that Mexico occupies the penultimate place in the habit of reading among a sample of 108 countries as reported by UNESCO.
- Lebanon is among the group that includes France, USA and Portugal, where the majority of the people mainly read to get informed, keep updated, research a topic, and to be well developed. Another group includes Spain, Mexico, England, Australia and Canada, where the majority of the people read for pleasure and entertainment.
- As for the general trend of reading as years go by; Table-11 demonstrates that except for USA, which has maintained a constant reading percentage over the last years, all other countries are suffering from a decline in reading hours and readers. The share of

Americans who reported not reading any book in the past 12 months was 19% in 2011. This hit a high point of 27% in 2015. This year, 24% of America's adults say they have not read any book in any format in the past 12 months [59].

- As for the number of books read per year by an average reader, Table-11 shows that Lebanon occupies a midway position among the countries, where a Lebanese reads an average of 5 books per year. As a matter of fact, Australia looks to rank first (3.2 books per month or 38.4 books per year), England goes next with an average of 10 books, France goes in third place with around 9 books. Thus, if truth is to be told, on the matter of books read per year, Lebanon ranks better than Spain, USA, Mexico, Portugal and Canada.
- Finally, as for the general reading habits, an estimated 11% of the Lebanese residents do not read. This figure is much higher than in Mexico, France and Australia but much better than in Spain, USA, Portugal, England and Canada.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research is to identify the reading habits among the Lebanese residents in general

and the educated populace in particular. This research empirically supports the assessed concepts as to:

- Lebanese respondents dedicate 0.75 hours of reading time only which is well below the world figures
- Lebanon is among the group that includes France, USA and Portugal, where the majority of the people mainly read to get informed, keep updated, research a topic, and to be well developed.
- The general trend of reading as years go by; Table-11 demonstrates that except for USA, which has maintained a constant reading percentage over the last years, all other countries including Lebanon are suffering from a decline in reading hours and readers
- Lebanon occupies a midway position among the countries, where a Lebanese reads an average of 5 books per year.
- Finally, as for the general reading habits, an estimated 11% of the Lebanese residents do not read.

It is worth mentioning that the demographics highlight four main features of the respondents:

- The respondents come from a highly educated sample, since 45.1% of them hold a university level and 20.6% hold a higher postgraduate level, making the percentage of highly educated respondents 65.7%.
- The majority of the respondents are unemployed (50.1%).
- The grand majority of the respondents are students (58.8%).
- The responses obtained show the most prominent activities done by the 3867 respondents in their spare times. 10.1% of the Lebanese read; the question "In general, do you like to read?" shows that 47.7% read frequently, 18.9% never or rarely read, and around 34% likes to read.

The overall results expressed above are quite negative, with nearly half of respondents (51.9%) stating that they do not enjoy reading. Further, for the question "How often do you read books (online or print)?" only 11.6% reads on a daily basis with 10.86% that never reads at all. Also, the question "Have you read more or less than last year?", whereby respondents admit a decline in the reading habits where 48.8% of the respondents concede that they had read more in the previous year as compared to the current year (2013-2014); and, only 21% declared that they have read more. Also, 25.5% claims that they have read about the same number. Again, this finding runs in parallel with other studies that have raised the warning flag of diminishing reading habits [17]. Finally, 19.3% of the respondents have never read a single book during the last 12 months, which is an alarming figure.

This research has shed light on 'Reading Habits' that is considered of high priority for the

intellectual health of the society and the nation. 'Reading Habits' nowadays is a potential value for the upbringing of the next generations. According to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rachid Al Maktoum quoted in the UAE Cabinet [74], "A reading nation creates generations that inherit wellness, forgiveness and righteousness. Such a nation faces challenges with hope, perseverance, and determination. A reading generation will be able to build, create and interact positively with their surroundings and the world" (Para 6). Therefore, the objective is to assess and explore the reality of Reading Habits so that empirical results may be used to help establish an objective and reliable platform to be used for policy makers in the Lebanese government, educational institutions and academic researchers for immediate management of future programs directed at influencing the status quo reading habits and to motivate purposeful change for the sake of future generations and the future leaders of the nation.

The economic, social and political health of a country are highly correlated with citizens that can read widely and apply it practically for development [18]. The outcomes of this research show that Lebanon like many other countries is suffering from the very poor reading habits; thus, immediate remedial action, as delineated above, is needed by all Lebanese sectors at all levels. Worth noting that the first initiative to promote the habit of reading among children in order to enable them to take part in the rapid development of knowledge worldwide, was initiated by Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, first lady of Egypt, in 1991. The project was labelled, "Reading for All" [75]. Other countries, including MENA and Gulf countries, have put plans to overcome the reading crisis and Lebanon should do the same. Moreover, it is worth highlighting, that according to Hanafy's "What Arabs Read: a Pan-Arab Survey on Readership" [19], statistical surveys related to reading should be considered carefully in the Arab world simply because respondents seek to present an image of themselves as educated readers.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that according to Odlund and Tradgard [76], reports and studies have shown significantly low reading levels in the Arab world. The average reading time for an Arab child is six minutes a year compared with 12,000 minutes in the West, according to the Arab Thought Foundation's Arab Report for Cultural Development. However, as a counter argument, the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, on September 2015, launched the "Arab Reading Challenge", the largest Arab project to encourage students in the Arab world to read, with more than a million students committing to read 50 million extracurricular books during every academic year. He insists that "the Arab world does not face a reading crisis but rather an incentive crisis. We wish to create a positive and collaborative environment in which

education officials and parents work together to encourage our children to read and develop a passion for knowledge to expand their horizons," he stated [74].

The Arab Reading Challenge aims to instill the culture of reading and build a new generation of knowledgeable, educated Arab youth" [74]. Table-12 depicts the outcomes of the first three years to the challenge.

Table-12: The Arab Reading Challenge 2016-2018

Year	2016	2017	2018
No. of participating students	3.5 million	7.4 million	10.5 million
No. of competing schools	30,000	41,000	52,000
No. of supervisors	60,000	75,000	86,000
No. of arbitrators	n.a.	1,500	n.a.
No. of books read	150 million	200 million	> 300 million
No. of countries [Arab & non-Arab]	16	25	44
Reference	Arab Reading Challenge, 2016 [77]; UAE Cabinet, 2017 [74]; Moukhallati, 2017 [78].	Mohamad, 2017 [79]; UAE Cabinet, 2017 [74].	MENA Herald, 2018 [80].

The view for the Arab World is that it is suffering from a reading crisis whose consequences are seen and felt every day in this region. However, the ARC has made a difference, at least on the near future term, supporting what Sheikh Mohammad has planned, "reading opens minds, magnifies hunger for knowledge and instills the values of openness and moderation that define great civilizations" (Para 2-3) [81]. Further, Moukhallati [78] asserts that Sheikh Mohammed's response to the world "the Arabs' weapon was and will remain knowledge, education and open-mindedness. We are positive this cultured and tolerant generation can spread hope and build the future" (Para 21). Moreover, the ARC is a proof that Arabs can work together to achieve a lot. "The generation that reads also builds and flourishes" (Para 22).

This research has many attributes, including being the first academic and parametric research performed in Lebanon relevant to 'Reading Habits'. Consequently, this paper adds to the body of knowledge of 'Reading Habits' in the Middle East, inciting other researchers to carry out comparative studies needed to construct a general assessment of 'Reading Habits' in the region. 'Reading Habits' is an old and new concern and an important concept treated worldwide; as such, it is necessary to have a better awareness of it in countries such as Lebanon where the education system is labelled advanced, though the outcomes do not match.

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