
Title	A mixed-methods study of the leisure reading habits of preservice teachers
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A mixed-methods study of the leisure reading habits of preservice teachers

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Abstract

Reading habits and preferences are invaluable in fostering literacy instruction. Although there is considerable research on the importance of leisure reading for students, there remains room to explore its relevance among teachers and its application to the classroom context. This paper seeks to explore the attitudes, beliefs and habits of leisure reading among preservice teachers, and how their perceptions of leisure reading influence their teaching strategies and prioritization of leisure reading within the classroom. 8 semi-structured qualitative interviews were administered to pre-service teachers, alongside 102 quantitative questionnaires and Author Recognition Tests to measure the extent of their print exposure. Findings identified most as prolific readers, unanimously agreeing on the importance of leisure reading. However, only a handful of pre-service teachers were familiar with book series popular among students, and some remarked on negative reading experiences. Implications from the study include developing professional knowledge of extensive reading, reconsidering current reading programmes for greater effectiveness and placing more emphasis on young adult literature titles.

Introduction

This paper examines leisure reading among preservice teachers, exploring their reading habits and preferences, and understanding their implications in the classroom. Defined as reading students choose to do on their own for pleasure and enjoyment (Cox & Schaezel, 2007; Martin-Chang et al., 2021), the habit of independent reading heralds a wide repertoire of benefits that are advantageous to both teachers and students alike. As such, the attitudes and behaviours of teachers within the classroom play a key role, wielding considerable influence over the success of these programmes in the propagation of a reading culture. This is reinforced by the belief that “teachers should read personally in their lives, [and] that teachers should make time for reading . . .” (Morrison et al., 1999:

6), being a practice that would be invaluable for literacy instruction within the classroom.

Although there is considerable research about the importance of leisure reading, there remains room to explore its relevance among teachers. The reading habits of teachers themselves are unexamined, despite bearing the onus of encouraging their students to engage in pleasure reading. This is supported by how the review of articles reveals only a small percentage of studies focusing on preservice teachers. For instance, most studies are centred around profiling the reading habits of children and students (Majid & Tan, 2007; Majid, 2018), instead of examining and accounting for the leisure reading habits of preservice teachers. Studies by Applegate (2004), Cox & Schaetzel (2007) and Lukhele (2013) remain limited in terms of depth of analysis and analysis of the attitudes of trainee teachers towards recreational reading. Although the study conducted by Myra Garcés-Bacsal (2018) provides valuable insight into the strong connection between teachers who are devoted readers, their attitudes towards reading and their teaching strategies, it only focuses on responses from in-service teachers through a questionnaire.

Hence, this paper seeks to extend the literature on this topic by observing how leisure reading is beneficial for educators, contextualised within the local domain of Singapore and specific to the trainee teacher populace. The collection of empirical data offers insight into the reading habits and attitudes of trainee teachers, vital in obtaining a general overview of their reading preferences and perceptions. This study contributes to emerging literature by affirming prior findings and observations of the leisure reading habits of preservice teachers, adding further value to them by focusing on their implications on teaching pedagogy and generating effective strategies to promote self-directed reading. As such, this paper seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the reading habits of preservice teachers?
2. What were the reading experiences of preservice teachers when they were students?
3. What are the attitudes of preservice teachers towards leisure reading?
4. How do preservice teachers think their leisure reading habits will influence their teaching strategies and the creation of a classroom reading culture?

Literature review

Benefits of leisure reading

Readers who are intrinsically motivated to read often derive enjoyment from the process of leisure reading, placing inherent value in the activity as it provides them with a platform to relax and unwind (Martin-Chang et al., 2021). Leisure reading also provides increased exposure to a variety of different perspectives, allowing readers to become more critical and discerning between right and wrong and being equipped with novel

perceptions and ways of thinking (Abeyrathna, 2004). Not to mention, leisure reading plays a crucial role in attaining intellectual growth essential for lifelong learning and contributes to positive academic outcomes and is indispensable in the classroom setting.

Reading habits and attitudes of preservice teachers

Most trainee teachers in Singapore fall into the categories of being functional and detached readers, and only a few are identified as prolific readers (Cox & Schaezel, 2007). Functional readers read primarily to obtain information instead of for pleasure, whereas detached readers hold no emotional connection with the reading process. However, there are a minority of trainee teachers who read extensively for pleasure, actively “seek[ing] out opportunities to read and spend their spare time reading” as they “take great pleasure in reading”. (Cox & Schaezel, 2007: 309). These findings are echoed in a study conducted by Applegate (2004) where over half of the participants revealed that they did not experience enjoyment from the process of reading due to the “association between negative reading experiences in formal education and a reduced interest in leisure reading” (Martin-Chang et al., 2021: 1390). Due to the demands and pressure from their academic workload, the majority of the participants were dissuaded from engaging in leisure reading (Kerkhoff, 2020).

Importance of teacher leisure reading habits in the classroom

Daisey (2009) asserts that “teachers’ personal experiences with reading form an important basis for their attitudes towards infusing reading activities into their instruction” (p. 168). The skills, attitudes, and beliefs of preservice teachers (Kerkhoff, 2020; Lorenzen, 2008; Lukhele, 2013; Martin-Chang et al. 2021) are powerful in influencing the reading attitudes of students, being integral agents in the process of inculcating a habit of leisure reading. Through modelling a love for reading and promoting reading as an enjoyable process (McKool & Gespass, 2009), there is a linear relationship between the reading habits of teachers and the attitudes they bring into the classroom (Richardson et al., 1991; Wozniak, 2010; Zancanella, 1991) which can be utilised to promote student motivation. There exists a strong connection between the personal literacy activities of teachers who read for pleasure and their teaching practices in reading (Cox & Schaezel, 2007; McKool & Gespass, 2009; Morrison et al., 1999; Rummel, 1997). Studies by Bixler (2013), Cremin (2008) and Merga (2016) suggest a positive correlation between the enthusiastic reading habits of teachers and the level of motivation their students have towards reading, showcasing the extensive positive impact of a robust teacher reading identity.

Strategies to promote leisure reading

The incorporation of an increased number of literature courses and infusing methods of reading for pleasure into the English trainee teacher programs (Cox & Schaezel, 2007) will be beneficial in igniting a passion for reading, instead of merely focusing on the importance of “mechanistic literacy” (Lukhele, 2013). Fostering positive reading attitudes will result in positive reading behaviour, encouraging trainee teachers to internalise the importance of leisure reading and devote the time to do so. Additionally, “authentic reader-to-reader conversations about how and what we read; and instructor support on self-generated reading goals” (Kerkhoff, 2020: 209) could be implemented during these courses, allowing the preservice teachers to partake in in-depth discussion to generate interest and discourse around the texts (Daisey, 2009).

Methodology

Semi-structured qualitative interviews

In-depth and semi-structured qualitative interviews were first administered to eight pre-service teachers within the English Language and English Literature specialization, enrolled in the National Institute of Education in Singapore. The profile of respondents includes teachers in the Secondary track with an even spread of male and female pre-service teachers in each academic year, in the Bachelor of Arts (Education) programme. As such, they have all undertaken courses on both teaching pedagogy and content instruction, having a formal background in both the theory and practice of teaching reading.

Quantitative questionnaires

102 quantitative questionnaires were released to other pre-service teachers within the English Language specialization, across both the Bachelor of Arts (Education) as well as the Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme. The series of questions were generated from the findings of the initial interview stage, being tailored to the specific themes that had been identified and administered to wider sample size for a more accurate representation of the preservice teachers.

The qualitative to quantitative approach seeks to add value to the quantitative study conducted by Garces-Bacsal (2018), primarily focusing on pre-service teachers within the English Language specialization to obtain deeper insights into their habits and attitudes towards leisure reading, as well as generating a more refined survey from the responses and findings of the interview.

Author recognition test

Participants were invited to select the names they recognised from the long list provided, which contained real authors as well as non-authors to serve as foils to improve the accuracy of their overall performance. As “Performance on the ART correlates strongly with reading experience” (Martin-Chang, 2021: 1394), authors across genres such as contemporary adult fiction, young adult fiction and non-fiction were included to observe their reading experiences.

Findings and discussion

Preservice teacher reading habits

Despite most preservice teachers identifying as avid readers, they do not engage in leisure reading as often as they desire to. Citing pragmatic considerations such as time constraints and academic workload, these commitments reduce the frequency and opportunities they have to engage in independent reading and, align with the studies conducted by Raju (2014) and St-Clair-Thompson (2018) where leisure reading is relegated to a position of lesser importance that is forgone in the interest of academic commitments (Table 1).

This is similarly reflected in the questionnaire, where 94.1% of respondents identified school commitments as a challenge that prevents them from reading for leisure more often. These findings reinforce past research where many teachers were dissuaded from engaging in leisure reading due to the demands and pressure from their academic workload (Kerkhoff, 2020).

Preservice teachers also demonstrate a preference for reading print books compared to digital mediums. Out of the 102 respondents, 92 participants indicated that they preferred reading print books for leisure, as they enjoyed the feeling of holding a physical book and find it less tiring to read (Table 1).

The strong preference of preservice teachers to read in print is surprising of their proclivity to consume digital content as well as the affordances of convenience and accessibility of e-books. However, their preference for print books further reinforces the importance of intentionally creating the time and space to engage in leisure reading and disconnect from their digital devices.

Table 1

Key Data Excerpts from Qualitative Interview

Key Findings	Data Excerpts
<p>Preservice teacher reading habits</p>	<p>"I think because of time, it's now become more of like a monthly kind of basis where I'll pick it up and try and read a few pages. But unfortunately, I think the time has reduced because of like a lot of other commitments." (Andrew)</p> <p>"But once uni started, I guess, because of the hustle and bustle of uni life. I just didn't have time to sort of like, sit down and just enjoy a book as it is. So at the moment, I don't read many books." (Nathan)</p> <p>"I feel like digital media you don't, you know, get the feel of it of the book. I like the feel of a book and like the smell." (Theo)</p> <p>"But I believe in this experiential journey that one must go through when reading books. And it begins with the feel of the book, the smell of the book. Yeah, so all these things make books very special." (Henry)</p>
<p>Reading experiences of preservice teachers</p>	<p>"When I was in school, reading sort of became a very arduous task... it became skewed towards the academics, like, they will tell you, you need to read a certain number of books by the end of this week, and it becomes a task that I hated." (Andrew)</p> <p>"I think that the present way we teach reading is just driven to the examinations. It's not driven for real-world reading tasks or reading for enjoyment, there's minimal time carved out for this." (Henry)</p> <p>"in secondary school, again, reading wasn't much encouraged. We didn't have any teachers tell us that, or share their favourite books. So they just tell you that maxim like, you know, oh just go and read, because it's good for you, but they never really showed me how it would have benefited me." (Andrew)</p> <p>"during silent reading teachers should try and like bring a book and read along as well to model behaviour. But in primary and secondary school, no, like the teachers would be taking attendance, doing admin stuff they have to do." (Sheryl)</p>

Key Findings	Data Excerpts
Preservice teacher attitudes towards leisure reading	<p>"the kind of books and stories that we expose ourselves to will have an impact on the knowledge that we have, that we can bring into class... if like, I expose myself the more genres, then I'll be able to, like, share more variety of stories" (Kaitlyn)</p> <p>"you have that, I guess, autonomy to kind of dictate like, okay, I've read these books that I can recommend these books to the students to... pique their interest to the kind of like read more, perhaps books by the author, or even explore different genres" (Nathan)</p> <p>"All teachers need to be the role model for it... We need to be the shepherd. And our kids are the sheep, you know, you got to guide them to when, where to start reading from. You know, shape them into better readers and more critical thinkers from there...while also engaging the kids enough to help the kids realize how important it is to read or be a lifelong reader." (Henry)</p> <p>"I think it's important to model behaviour because if you just tell them, you have to read, but we're not doing it either, then it just comes across as us forcing them to do things that they don't want to do. I guess it might also be beneficial for us to show them the benefits of reading as well." (Sheryl)</p>
Print knowledge of young adult fiction	<p>"I don't know what's most popular over the past five years, amongst kids, honestly, I'm not sure. But my generation was Geronimo Stilton. As I was growing older, I know Percy Jackson was quite hot. But after that, I'm out." (Henry)</p> <p>"Book series popular among students? This one I'm not very sure." (Sheryl)</p> <p>"I think teachers should read so that we can use what they're reading... And also we should read what the students are reading so that we can show them how we can...meet them where they are at, in, in a way, like, use what they're reading for our lessons" (Ava)</p> <p>"I think it's important to, like get to know our students better, to find out their interests because what interests us may not interest them. So to be able to keep up with like the different interests of students, maybe we can like constantly like a check-in with them or like ask them what genre they prefer, or like, what kind of topics they like" (Natalie)</p>

Reading experiences of preservice teachers

Several preservice teachers shared their negative reading experiences when they were students themselves, due to a lack of interesting reading programmes and teacher engagement. Coercive reading programmes and the overemphasis on academic outcomes were counterproductive, causing them to develop negative attitudes and perceptions toward reading (Table 1).

70 participants in the questionnaire echoed their agreement, perceiving their teachers in secondary school to prioritise reading for academic outcomes instead of leisure. This hindered the creation of a positive reading culture in the classroom by causing the reading to be associated primarily with academic benefits. This supports previous research (Applegate, 2004; Martin-Chang et al., 2021) where negative reading experiences in formal education had a detrimental impact on their reading attitudes and habits.

In addition to ineffective school reading programmes, lack of teacher engagement and modelling also contributed to the largely negative reading experiences of preservice teachers. 71.5% of the respondents asserted that their teachers did not model reading for leisure regularly, and only 44.1% shared that their teachers recommended books for leisure reading (Table 1).

This necessitates a change in current programmes to become more engaging in fostering a positive reading culture, adopting more effective and interactive activities to encourage students to read for leisure. The importance of models for preservice teachers to integrate positive reading experiences into their classrooms is also highlighted, to actively engage and motivate students in their leisure reading.

Preservice teacher attitudes towards leisure reading

Aligned with previous research (Abeyrathna, 2004; Martin-Chang et al., 2021) preservice teachers unanimously agreed on the importance of leisure reading, sharing the extensive benefits it heralds. 98% of the respondents strongly agreed on the importance of students reading for leisure, and 93.1% of respondents agreed on the importance of teachers engaging in leisure reading, supporting previous studies on the benefits of leisure reading.

This finding also extends emerging literature, as several preservice teachers remarked on how teacher leisure reading is essential to expose teachers to a wide variety of interesting and engaging text they could incorporate into their teaching instruction, build on their knowledge bases and expand their repertoire of book recommendations (Table 1). This is especially striking because previous research does not discuss how leisure reading contributes to professional development and the building of teacher expertise.

Preservice teachers also recognize the pivotal role teachers play as role models in exemplifying positive reading habits, as they are important for student motivation and engagement. 95% of the participants asserted that teachers play a key role in promoting leisure reading to their students, as their leisure reading habits and attitudes will influence the reading culture among students (Table 1).

With the understanding that the leisure reading habits of teachers are integral to the development of a positive reading culture, teachers must lead by example in their own daily lives. This is in alignment with past research that asserts how the personal reading experiences of teachers influence the reading habits of students (Kerkhoff, 2020;

Lukhele, 2013, Martin-Change et al., 2021), and supports previous findings on how teacher reading promotes student motivation (McKool & Gespass, 2009; Richardson et al., 1991; Wozniak, 2010). Modelling a genuine love and appreciation for reading will greatly influence the reading attitudes of students, promoting student motivation in leisure reading.

Print knowledge of young adult fiction

Most preservice teachers demonstrated a lack of awareness of titles popular among their students and have not personally read such texts themselves (Table 1). Only 26.4% of the preservice teachers indicate that they were familiar with book series or titles popular among students, and 27.4% had read these titles. This is similarly echoed in the findings of the Author Recognition Test as seen in Table 2, as participants appeared more familiar with authors who wrote contemporary adult fiction than young adult literature.

Table 2

Scores from Author Recognition Test

	Mean	SSD	Min	Max
Contemporary Adult Fiction Authors	0.431	0.179	0	1
Young Adult Fiction Authors	0.406	0.211	0	1
Nonfiction Authors	0.186	0.118	0	1
Total Authors	0.356	0.162	0	1

This is striking as print knowledge of young adult fiction remains integral in fostering greater engagement with their students. Being aware of books popular among students will allow us to maximise their usage and incorporation into teaching instruction, which would be beneficial in engaging and motivating students. This would create a platform for teachers to recommend good books that cater to the interests of students and encourage informal discussions around books that are familiar to both teachers and students (Table 1).

Application in the classroom

As illustrated in Table 3, preservice teachers provided a wide range of recommendations for infusing pleasure into reading and instilling the habit of leisure reading in the classroom. Through modelling positive reading habits and utilising classroom strategies

such as book recommendations and discussions, teachers can influence the reading motivation of students and spark their interest in books. The social nature of reading is emphasized by several preservice teachers, advocating for the use of discussions and talk-around-text which would create more engagement and discourse around reading. This supports prior research which asserts the connection between the leisure reading of teachers and their teaching practices in reading (Cox & Schaezel, 2007; McKool & Gespass, 2009; Morrison et al., 1999), as their attitudes shape the methods and practices employed in the classroom.

Table 3

Data Excerpts from Qualitative Interview on Strategies to Promote Leisure Reading

Strategies	Data Excerpts
Allocating more time for reading	<p>“start picking up books that they like, that they enjoy, carving out time on in my classes to get them to, to just read” (Andrew)</p> <p>“reading really needs to be more front and center. And we should build our curriculum around reading materials, rather than incorporating reading materials into our curriculum” (Henry)</p>
Book recommendations	<p>“it’s also important to help learners find the books that they can enjoy” (Andrew)</p> <p>“I find out what their interests are...give them reading suggestions like what are some books they can consider” (Kaitlyn)</p>
Creating a community of readers	<p>“I want to create a community of readers...discussions and having conversations with them about their books, and participating with them in the process” (Andrew)</p> <p>“checking in on students occasionally... help students like me, who didn’t really enjoy reading, to find something that I actually enjoy” (Natalie)</p>
Engaging school reading programmes	<p>“I think when you bring in literature, drama, and everything it becomes it makes it come alive, it makes them more engaged in the book when they know that, know this something you can like act it out or something” (Andrew)</p> <p>“storytelling sessions...then whoever wants to come listen right, and they can just share, like maybe a few, like a chapter or two of a book... Maybe put up like posters too, like different stories and different books” (Theo)</p>

Limitations

Electing to work with preservice teachers within Singapore limits the generalizability of the findings to in-service teachers or teachers in other countries. Preservice teachers lack substantial experience in teaching, and as such their leisure reading habits, attitudes and strategies are prone to change when they begin teaching extensively. As such, monitoring the respondents after the completion of their programme will allow us to observe how such professional opportunities will alter their reading experiences and attitudes.

Additionally, the Author Recognition Test is employed on the assumption that greater amounts of reading would translate into higher author recognition scores, across the respective genres. However, not all readers pay close attention to the authors of the books that they read, and thus it may not be able to accurately capture their awareness of existing literature. Thus, to improve the accuracy and reliability of the test scores, other instruments such as the Title Recognition Test and self-disclosure could be conducted to improve triangulation.

Table 4

Table of Names and Genres in the Author Recognition Test

Contemporary Adult Fiction Authors	
A.J. Finn	George Orwell
Aldous Huxley	George R.R. Martin
Alice Sebold	Harper Lee
Amor Towles	Haruki Murakami
Anthony Doerr	J.D. Salinger
Arthur Golden	J.R.R. Tolkien
Arundhati Roy	Jane Austen
Audrey Niffenegger	John Steinbeck
Celeste Ng	Leo Tolstoy
Charles Dickens	Margaret Atwood
Charlotte Bronte	Mark Twain
Danielle Steele	Mary Shelley
David Nicholls	Oscar Wilde
Delia Owens	Paula Hawkins
E.L. James	Paulo Coelho
Ernest Hemingway	Ray Bradbury
F. Scott Fitzgerald	Stephen King
Franz Kafka	Stieg Larsson
Fyodor Dostoyevsky	Thomas Harris
	Virginia Woolf

Young Adult Fiction Authors

Adam Silvera	Lauren Oliver
Agatha christie	Lemony Snicket
Angie Thomas	Lewis Carroll
C.S. Lewis	Lois Lowry
Cecelia Ahem	Madeline Miller
Dan Brown	Mark Haddon
Enid Blyton	Markus Zusak
Gilian Flynn	Nicholas Sparks
H.G. Wells	Patrick Ness
Heather Morris	Patrick Pullman
J.K. Rowling	R.L. Stein
James Patterson	Rainbow Rowell
Jenny Han	Roald Dahl
Jodi Picoult	Sarah J. Maas
John Boyne	Sophie Kinsella
John Green	Stephenie Meyer
Jojo Myoes	Suzanne Collins
Kazuo Ishiguro	Tom Clancy
Kevin Kwan	William Golding
Khaled Hosseini	Yann Martel

Non-Fiction Authors

Adam Kay	John Gray
Barack Obama	Jordan B. Peterson
Bill Bryson	Laura Hillenbrand
Dale Carnegie	Louise Hay
Daniel Kahneman	Malala Yousafzai
Dave Pelzer	Malcom Gladwell
David Allen	Marie Kondo
Elizabeth Kolbert	Mark Manson
Gillian McKeith	Napolean Hill
James Clear	Paul Kalanithi
Rhonda Byrne	Peter Kay
Richard Dawkins	Siddhartha Mukherjee
Robert Greene	Spencer Johnson
Robert Kiyosaki	Stephen Hawking
Yuval Noah Harrari	Stephen R. Covey

Foils

Adam Kerr	Irene Morgan
Alan Gill	Kimberly Welch
Anthony Knox	Mary Allan
Chloe White	Molly Sutherland
Colin Edmunds	Penelope Randall
Dan Clark	Ryan Alsop
Elizabeth Greene	Sarah Ferguson
Ella Henderson	Sue Grant
Emily Clarkson	Vanessa Morrison
Evan Underwood	William Nolan

Conclusion

Teacher education programmes should instil within future teachers their integral role in shaping student reading and espouse the importance of their reading. Engaging in leisure reading should be an intentional activity where time and effort are devoted to inculcating positive reading habits, for the personal and professional development of teachers. Current student reading programmes should be re-examined for greater effectiveness and engagement, as the overemphasis on academic outcomes may be detrimental to the reading attitudes of students. Students should be provided with the agency to select texts they have a genuine interest in and have authentic reader-to-reader conversations to transform reading into a social activity. Finally, increased access to popular young adult literature titles should be provided to preservice teachers, to incorporate popular texts among students into classroom instruction.

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