

The Importance of Self-Directed Reading Habits for University Education and Career preparation: The Case of Female Students of the College of Law of Haramaya University, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This paper is based on a qualitative case study designed to investigate the experiences and viewpoints regarding the importance of self-directed reading habits for university education and career preparation of a group of female students studying at the Law College (LC) of Haramaya University (HU), Ethiopia. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceived use of their self-directed reading habits for their academic performance and readiness for the future workforce at Law College. This study employed qualitative research methods. In effect, FGD and one-on-one interviews and detailed self-completed written reflections were employed to secure data from purposively sampled participants. The data was then coded, categorized and thematically analyzed systematically. The findings show that the pre-university self-directed reading habits acquired over the years have a bearing on LC academic performance and self-preparation for the would-be jobs. Given the purposes of law and law courses reading requirements, the informants, however, viewed the self-directed reading habits reinforced in HU as having not much contribution to law academic performances and the legal professions of their interest. Our participants who felt no longer reinforcing desirable reading habits for the same or related goals, owing to the academic environment of the College/the University, constituted the majority. Based on the study we recommend the College to revisit course instructions and/or curriculum to ensure whether it addresses the intent of students' self-directed reading habits, law education and legal posts adequately. LC should encourage students to read around and beyond its curricula, by creating opportunities alongside the regular, field-focused readings.

Keywords: Self-directed reading, qualitative case study, academic performance, professional self-preparation, law females

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Introduction

Reading is a ‘lifelong habit’ of making meanings from varied sources: print, electronic or online materials, to thrive or survive the complexities of this century, the digital age. Indisputably, at the core of self-education and lifelong learning, lies avid reading (Chettri and Rout, 2013). This essentially requires wide reading beyond and above its basic consumptions (Ruterana, 2012; Du Toit, 2001) should the act be instilled in early age (Baba and Affendi, 2020; Chettri and Rout, 2013; Yallappa, 2022), transformed into a habit (Andayani and Maryam, 2018; Annable, 2017) in adolescence or adulthood (Annable, 2017; Waghmare, 2018), and become the reader’s taste sustainably (Abeyrathna & Zainab, 2004). “The most effective and lasting method in the continuous transformation of the reading process” is “to gain reading habits” (Akçay, 2017, p44). The term reading habits is a crude concept (Moniek, et al., 2020). For this study, it is defined as self-directed reading habits wherein law females read physical and/or digital materials passionately, regularly and continuously at places and times of their choosing, for their own goals, without having feelings of pressure from tests, assignments, or case debriefings.

Although reading habits are best formed in childhood (Yallappa, 2022), Waghmare foresees that they become goal-oriented at university (2018). University age, 17-25, is the most intense and productive stage in formal education, requiring reading act frequently and necessarily (Nashath & Akram, 2021; Kamhieh, 2017). Kamhieh strongly argues that no ideal place on the ladder of education “than at the tertiary level,” where students must read voluminous and lengthy materials to succeed (2017, p2). Yet as the modern technology use continues to revolutionize a university youth, this kind of reading is severely challenged (Balan et al., 2019; Hakemulder and Mangen, 2024), and a rapid shift in reading behaviors and habits becomes imminent (Garza et al., 2014), a felt challenge in Ethiopian universities (Mbhele, 2016; Misganaw, 2017; Tadesse, 2017). Consequently, inculcating a love of reading in students has become increasingly difficult for instructors (International Literacy Association, [ILA], 2019). Largely, that has impact on education and jobs (Shehu and Jeromes, 2022). Therefore, empowering learners to self-direct their reading lives is sought (ILA, 2019). At university, bad reading habits cause “difficulty in most academic courses...” and isolation from college life (Lowe, 1984, p22), whereas good reading habits contribute to improved academic, social and professional lives (Erdem, 2015; Nashath & Akram, 2021; Parlette & Howard, 2010). They increase an individual’s knowledge (Ezeala, 2020), critical thinking skills and oral fluency (Balan, et al., 2019) reading strategies and study skills (Rosli et al., 2017), comprehension, and competence which positively influence students’ academic success (Parodi et al., 2019). It follows from this that reading habits are a necessity for both the academic and the professional pursuits of higher learning institution students (Erdem, 2015; Kumar, et al., 2022; Rosli, et al., 2017).

Importantly, students who enjoy personal, educational and professional success are those who maintain a consistent reading of academic and non-academic materials (Applegate et al., 2014; Balan, et al., 2019; Garza, et al. 2014; Huang et al., 2014; Mansur, et al. 2013; Mokhtari et al., 2011; Te Maro et al., 2019). Passionate readers, who read frequently even when the contents they read lacked a direct relation with their studies, would be better performers and higher achievers (Medina and Villarreal, 2020). In fact, reading should not occur as a result of conscious pressure resulting from academic works or as a way to prepare for employment (State et al., 2010). More importantly, students should be encouraged to read regularly and develop a self-directed reading habits (Annable; Erickson and Koppenhaver, 2007; ILA, 2019; Johnson & Blair, 2003; Oricco, 2017; 2017). If learners are self directed, then they are more likely to continuously engage in reading (Annable, 2017; Belzer, 2002), enhance their reading volume useful to grow as readers, increase their confidence, competence, and a love for reading (ILA, 2019). These inputs are thought to add to better academic achievement and learning (Chin Ee Loh & Baoqi Sun, 2019).

Professionally, it is argued that people have to develop themselves after formal education to adapt to change, for self-education and career growth (Buyukgoze, 2023; Erdem, 2015). For example, knowledge is continually updated and expanded, so the competences and skills acquired during the formal study should be actively improved (Foong & Khoo, 2015; Wielkiewicz & Meuwissen, 2014). Yet the generic skills a student acquired as a graduate attribute maybe inadequate to fit him/her for the

dynamic situations of employment and workplace (Jamaludin et al., 2020; Moore & Morton, 2017). However, it is also argued that people are unlikely to read, especially in Africa, once their study is over (Nalusiba, 2010). Evidently, the reading habits of educated Ethiopians were found to be poor (Hassen, 2016). For others, the nature of their jobs makes them too busy to read (Fernandez-Blanco, et al., 2015). Therefore, the undergraduates, the future professionals, should possess the habits of reading that elevates their intellectual capital and efficiency necessary for the social and the workforce (Buyukgoze, 2023; Erdem, 2015; Foong & Khoo 2015). Above all, the huge surveys regarding the abilities and general employability of graduates have led to current initiatives in universities both locally and globally to seriously focus on making graduates 'job ready' for their work in the professions (Gill, 2018; Moore & Morton, 2015). As such, there is a move towards making the skills and conceptions more noticeable and explicit in the higher education curriculum" (Gill, 2018). When it comes to reading, university time is an opportunity to create enjoying awareness and consciousness (Erdem, 2015) or an on-campus reading culture, by organizing book clubs, special interest reading groups and literary events (Hatane et al., 2021; Nathanson et al., 2008), and by encouraging students to share their favorite books and/or authors (Buyukgoze, 2023).

Of course, reading habits that ensure fruitful learning and profession are rooted in childhood (Davidovitch & Gerkerova, 2023). Still, good reading habits should prolong learning and/or reading beyond school. Impliedly, present-day performances are the byproduct of the past reading habits (Zare et al., 2023) and those that were sustained from the past and/or enriched during university years. But in tertiary-level studies on reading habits in general and field-specific reading habits of students (including law), this looked underestimated (Nicolosi & Reiter, 2024; Owens, 2016; Suresh & Thanuskodi, 2022). Hence, our study tried to address the issues, alongside their influences on current performances of law learners. It has been learnt that reading habits are priced more in law studies and jobs (McKinney, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Rani, 2022; Suresh & Thanuskodi, 2022; Spencer, 2004). In law, the act of reading demands both disciplined and imaginative habits of mind (Mitchell, 2012). Moreover, law is often transformative, often vague, and often difficult to conclude and being informed through persistent reading of print and digital genres is emphasized (Graham, 2013; Suresh & Thanuskodi, 2022). The academics also urge researchers to ensure law students read regularly and avidly, in considerable amount and complexity (MacKinney, 2012; Spencer, 2004). This was why this study prioritized law students, with our focal groups being female undergraduates (See Participants section for more rationales).

That said, except the common narratives that females outsmart boys or emphasis of girlhood in reading literatures, there is limited scholarly studies that inform what their reading habits are like (Lowe, 2016) and the impact of their readings. These included college-level gender-based and female only works (in overseas and in Ethiopia). The latter, published and accessible ones were done by Azad in 2019; Husaini in 2013; Jayamma in 2017, and Kamhie in 2017. Azad studied 60 females reading frequency, preferred language and content, and factors debilitating their reading and the choices, through questionnaires. Husaini surveyed 105 undergraduate medical females' knowledge, attitude and practice' of reading habits. Kamhie explored 40 off-campus women's book reading choices using survey methods, interviews and journals to identify their chosen literary genres, authors and actors. However, none of these studies examined whether their respondents' reading habits helped them to be ready for their esteemed jobs, and the present work was in part initiated in response to this. In Ethiopian context, literatures available to us include females general academic performances and achievements in school (Ali, 2018; Tadesse, 2009), in university (Marsha, et al., 2013) in national exams (like Grade 12 exam and university exit-exam). For instance, Ministry of Education of Ethiopia reported that females' scores for the school leaving exam of 2022/23 were far lower than that of males. Even the females who managed to join universities demonstrated lower academic performances (Tiruneh & Petros, 2014; Firew, 2013; Tadesse, 2009). A case in point is HU law graduates of 2023. Of all students, 86 (100%) only 7(8%) females passed the exit-exam (LC Registrar student records) although the College is thought to recruit 'higher performers' to join its field. However small and partial these data would seem, the results are negative when it comes to their performances. Likewise, no existing evidence (to our knowledge) expose whether or not their self-directed reading habits contribute to their university education and prospective profession. Thus, the current study aimed to

explore the views of regular, undergraduate, LC females regarding their pre-university (past) and present self-directed reading habits impact on their HU academic performances and self-preparation for their post-university posts. The study attempted to find the answer to the question: 'How do the females perceive the importance of self-directed reading habits for their academic performances and professional self-preparation?' This paper is further guided by the following two sub-research questions:

a) What do regular, undergraduate LC female students think about the importance of their past self-directed reading habits for their law academic performances and professional self preparation?

b) What do the students think about the significance of their LC self-directed reading habits for the ongoing academic performances and readiness for their preferred occupations, if anything?

Methodology

This study aimed to investigate the students' viewpoints about the importance of past and present self-directed reading habits for their LC academic and expected work lives. With this in mind, the researchers engaged in the research processes. This calls for what Bhattacharjee (2012) refers to as 'the subjective interpretation of participants involved', by interviewing them and by getting them to reflect on their self-directed reading habit influences, and practices, and then reconciling among their responses through their subjective perspectives. The study was informed by the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism promotes negotiation of meanings and perspectives. Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Design

This paper is the outcome of a cross-sectional study done as part of a larger PhD dissertation project. It adopts qualitative research approach, with an interpretive case study design. One motivation to use the design emanated from the feeling that no research of similar intent has been done with the target participants. Thus, exploratory nature of data extraction or generation was felt more desirable (Creswell, 2009). Studying in depth, exploring their prior and HU reinforced self-directed reading habits, it was hoped to get a detailed knowledge (Singh, 2006) about views on their self-directed reading habits contributions to their academic performances and to equip themselves for their jobs.

Participants

Female undergraduate students in LC of HU were the study population. They were considered for the study at least for four reasons. One reason that drives this is our contention that they have been under pressure/unprivileged to develop and sustain their reading habits especially in our context. It follows from this that an insignificant number of them (compared to males) succeed in joining higher learning institutions even though their source population figure is considered far greater than any other members of society. As such, doing research with them to examine and understand their reading habits, and what consequence(s) that might have on their lives is felt as a moral and professional duty vested with a researcher. The second motive for their choice is the fact that (except comparative gender-based studies) relevant studies are scant. For instance, Lowe (2016) admit the presence of scholarly works that portrayed girlhood in widely read novels, but what "has seen little interest, however, is in the investigation of girls' reading habits in the past" (p. 340). The third reason is to do with the findings from our pilot study that law education and good law professions require deep and wide reading while the practice in the College environment appeared to be to the contrary, so the participant suggested the need for more investigation. To some extent, the findings that females are better in reading habits and outperformed their male counterparts were a captivating issue to do this research with, and this is the fourth rationale for their choice.

For the College had no third year by the time the data was taken, purposive sampling, which Clarke et al. (2005, p) claims is "the most successful technique" was applied to 34 female students in the rest batches. Their sample sizes were determined by the theoretical saturation principle (Flick, 2014). To reach the point, the data was collected and analyzed iteratively, switching back and forth

during the processes. The saturation was met as mentions of criteria became increasingly repetitive. The students had distinct sizes from one given year level to another. Then a proportional quota sampling was used to distribute the samples into the batches proportionally (e.g., to ensure sample representativeness).

Trustworthiness and Consistency

For this study, the format of the contents and structures of the instruments were modeled on the instruments of others (e.g., Annable, 2017; Moniek et al., 2020), but the order of the items within a given tool is more of our logical reasoning and experience of how they should be. To assess their dependability, the tools were piloted (Ronald et al., 2024). Isaac & Michael (1995) recommend sample sizes of 10 to 30 participants, and we trialed with 10 randomly chosen law female students. This helped to fix issues such as clarity, organization and length of the items. The modified versions were used for the main study. To make our study credible, we also tried best to collect and present accurate, rich, unbiased accounts of data as revealed to us, and as experienced by our participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Nowell, et al 2017; Tobin & Begley, 2004). An almost 16 weeks engagement in the data collection process, staying in the setting presumably enabled us to realize the goal. Building trust and rapport between our respondents and us, we also feel that we were able to secure data that would translate in to accurate findings (Creswell, 2014). The accuracy of the analyses and findings was further checked through member-checks and external audits (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given their sizes, the member-checking was done with some informants whose datasets were used in the study to answer the research questions, and where we felt unconfident on the accuracy of the transcriptions and analyses, but no inaccuracy reports were received. Two experienced PhD candidates assisted in auditing the transcripts, and we also got comments on the analyses, interpretations and conclusions of the study. Attempts were also made to prove the consistency of the analysis and findings across various researchers and different studies (Gibbs, 2007). Besides, much effort was exerted to describe the processes of our work in details so that future researchers might trace them (e.g., to replicate in similar contexts) incase they wish to do so (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, justifications for why and how we used certain theory, methods, analyses (Koch, 1994) was explained at each stage, hoping that our audiences would understand the rationales behind the decisions and assumptions made (Nowell, et al., 2015).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Three semi-structured instruments were triangulated to collect the data. One-on-one interview was used to get in-depth responses of the participants. Focus group discussions elicited a broad area of data covering their pre- and the while-university self-directed reading habits in context of the aforementioned objectives of this paper. For the same purpose, self-completed written reflections guide allowed opportunities to collect data requiring complete, detailed reflections which the format of the rest instruments would not support, and considered time-consuming, or boring, and thus leading to unwillingness on the part of informants. Additionally, the guide was expected to grant freedom and flexibility for the researched, while at the same time minimizing the data collectors' intrusion, thus maintaining positionality. The questions in all the tools are similar but they vary in number of items and level of details/sub-questions. The written self-reflection contain the largest number of items each with open-ended prompts (e.g., the Hows?, Whys?), to allow the participants to personally read and reflect on them in detail within a week. To give better context for analyses and interpretations of the data required to answer the research questions, the guide included background data. This was in part made based on Pallant's (2011, p., 53) advice: "In studies involving human participants, it is useful to collect information on the number of people or cases in the sample ...education level, and any other relevant background information." Of the available law females (34), 25 of them willingly filled out paper-based self-reflection guide and returned them to representatives of each class. Thus, this study determined that their ages, ranging from 19 to 23, with most of them attended good schools, and had good reading motivations and positive attitudes. Many of them come from urban, educated families' with good reading culture.

The informants were contacted through the College personnel and law female representatives at their setting. Those interested in the study provided their names and phone numbers for follow-up contact, typically for one-on-one interviews. In order to encourage them to participate, they were informed that the interview would take not more than 60 minutes. Besides this, refreshments (Parlette & Howard, 2010) and mobile card gifts were incentivized to compensate them. As with refreshment, the groups were invited to coffee and/or tea. This was used as a platform to encourage the exchange of natural/casual conversations, thereby creating a more relaxed environment.

The interview took place in legal female students' office owing to their preference. Notes were taken during the interviews to supplement the interview records, to document the observations (e.g., of the relevant non-verbal signals noted as the interviews unfold) and to keep a back up incase the recording system fails (Mack, et al., 2005), or the interviewees were uninterested to be audioed. Actually, system failure happened while moderating one of the group interviews and we kept extensive notes as complementary data. As Dornyei (2007) correctly argues, "It is very difficult to get someone who is both competent and ready to engage in this time-consuming activity", so the present researchers conducted both one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The interview data were recorded with MiPad voice recorder. Then, the recorded data were coded. The coded data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following the six procedures developed by Nowell, et al. (2017).

Largely, themes were generated from the data but the presentation of the results and discussions arising out of the data were organized around the two research questions above. The themes generated from the final codes were categorized under various themes and sub-themes. To ensure the quality of the analysis, data reduction, data display and data category strategies (Cohen et al., 2007) were also followed. For example, while analyzing the informants responses, two major themes emerged across the whole datasets, and the matching data were reduced to these emergent categories, to enhance readability, and to do further rigorous analyses and interpretations. Moreover, transcripts and analyses were done in line with ethical issues.

Results

The importance of past self-directed reading habits for university education

Here the students claimed to have had a base for the habits of reading developed since their childhoods, and that thought to have importance for their learning and their dream professions. For example, many of them commented that the materials they enjoyed reading mainly had no direct relationship with their academic and career ambitions but thought "the materials supported them in different ways." What Hasu and Feriha thought to be the direct effect of their self-directed reading in particular was critical thinking skills. Read the datasets taken from their interview responses consequently:

For example, I acquired critical thinking from it. Reading self-help books enrich critical thinking. ... This is essential for learning. And most of what we learn in law needs critical thinking. My reading habits helped me to view things in a multidimensional way. What we call critical thinking. When we entered law, we noticed this kind of thing more often. It has a connection with critical thinking. Being critical in turn helped me to understand subjects well.

Both Hasu and Feriha had the idea that the critical thinking skills they acquired believed to be essential for their current area of study (law). Feriha perceived to have tested such skills in practice, and that they assisted her to view things from multiple angles and to internalize law subjects. On her part, Yabs remembered using (at home and school) Wi-Fi to download and read materials of her preferences (e.g., to review books) as a result of which she said to have learnt how to analyze and evaluate materials. Similarly, Rachas said that her parents used to encourage her to write reflections on and evaluations of the books she was reading, and she recalled that "...Now, there is some effect of it." For these readers, it could be said that their previous self-directed reading habits enabled them to acquire the skills of analyses, syntheses and evaluations of information/materials read. Not only this, their existing readings also thought to develop other life skills. For example, when Hasu was asked

whether she perceived her self-directed reading habits would prepare her for the expected job, she responded 'Yes' unequivocally. As an evidence for this, she responded that her prior reading content preferences mainly reflected the multifaceted aspects of life (e.g., social, occupational, spiritual, etc). When asked to clarify the reasons for the choices, she responded:

Life is not academics only," and "We won't work on uniform things. We meet and work with different people. We find people following different religions.

This reflection would indicate that Hasu was conscious of the workplace behaviors, relationships and duties beforehand and getting herself ready for future coping mechanisms (Erdem, 2015). In other words, she was mentally and psychologically getting her ready at the College so that she might lead a successful professional life. On the other hand, Birukt and Yerus indicated that they used to read various contents during schools, most of which were large volume materials. Here follows Birukt's response in this regard:

I like reading long story-based fictions. And my reading of lengthy books, I would say, reading much doesn't bore me for a longer time now.... I don't feel impatient. Mindset books change our minds and thinking, especially about the importance of goal-setting.

Here Brukt's responses appear to emphasize that her habits of reading lengthy materials in the past helped her to develop patience and stamina to stay reading for longer times at LC. Yerus shared Birukt's perception. Importantly, Graham (2013) states that "...effective legal analyst and writer requires practice and patience" (p, xi), and thus confirming the view of the respondents. Experiences also witness that students who have endurance to stay on the task of reading can increase the likelihood of reading amount, and better performances are highly likely. For example, prior findings revealed that the amount of reading is predictive of students' reading ability, overall performance and achievement (e.g., Winberg, 2022). In her extract above, Brukt also viewed that her self-directed reading habits benefitted her to be flexible, thoughtful and goal-oriented. In fact, some educationalists witness these to be among the qualities of successful students. They are flexible to change minds, or to take risks for their learning, if need be. At the same, Brukt and many other informants who claimed to read lengthy materials were to do with fictions (e.g., the novels). Although reading such kinds of materials as part of their leisure activities is presumably meant to have fun, but that could also positively affect their academic performance (Parlette & Howard, 2010). Yerus also said to have acquired oral fluency/communication skills due to her participation in school literacy contest that others (e.g. Bets, Fen, and Feriha) claimed to have the exposure, too. Researches on reading habits (e.g., by Rabaud et al., 2018) would approve that reading prompts interpersonal communication. Here is what Yerus has to say:

There were three programs in a week. On Mondays, we were required to prepare and report news. On Wednesdays, we were expected to present book reviews. On Thursdays, we were required to read entertaining issues and present them. ...I believe that this has helped me a lot.

This shows that the school created a positive reading atmosphere more likely to impact their habits of reading which may translate into their academic performances and enrich them to qualify for the work world at HU. For the school program, Yerus said: "Reading too much was expected of us highly." This experience actually might foster her ability to read the bulk of reading materials on law in the University and achieve progress in her self-education and associated benefits.

The importance of self-directed reading practices for future career

The participants had affirmative perceptions about the importance of their present self-directed readings in their education, and readiness at the College for the career. For example, Hasu said to have read both academic and non-academic materials extensively. Moreover, she talked about using Internet oftentimes to read widely around legal-based materials. Like Hasu, Aminch stated that she accessed Internet to download relevant and latest law books meant to read at her conveniences. In LC, Feriha liked to read "current law-related news, new arrivals and history" mostly whenever she went

online. Hasu particularly resorted to Internet to make up gaps in her lecture notes, attributed to the lecturers' instructional approaches. Here is what she said:

The lecturers have the trend of 'bulking up' lectures. Most of the time, they didn't point out the main point/topical idea correctly. Searching for the key point/main point on the Internet I read. Once I have grasped the key point and internalized it, I would go back to reading the 'wider' ones.

As shown in the responses, the participants access/download Internet resources related to their law discipline. Evidently, Internet is used a strategy to get gist of lecture notes/to supplement lectures (Hasu), to download updated law books (Aminch), to read recent law information (Feriha). Despite the differences in the volume of material, or specific purpose, the results for these participants witness that the primary intentions would be to facilitate their performance in law courses. On the other hand, "In the future, all what we do won't be identical. We will work with different people, so my reading habits contribute..." is the response Hasu gave to clarify that her present self-directed reading habits was also meant to prepare her for on-job requirements. Feriha also shared the expectations of Hasu as follows:

Law education requires reading a lot... Mostly we are expected to be good lawyers or judges...and this demands reading widely. Reading today makes our future job easier. And this is the culture of law. We need to read more yet. On her part, Rachas pointed out the following: ... Unless you have some kind of reading base, it affects the job you want to do. You have to know what the case/accusations are likely to be about, what generates it, and the like. ... You cannot represent your clients well. For the future job, we are even required to do more aggressive reading. Reading habits have effects on education as well as future careers.

Overall, the responses indicate that being a good lawyer and judge, and law field in general needs reading broadly and critically, updating oneself from different sources. For both purposes, the results further expose that law students should build firm foundations of their reading habits at LC. In this regard, Tigy shared the optimism and asserted that, Reading is a must for academic performance. My reading habits of today are a base for my future career. I assume that my current reading is a preparation for the forthcoming thing. I think it enhances my research ability. Here Tigy underlines the necessity of having reading habits for academic performance and hoped that reading habits would benefit her in the future life, including job. In sum, these females at least in principle recognized that their present and past self-directed reading habits are essential for better performances in their academic and prospective careers. Conversely, the majority of respondents were either unhappy with or did not believe they were in the habits of reading (in terms of intensity, variety, frequency and time availability) in LC by then. Given facilities (e.g., Internet, library) in university, we found this to be against our expectations, and we were interested to raise further questions. Among the responses garnered, Feriha expressed that she was reading and writing better and made a big progress in her skills and thinking capacity in the past than when she was in LC.

With reassessment of her readings over the four/five years in HU, Feriha regretted missing important qualities one would get by reading books, which in her view, had a lot to do with law education. As she was one of the would-be law graduates, this resentment might be triggered by the feeling of, for example, incompetence for the job(s) she was longing for. Conceptually, the viewpoint of Racha's was more alike:

Now we are more used to PowerPoint-based reading. And we are habited to looking for shorter versions to do assignments, or prepare for exams, and compete with others pretending to be smart.

Here, in principle, using PowerPoint as a medium is not a problem. But their formats usually suit shorter versions (s), so they de-contextualize the wider concepts of the original information organized as part of a book, for example. Then, if the students rely on them for much of the

College/course requisites and feel 'satisfied' or learn that there is no need to read further beyond, shallow and shorter forms of reading habits are likely to prevail (Delgado et al., 2018). In case of Racha, she appeared to think that their present-day reading habits (e.g., reading shorter texts) were also shaped by technology-assisted instructional mode of lecturers. Yet she sounded unconfident and frustrated that this mode of reading is unlikely to assist in their better performances. Yabs and Tigy too, felt incompleteness with their ongoing self-directed reading habits but were optimistic about the importance of the habits for the said goals. Yabs hoped that her reading habits would empower her to become a better person, a lawyer or one who gets employed in international organizations. For this sake, Yabs admitted that reading research articles and books, and maintaining the habits is a necessity. In turn, this would have implications for the lecturers and the College at large, for instance, to create awareness raising activities, to give assignments and tests that encourage students to read beyond/around the power point-based lectures.

Moreover, what most of the participants thought to be impediments to reinforcing their present reading habits were being too busy. Azad (2019) and Spencer (2004) recognize this scenario. Law students are "time-pressured and, in large numbers, not doing their reading". One of the evidences cited in literatures is that the reading materials require higher cognitive skills and extensive reading habits to understand and perform better (Spencer, 2004, p. 9). From our experiences as instructors we also know that students, including those in law fields are required to be knowledgeable and 'experts' at least in the courses for which they were enrolled in the university. Then, they have to do interim assignments, case debriefings, debates (moot court debates) and take tests, including exit exams hoped to serve them as credentials for national-level requirements and largely for the workforce. This again needs scheduling extra sessions to train and/or revise the key areas in their disciplines hoping that they will be able to perform well and achieve better outcomes. Feeling overwhelmed with the tasks of reading, the learners' complaining about 'lack of time', therefore, started to loom up. On the other hand, our participants' actions and personalities, especially due to the new technology have been found to have fair shares in competing with their reading time. For example, Tigy, Yash, Mah, and Fen said that they were reading much during school times partly because they avoided keeping personal phones with them mostly due to restrictions by their parents and/or schools. But, they owned the devices as they came to HU, and more options (e.g., free access to WiFi) were available to them in the campus.

Here evidences from their datasets further indicated their interests particularly in social media for enjoyment far outbalanced the reading they should have engaged in. This may lead to bad reading habits whose outcomes could be difficulty with academic courses (Lowe, 1984), and their legal careers which essentially require nurturing deep and wide reading. In fact, the majority of the participants expressed their will (some with indignation) to change their reading behaviors and read more as long as they were in the University to help them do better academically and professionally. Such kinds of belief and interest are predictive of taking learning more seriously throughout their lives (Huang et al., 2014; Nathanson et al., 2008; Rabaud et al., 2018; Wielkiewicz & Meuwissen, 2014), implying future research to consider this area for further informed outcomes.

Discussion

The study suggested that female students' past reading habits they acquired overtimes had highly contributed to their present-time academic performances and preparation for their next jobs. For example, many of them commented that the materials they enjoyed reading mainly had no direct relationship with their academic and career ambitions but thought "the materials supported them in different ways." Here existing findings found positive link between the materials read regardless of whether the materials are related or not and performance and achievements of students (e.g., Medina and Villarreal, 2020), confirming the assertion of the informants. More specifically, the results further indicated that the reading habits the participants had helped them to get critical thinking skills, and analytical skills.

Both ingredients are considered to have higher importance to law academic performance and legal professions, as claimed by previous researchers such as Balan et al (2019), Graham (2013) and

Christensen (2007). For instance, most of the law school reading works are taken from casebooks, which were not also intended for law students originally, and are often difficult to understand, so “Higher-performing students tend to...apply critical thinking to their reading” (Christensen, 2007, p). Such line of thought broadly endorses the cognitivists’ philosophy of reading. Moreover, such skills are needed in legal analysis (Graham, 2013), suggesting the need for encouraging self-directed reading habits to enhance law females higher cognitive skills should the College expect them to have better performances. However, our participants complained that the trend in the college of law in HU does not encourage this culture.

When asked if they have reinforced their past or acquired present self-directed reading habits during the LC study, and (if so) they felt the habits had importance for their education and careers, the majority of results reveal that participants were either dissatisfied with or did not perceive they were in the habits of reading by then. Given facilities (e.g., Internet, library) and in the University, we found this to be against our expectations, and we were interested to raise further questions. In our questioning, we found students do read for both for academic and non-academic purposes using physical and Internet resources during the College days. The findings, thus, align with Rani (2022), Spencer (2004) , and Suresh and Thanuskodi (2022). However, when they compared their present-day and past reading habits, they thought that their previous reading encouraged deep and wide reading. In contrast, the results hinted that the present self-directed reading habits reinforced at LC meant for their learning in the College were more characterized by shallow, short and quick reading. The participants concern could be likened to what Delgado et al., (2018) call The *Shallowing Hypothesis*. This type of reading habit encourages superficial interactions and likely to cause difficulty to engage in more cognitively challenging modes of reading requiring sustained attention (Delgado et al., 2018). The results stating the reasons of most of the participants indicate that they were too busy during the college years. Azad (2019) and Spencer (2004) recognize this scenario. On the other hand, evidences from their datasets further point to their interests particularly in social media for enjoyment far outbalanced the reading they should have engaged in. That is, what the media psychology call *Hedonic Motive* (Oliver& Raney, 2011; Hakemulder and Mangen, 2024) seemed to overtake their reading habits and behaviors. This may lead to bad reading habits whose outcomes could be difficulty with academic courses (Lowe, 1984), and their legal careers which essentially require deep and wide reading. This would have implications for the law instructors and the College in general to revisit the instruction and/or curriculum for improving the reading habits of the students that commensurate with the intent of law education and legal posts.

Conclusions

The results provided data for the perceived importance of self-directed reading habits for academic performance and self-preparation for the professions of LC undergraduate females. It is perceived that being a good legal professional and studying law in general needs wide and deep reading habits, updating oneself from different sources. The themes revealed that participants’ pre-university experiences gained from self-directed reading habits were perceived to have significance to their overall LC academic performances and legal professions they endeared to secure in the future. Because of their past reading habits, a sizable number of informants claimed to have acquired and developed higher levels of cognitive skills, knowledge and strategies applicable to their college-time performances. Critical thinking skills were regarded as highly important skills for law education and legal careers. Moreover, lots of them felt that they were managed to keep the self-directed readings in LC on a regular and consistent basis. Given the depth and breadth of their readings, almost all participants, however, thought that their HU based-reading habits fell short of the ‘standard’ for law courses and law learning purposes, and ultimately for the performances supposed to ensure their success academically and professionally. Unlike the self-directed reading habits they were accustomed to in the past, due to the academic-based reading culture in LC, and found themselves under time and institutional pressures to work primarily towards this goal. Yet the findings witnessed that individual female learners’ behaviors (the ‘inappropriate’ dispense of reading time typically for technologies, e.g., social media) use at the expense of reading had fair shares in the thought pressures, and interference with maintaining the reading habits useful for their personal and institutional purposes.

The study of self-directed reading of students may contribute for current research to thrive the reading engagement and love for reading which is already at stake with the rise of digital technology. It was also learnt that COVID-19 pandemic increased importance of self-directed learning and lifelong learning, which would also imply the need for fostering self-directed reading habits among learners so that they may turn themselves to self-directed readers in similar situations of national and global challenge.

The participated law females had concerns that LC environment emphasized shallow, forced academic reading culture and overburdened them with related works, so they failed to read as widely and thoroughly as required to perform well. Thus, we recommend the College to encourage self directed reading habits, by creating opportunities alongside the regular, field-focused reading/learning curricula. Based on previous literature on self-directed reading habits, we also suggest future researchers to investigate the culture, practices and facilities of the higher education institutions for the promotion of self-directed reading habits for undergraduates improved performance in learning and self-preparation for the jobs.

The research outcomes also revealed that the law female learners' personal factors (e.g., their mismanagement of time for using modern technologies for purposes other than reading) highly competed with their reading time. Here, they should be reminded that they have to be time-wise and purposeful. Moreover, the College should make efforts to offer short-term trainings especially before they join the discipline. Alternatively, it may be good if a student owns manual that guides them to adjust their reading behaviors, or to learn how to strike balances among their independent reading lives intended (be it for personal, social and fun), and for their educations and future occupations, especially as they go online.

This research was conducted with the majority of female participants from urban and semi urban backgrounds. Future researchers may further conduct study to examine how their self-directed reading habits would influence the academic performances and intended legal professions of law females from diverse backgrounds (e.g., rural areas or involve as many as possible). Moreover, our study is a year-long cross-sectional study. However, existing writers urged that designs of reading habits to be longitudinal (Kim-brough, 1972; Lamme, 1976). We suggest future researchers to consider the latter. This might involve following a cohort of learners over four periods of their study in LC so as to understand how their self-directed reading habits impact their academic and preparedness for their careers during the years.

Reports of academic achievements, as measured by CGPA of students would also be essential to show whether the claims of the gains of self-directed reading habits reflected in their academic achievements, too. Nonetheless, our current work is focused on obtaining their views regarding the importance of their self-directed reading habits for their academic and careers and did not examine their actual achievements. Future work may find this as a gap to conduct correlation research.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have not disclosed any potential conflicts of interest.

Funding: This research is funded by the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia under FORM-C SGS-07, while Haramaya University gave the corresponding author, Jeilan Mohammed, an on-campus residence-permit, and we would like to thank both of them wholeheartedly.

CRedit Author Statement: *Jeilan Mohammed Tutturo:* Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection and Analysis, Interpretation, Writing-Original Draft Preparation, Editing, Validation, Funding Acquisition.

Jeylan Wolyie Hussein: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Analysis and Interpretation, Supervision, Validation, Writing-Reviewing and Editing.

Abera Admassu: Conceptualization, Research Design and Methodology, Data Analysis and Interpretation, Supervision, Writing-Reviewing and Editing, Validation.

Adinew Tadesse: Conceptualization, Research Design, Methodology, Data Analysis and Interpretation, Supervision, Reviewing and Editing, Validation.

Ethical Statement: The researchers secured permissions from Haramaya University and the target participants verbally and in writing. The participants were assured for the anonymities of their identities and confidentiality of the data. If not for places, their real names were replaced by pseudonyms in the transcripts and analyses to protect their identities (Creswell, 2009).

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