

Boosting Wellness through Books: Reading Culture and Library Usage among Students at Lagos State University

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of reading culture and library usage on the wellness of students at Lagos State University. Using the descriptive survey research design and the convenience sampling technique, 1313 students were selected as respondents for this study. Three hypotheses were stated and tested using the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient (PPMC) and multiple regression. Findings from hypothesis one shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between reading culture and mental well-being, and hypothesis two shows a significant and positive relationship between library usage and the mental well-being of students. Congruently, hypothesis three shows a significant joint effect of reading culture and library usage on the mental well-being of students. Based on these findings, this study recommends that the management of Lagos State University should integrate reading culture into the curriculum, emphasizing its importance for both academic and leisure purposes. This can be achieved through initiatives like reading challenges and book clubs. Also, the management of the University should ensure that libraries become supportive environments by increasing study spaces, quiet zones, and diverse learning resources to accommodate various student preferences and needs.

Keywords: Library usage, mental wellbeing, reading culture, students, university

INTRODUCTION

The nexus between mental well-being and academic environments is intricate and profound. Mental well-being, a comprehensive construct, involves emotional, psychological, and social dimensions that significantly influence how individuals process thoughts, navigate emotions, and interact socially (Dugan et al., 2023). This multifaceted nature of mental well-being plays a critical role in determining stress management, interpersonal relations, and decision-making processes. Within the academic sphere, the mental well-being of students is of paramount importance. It bears a direct impact on pivotal aspects such as learning outcomes, student engagement, and overall satisfaction with life (Douwes et al., 2023). The interplay between reading, library usage, and mental well-being is an area that has captivated academic researchers, primarily due to the therapeutic potential of reading. Engaging in reading activities has been recognized for its capacity to alleviate stress, foster empathy, and uplift mood states (Egger et al., 2019). Libraries, as structured and tranquil havens, significantly contribute to diminishing anxiety and nurturing a sense of community and belonging among the student populace (Veil & Bishop, 2014). In parallel, the landscape of information technology is undergoing a rapid and transformative evolution, significantly impacting the traditional paradigms of reading culture and library usage. The emergence of digital libraries and a plethora of online resources has revolutionized students' interaction with reading materials. Despite these technological advancements, the intrinsic value of a vibrant reading culture and the utility of libraries in promoting academic and personal growth continue to be indisputable. A robust reading culture is known not just for its contribution to academic excellence but also for its vital role in enriching cognitive and emotional development.

Reading culture, representing an array of habits, preferences, and attitudes towards reading, is deeply embedded in educational systems and is synonymous with the cultivation of critical thinking abilities, creativity, and the broadening of knowledge horizons (Talenta & Himawati, 2023). Libraries, traditionally perceived as mere book repositories, are in reality dynamic and resource-rich environments that facilitate learning and intellectual exploration, offering students a sanctuary to delve into the realms of knowledge. Nonetheless, this landscape is not devoid of challenges. A worrying trend is the discernible decline in students' interest in reading and the underutilization of library resources, posing potential risks to their mental well-being. Despite the critical importance of maintaining a vibrant reading culture and ensuring effective library usage, these practices are witnessing a decline among student communities. The proliferation of digital media and the allure of the internet have precipitated a shift in reading habits, skewing towards superficial reading patterns and reduced attention spans (Korte, 2020). Moreover, the potential of libraries as nurturing grounds for mental well-being is not being fully harnessed, often attributed to factors such as underfunding, inadequate facilities, (Estrullo-Suaga et al., 2023), and perceived obsolescence of libraries in the digital era. This study therefore addresses this gap in the literature by undertaking a comprehensive investigation into the effects of reading culture and library usage on the mental well-being of students at Lagos State University to invigorate reading culture and reposition libraries as pivotal support systems for the mental and academic enhancement of students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

The concept of reading culture encompasses more than just the act of reading; it includes a society's attitudes, habits, and values towards literature. It provides insight into the intellectual vitality of a community. A strong reading culture emphasizes accessibility, ensuring that literature is readily available and inclusive, catering to diverse tastes (Talenta&Himawati, 2023). It also reflects a societal emphasis on critical thinking and analytical skills, as individuals engage with various perspectives and ideas. The digital age has had both positive and negative impacts on reading culture. Online content presents challenges to traditional print media, but it also provides new opportunities for literary exploration. Schools and educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping reading habits. Fostering a positive reading culture from a young age is essential for cultivating a lifelong love for literature. The decline in reading culture may be symptomatic of broader societal issues, such as a fast-paced lifestyle and diminished attention spans. Book clubs, literary events, and communal reading spaces play a vital role in revitalizing reading culture by nurturing a sense of community and promoting shared intellectual exploration. A vibrant reading culture contributes to a more informed, empathetic, and culturally rich society, bridging gaps and fostering connections through the shared experience of literature (Exum, 2023). Ultimately, a society's reading culture reflects its intellectual vitality and capacity for nuanced understanding.

Library usage, as a multifaceted concept, encompasses a range of activities including borrowing books, using study spaces, accessing digital resources, and attending library-organized events. Its relevance in academic and cognitive development is well-documented in library and information science literature. According to Julien and Barker (2009), library usage extends beyond the physical borrowing of books; it involves the engagement with a variety of resources and services provided by libraries that are instrumental in fostering an environment conducive to learning and knowledge acquisition. This engagement, as posited by Vakkari (2010), facilitates the development of information-seeking behavior and research skills, integral to academic success and lifelong learning. Moreover, the role of libraries has evolved significantly with the advent of digital technology. Libraries are no longer seen merely as repositories of books but as dynamic learning spaces that offer access to a wealth of digital resources, including e-books, online journals, and databases (Rowlands et al., 2008). This transformation has expanded the scope of library usage, making it more accessible and versatile. The integration of technology in library services, as observed by Fourie and Loe (2016), not only enhances the accessibility of information but also encourages the development of digital literacy skills among users. This digital dimension of library usage is increasingly recognized as pivotal in equipping students with the necessary skills to navigate the information-rich digital landscape effectively.

The mental well-being of students is crucial for their academic success and personal development. It encompasses emotional, social, and psychological aspects that have a significant impact on their learning outcomes. Schools and colleges play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment that addresses students' mental health needs (Maclean & Law, 2022). Initiatives such as counseling services, mental health awareness campaigns, and stress management programs contribute to a positive atmosphere. The academic workload, social pressures, and transitions can place a strain on students' mental well-being, necessitating proactive measures for early

intervention and support. Prioritizing student mental health is not only the right thing to do, but it also enhances the overall campus culture, laying the foundation for comprehensive educational experiences.

Theoretical Review

In exploring the intricate relationship between reading culture, library usage, and students' mental well-being, two prominent theories offer profound insights: the cognitive theory of stress and coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), and Vygotsky and Cole's (1978) sociocultural theory. The cognitive theory of stress and coping provides a framework for understanding how reading culture and library usage can significantly influence students' mental well-being. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), individuals continually interact with their environment and assess potential stressors. Reading, in this context, can be seen as a form of problem-focused coping, where engaging with literature provides a means for students to escape stressors, thus offering a temporary respite from the pressures of academic life. Furthermore, the theory posits that emotion-focused coping, which includes activities that reduce emotional distress, can be facilitated through the immersive and reflective nature of reading. Libraries, as environments that offer access to a diverse range of reading materials and a quiet space for contemplation, amplify this coping mechanism. They provide a sanctuary where students can engage in introspective reading, thereby mitigating stress and enhancing their overall mental well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive development (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Reading culture and library usage can be seen through this lens as part of the cultural tools that mediate cognitive development. Vygotsky asserts that learning occurs in a social context and is deeply influenced by the cultural setting. Libraries serve as cultural hubs where students are exposed to a wealth of knowledge, interacting not only with the material but also with other individuals, thereby fostering a sense of community and belonging. This interaction is crucial for mental well-being, as it provides students with a supportive network and a sense of identity within the academic community. Moreover, the act of reading exposes students to different perspectives and ideas, promoting cognitive flexibility and empathy, which are essential components of psychological well-being (Vygotsky & Cole 1978).

Empirical Review

Reading Culture and Students' Mental Wellbeing

Empirical studies have consistently highlighted a positive correlation between a robust reading culture and students' mental well-being. For instance, Clair-Thompson et al., (2018) found that engagement in regular reading activities significantly contributes to stress reduction and the enhancement of mood states among university students. This relationship is further corroborated by the work of Soria et al., (2013), who observed that students who frequently utilized library resources and immersed themselves in reading exhibited lower levels of anxiety and a stronger sense of belonging within the academic community. Moreover, Pfundt and Peterson (2024) emphasized the therapeutic potential of reading, noting its capacity to foster empathy and

emotional intelligence, thereby enriching students' psychological well-being. These studies collectively underscore the pivotal role that a vibrant reading culture plays in nurturing not only the intellectual growth of students but also their emotional and psychological resilience, suggesting that the promotion of reading habits and the effective utilization of library resources can serve as vital components in supporting the mental health of students within academic settings. Based on the foregoing, we hypothesized that:

Library Usage and Students' Mental Wellbeing

Underlining the intrinsic role of libraries as more than just knowledge repositories but as sanctuaries that foster mental health and academic prowess is important. Dearnaley (2022) posited that the structured and tranquil environment of libraries contributes significantly to reducing stress and anxiety among students, thereby enhancing their mental well-being. This is complemented by the findings of Mantzios et al. (2020), who reported that regular library usage was associated with lower levels of perceived stress and higher levels of self-reported life satisfaction among university students. Furthermore, Brewster (2014) underscored the therapeutic benefits of reading, available through library resources, in mitigating depressive symptoms and promoting mental resilience. Collectively, these studies underscore the multifaceted benefits of library usage, not only as a cornerstone of academic growth but also as a critical contributor to the mental well-being of students, emphasizing the need for educational institutions to encourage library engagement as part of a comprehensive approach to student wellness. Thus, we hypothesized that:

Reading Culture, Library Usage and Students' Mental Wellbeing

Empirical studies have consistently underscored a symbiotic relationship between reading culture, library usage, and student well-being, positing that an entrenched culture of reading and effective utilization of library resources contribute significantly to the holistic development of students (Loh, 2015). Reading, as an act of cognitive engagement, has been demonstrated to not only enhance academic proficiency but also to bolster psychological resilience, with research indicating that immersion in literature can lead to reduced stress levels, heightened empathy, and improved mood states (Levin et al., 2020). Concurrently, libraries, as pivotal educational infrastructure, offer more than access to books; they provide a structured, tranquil space conducive to learning and mental well-being. Studies affirm that students who frequently use library facilities exhibit higher levels of academic achievement and report greater satisfaction with their educational experience. Furthermore, libraries serve as communal hubs that foster social interaction and a sense of belonging, factors known to be beneficial to mental health (Zanal-Abidin et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings illuminate the integral role that a vibrant reading culture and robust library systems play in nurturing the academic, emotional, and social facets of student life, ultimately contributing to a more well-rounded and satisfying educational journey based on this, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis:

H₁: There is a significant relationship between reading culture and the mental well-being of students at Lagos State University

H₂: There is a significant relationship between library usage and students' mental well-being at Lagos State University

H₃: Reading culture and library usage have a joint significant effect on the mental well-being of students at the Lagos State University

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the descriptive survey research design to explore the relationships between reading culture, library usage, and the mental health of students at Lagos State University. The target population comprised the entire student body across the faculties, colleges, and schools of Lagos State University, amounting to more than sixteen thousand (16,000) students. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a representative sample of students was carefully selected. A total of 1500 students were identified to participate in the study, ensuring a diverse and comprehensive representation of the student body. These samples were students who have registered and frequent the library almost daily. Data collection was conducted through a convenience sampling technique. Also, the data collection instrument (questionnaire) was adapted from existing scales by Krejcie and Morgan's (1970). Both scales underwent slight modifications to suit the specific context of this study. Notably, certain items on both scales were reverse-scored to mitigate response bias and ensure the accuracy of the data collected. A pilot test was conducted to test the internal consistency of the scale and they were found to be reliable as the Cronbach Alpha was greater than the acceptable value of 0.70.

The data collection spanned a period of two months, with the research assistants administering the survey instruments to the respondents after they had been trained. Respondents who are students cut across all faculties and disciplines like Medicine, Agriculture, Engineering, Management Sciences, Law, Social Sciences, Science, and Arts to ensure representativeness of opinions. One thousand five hundred (1500) copies of the questionnaires were distributed, one thousand three hundred and twenty-three (1323) copies were retrieved and one thousand and thirteen (1313) copies were found fit and used for final analysis. The data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27, allowing for a robust and thorough exploration of the relationships among the variables using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression as techniques of analysis. This study and research followed the laid down procedure for carrying out research ethically as enunciated in the LASU Research Ethics Policy (2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section concerns the analyses of the collected and collated data. It further discussed the results in the light of extant literature.

Table 1: Analyses of Demographic Variables of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	691 (52.6%)
	Female	622 (47.4%)
Age	16-25	1186 (90.3%)
	26-30	67 (5.1%)
	31-35	30 (2.3%)
	36-40	6 (0.5%)
	41 & above	24 (1.8%)
Marital Status	Single	1259 (95.9%)
	Married	54 (4.1%)
Academic Level	100 Level	370 (28.2%)
	200 Level	417 (31.8%)
	300 Level	254 (19.3%)
	400 Level	192 (14.6%)
	500 Level	26 (2%)
	600 Level & Above	54 (4.1%)
Hostel	On-Campus	54 (4.1%)
	Off-Campus	1259 (95.9%)

Source: Field Survey (2023)

As evident in Table 1 The student population exhibits a relatively balanced gender distribution, with males constituting 52.6% (691 students) and females making up 47.4% (622 students). This near-parity indicates a gender-diverse academic environment, which is beneficial for fostering a rich educational experience. Equally, the age distribution is heavily skewed towards the younger demographic, with a significant majority, 90.3% (1186 students), falling within the 16-25 age bracket. This suggests that the student body is predominantly composed of traditional university-age students. The representation gradually decreases with age, indicating fewer mature students, which is typical in undergraduate settings. Additionally, a vast majority of the students, 95.9% (1259 students), are single, while only 4.1% (54 students) are married. This is expected, given the predominant age group of 16-25 years, aligning with the traditional university-going age where most individuals are not yet married. The distribution across academic levels shows a higher concentration in the 100 Level (28.2%, 370 students) and 200 Level (31.8%, 417 students), suggesting a larger influx of students in the earlier stages of their university education. The number gradually decreases in the upper academic levels, with the least representation in the 500 Level (2%, 26 students) and 600 Level and above (4.1%, 54 students). This trend could be reflective of drop-off rates, changes in class sizes, or the structure of academic programs. The data reveals a significant preference or necessity for off-campus living, with a substantial 95.9% (1259 students)

residing off-campus, compared to a mere 4.1% (54 students) living on-campus. This disparity could indicate limited on-campus housing capacity, students' preference for off-campus life, or other socioeconomic factors influencing accommodation decisions.

Test of Hypothesis

H₁: There is a significant relationship between reading culture and the mental well-being of students at Lagos State University

Table 2: Correlation Analysis between Reading Culture and Mental Wellbeing

		Reading Culture	Mental Wellbeing
Reading Culture	Pearson Correlation	1	.217**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1313	1313
Mental Wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	.217**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1313	1313

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Table 2 presents a Pearson correlation analysis examining the relationship between reading culture and mental well-being among students at Lagos State University. The results reveal a positive correlation between reading culture and mental well-being, with a correlation coefficient of .217, which is statistically significant at a 0.05 level of significance. This implies that as engagement in reading culture increases, there is a corresponding enhancement in the mental well-being of the students involved. The significance level ($p < .000$) indicates a high level of confidence in the reliability of this positive correlation, suggesting that the observed relationship is not due to random chance but reflects a genuine interplay between these two variables in the students' population.

This finding aligns with existing research, further solidifying the notion that reading culture plays a significant role in shaping an individual's mental health. For instance, Clair-Thompson et al., (2018) highlighted that regular engagement in reading activities contributes significantly to reducing stress and enhancing mood states among university students. Similarly, Pfundt and Peterson (2024) emphasized the therapeutic potential of reading, noting its capacity to foster empathy and emotional intelligence, thereby enriching students' psychological well-being. The correlation coefficient obtained in this study (.217) suggests a moderate relationship, consistent with these previous studies, underscoring the positive impact of a robust reading culture on mental well-being. While the relationship is not extremely strong, it is indicative of a significant trend that supports the integration of reading culture into mental health strategies within academic environments.

H₂: There is a significant relationship between library usage and students' mental well-being at Lagos State University

Table 3: Correlation Analysis between Library Usage and Mental Wellbeing

		Library Usage	Mental Wellbeing
Library Usage	Pearson Correlation	1	.425**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1313	1313
Mental Wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	.425**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1313	1313

Source: Field Survey (2023)

The statistical analysis in Table 3 reveals a positive and significant correlation between library usage and mental well-being among the students, as indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient of .425 ($p < .05$, $N = 1313$). This result suggests a moderate relationship, meaning that as library usage increases, there tends to be a concurrent improvement in the mental well-being of students. This finding aligns with existing research in the field. For instance, Dearnaley (2022) found that regular library usage contributes to students' mental well-being by providing a conducive environment for study, reflection, and engagement with a supportive academic community. The structured, resource-rich environment of the library offers a sanctuary from the stressors of academic life, fostering a sense of accomplishment and tranquility. Similarly, Mantzios et al. (2020) work supports this correlation by demonstrating that the library's role extends beyond a mere repository of books; it is a dynamic space that promotes mental wellness through quiet study areas, access to information, and opportunities for collaborative learning. These elements of library usage are instrumental in reducing feelings of isolation, promoting academic confidence, and enhancing overall student well-being. The significance of these findings lies in their implications for educational policy and campus resource allocation. Recognizing the positive impact of library usage on mental well-being can guide institutions in making informed decisions regarding library services, resources, and space design. Additionally, these results underscore the importance of encouraging students to utilize library facilities as part of their academic routine, not only to support their educational endeavors but also to foster their mental health.

H₃: Reading culture and library usage have a joint significant effect on the mental well-being of students at Lagos State University.

Table 4: Model Summary of Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.435 ^a	.189	.188	.92896	1.554

a. Predictors: (Constant), Library_Usage, Reading_Culture

b. Dependent Variable: Mental_Wellbeing

Table 5: ANOVA of Regression Analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	263.996	2	131.998	152.960	.000 ^b
	Residual	1130.477	1310	.863		
	Total	1394.473	1312			
a. Dependent Variable: Mental_Wellbeing						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Library_Usage, Reading_Culture						

Table 6: Coefficients of Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.489	.160		9.285	.000
	Reading_Culture	.147	.039	.098	3.767	.000
	Library_Usage	.450	.030	.395	15.155	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Mental_Wellbeing						

Source: Field Survey (2023)

The regression analysis presented in Table 4 and Table 5 provides valuable insights into the relationship between library usage, reading culture, and students' mental well-being. The model summary (Table 3) reveals an adjusted R^2 value of 0.188, indicating that approximately 18.8% of the variance in students' mental well-being can be explained by the combined effects of library usage and reading culture. Although this percentage might not seem substantial, it signifies a meaningful influence considering the multifaceted nature of mental well-being. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.554 is close to 2, indicating no major issues with autocorrelation in the residuals. The ANOVA results (Table 5) show a significant F-statistic ($F = 152.960$, $p < .05$), confirming the overall significance of the regression model. This implies that library usage and reading culture significantly predict the mental well-being of students at Lagos State University, justifying the inclusion of these predictors in the model. Equally, the coefficients in Table 6 provide an understanding of the individual contribution of each predictor. The unstandardized coefficient for reading culture ($\beta = .147$, $p < .05$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in reading culture, there is an expected increase of .147 units in mental well-being, holding other variables constant. Similarly, the unstandardized coefficient for library usage ($\beta = .450$, $p < .000$) suggests a more substantial impact, with every one-unit increase in library usage predicting an increase of .450 units in mental well-being. The standardized coefficients (β values) reveal that library usage (.395) has a more substantial standardized effect on mental well-being compared to reading culture (.098), highlighting the relative importance of these predictors.

The findings resonate with the existing literature that underscores the significance of reading culture and library usage in enhancing mental well-being. For instance, Levin et al. (2020).emphasized the stress-reducing and mood-enhancing effects of engagement in reading

activities. The positive coefficient of reading culture aligns with their findings, suggesting that nurturing a reading habit can contribute positively to mental well-being. Similarly, Zanal-Abidin et al. (2023) highlighted the role of library usage in providing a sense of belonging and reducing anxiety among students, which is in harmony with the significant positive coefficient for library usage observed in this study. The strong interplay between library usage and mental well-being corroborates the idea that libraries, as resource-rich and supportive environments, play a crucial role in fostering students' mental health.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributes to the growing body of literature that advocates for the importance of reading culture and library usage in enhancing students' mental well-being. It highlights the need for a strategic focus on these areas to support the holistic development of students in academic settings. By demonstrating the positive impact of reading culture and library utilization on mental health, this study underscores the significance of creating educational environments that prioritize not only academic achievement but also the overall well-being of students. This study concludes that as educational institutions and policymakers consider ways to promote student success and welfare, they should recognize the vital role that fostering a love for reading and providing access to supportive library resources can play in nurturing students' mental health and contributing to their overall growth and development. Thus, this study recommends that the management of Lagos State University should integrate reading culture into the curriculum, emphasizing its importance for both academic and leisure purposes. This can be achieved through initiatives like reading challenges and book clubs. Also, the management of the University should ensure that libraries become supportive environments by increasing study spaces, quiet zones, and diverse learning resources to accommodate various student preferences and needs. Lastly, librarians should actively engage with students, offering guidance and support for academic and personal assistance, and creating inclusive spaces.

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