
Reading Habits and Interests of Generation Y Students: Challenges of Reflective Learning

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Abstract

There has been greater awareness about the problems associated with the reading habits of the youth and the consequences of such problems. In a world where harnessing and using knowledge is of utmost importance, inculcating good reading habits among students must take centre-stage. This study was undertaken to assess the reading habits and interest of Generation Y students and the challenges faced by educators. This quantitative study used a structured questionnaire to elicit information relating to the attitudes of Gen Y students towards reading. A total of 79 respondents comprising business students from a private higher education institution in Malaysia voluntarily participated in the research. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to analyse the data collected. The use of factor and cluster analysis revealed the presence of three clusters of readers (Natural, Indifferent and Disadvantaged Readers) based on their reading attitudes and four categories of their characteristics. Further investigation revealed the influence of gender and ethnicity on the reading attitudes of these students. It was discovered that there were more natural readers among females and disadvantaged readers among males and that the Malay and Indian students were more natural readers as compared to the Chinese students. The paper provides an insight into the reading habits of the millennial generation students and the need to find workable strategies to enhance their habits and interests to extend beyond "reading only to succeed in exams". The study disclosed the need for engaging students in reflective learning to better prepare them for the knowledge economy.

Key words: Generation Y, reading habits, traits, cluster analysis, reflective learning, teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

There has been greater awareness about the problems associated with the reading habits of the youth and the consequences of such problems. In a world where harnessing and using knowledge is of utmost importance, inculcating good reading habits among students must take centre-stage. The increased competition brought on by globalisation has also

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placed a great deal of pressure on educators to adopt teaching and learning methodologies that will ensure the achievement of graduate outcomes, thereby enhancing graduate employability. In order to face an ever-changing and competitive work environment, educators must prepare the future graduates to have the ability to adapt themselves to the various social, economic and technological changes that are taking place in the world. Reading is one of the most fundamental components of the learning process and is seen as a catalyst for life-long learning and intellectual growth. The decline in reading habits and interests “has been attributed to the failure of educational instructions in schools to cultivate permanent interest in students to read” (Abeyrathna, 2004).

Several studies have been undertaken on the various aspects of reading including the reading habits, interests and attitudes of students. Some of these include studies done by Rennie and Patterson (2008), Manuel and Robinson (2003), Su-Yen Chen (2007), Mokhtari, Richard and Gardner (2009), Gallik (1999) and Ogunrombi and Adio (1995). Rennie and Patterson (2008) studied the reading and identity of the Google generation (the Generation Y) and concluded that there existed a gap between students’ in-school and out-of-school reading practices. It was also reported that there were low levels of engagement with novels and almost no engagement with poetry or short stories outside school. Manuel and Robinson (2003) reviewed some assumptions about gender and adolescents’ reading practices while Su-Yen Chen (2007) did a study on the extra-curricular reading habits of college students in Taiwan and discovered that the males spent a greater average amount of time on extracurricular reading compared to the females but there was a greater variance found among males. The study also found the existence of a negative significant correlation between high school grades (except for students whose grades were above 90) and the amount of time spent on extra-curricular reading. In other words, students with lower grades spend more time on extra-curricular reading. A study done on the impact of Internet and television use on the reading habits and practices of college students by Mokhtari *et al.* (2009) found that students enjoyed using the Internet more than recreational reading, reading for academic purposes, or watching television. Far fewer students reported enjoying reading for academic purposes than enjoying using the Internet.

In view of the greater awareness of the problems associated with the reading habits and interests of the youth of today, this study was undertaken to assess the reading habits and interest of Generation Y students and the challenges faced by educators. As educators, we are placed with the responsibility of assisting our students to learn *how to learn*. Various studies (Brockbank and McGill, 2007; Thorpe, 2004) have shown that reflective learning is one of the most significant methods of engaging students in the learning process. Reflective learning, which is a major component of active learning, enhances creative and critical thinking skills and promotes students to become active learners. The authors believe that through reflective learning, students use past experiences and knowledge and current conditions to reflect upon and learn difficult theories and concepts. Past and current experiences and knowledge is further enhanced by reading and harnessing knowledge. Reading increases an individual’s wealth of experience and is therefore a key

component of reflective learning. Students with good reading habits and attitudes become better reflectors and critical thinkers. Therefore, in order to enhance reflective learning among students, course curriculum must be developed to ensure reading becomes a core component of the learning process. Course assessments must focus on motivating students to read in and out of school. “The motivation is achieved when the environment is physiologically and academically safe; when choices are provided and when clear achievable goals are present” (Abeyrathna, 2004). Educators must develop curriculum that enables students to enhance their reading skills and become independent readers and life long learners.

This study is based on a number of theoretical models of reflection. One such model is that of Scanlon and Chernomas (1997) whose theoretical model of reflection divides the reflection process into three stages comprising of awareness, critical analysis and new perspective. Another such model is the ‘Reflection Integration Model’ by Hutchinson and Allen (1997) based on experiential learning theory to enhance reflective learning among education students. The four components of pre-experience, experience, reflection and integration that make up the model focus on how meaningful learning takes place when reflection turns experiences into learning (Hutchinson and Allen, 1997). Prior experience and awareness are enhanced through reading, researching and undertaking certain actions to create greater awareness of the outcomes. Reflecting on prior and current experience and critically analysing the outcomes gives rise to new perspectives on existing theories and concepts. Such critical analysis and reflective practices can only be sharpened and become meaningful if it is accompanied by the use of prior and current knowledge through continuous reading.

Since reading plays a significant role in knowledge building and intellectual growth, this study was undertaken with the following objectives:

- (i) To explore the reading habits, attitudes and interests of Generation Y college students in a private institution of higher education in Malaysia.
- (ii) To identify the core traits and characteristics of Generation Y students.
- (iii) To investigate the influence of gender, nationality and race on the reading attitudes of Generation Y students.

METHODS

A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information with regards to respondents’ demographic details, their reading habits and interests, their reading attitudes (this section contained 23 statements on a 5-point Likert scale) and finally their traits and characteristics. This section contained 22 traits and characteristics on a 5-point Likert scale that were adapted and somewhat edited from Saucier’s Big-5 mini markers model (Saucier and Goldberg, 2002).

A total of 79 respondents who comprise the foundation and first-year students, participated in this survey. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse

the data collected. The results were summarised using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean scores and standard deviations. The utilisation of cross tabulations, factor analysis and cluster analysis also provided useful insights into the various dimensions or constructs of the reading habits and attitudes of the respondents. The other statistical analysis tools employed included cross-tabulations and reliability test.

FINDINGS

This study reports the findings of the reading habits and attitudes of Generation Y students. It also gives an insight into the types of traits and characteristics that they possess and whether certain demographic characteristics have an impact on their reading attitudes.

Profile of Respondents

There were a total of 79 respondents, of which 48.1% were females and 51.9% were males. 62.3% were Chinese; 7.8% were Indians; 22.1% were Malays and 7.8% from other ethnic groups. About 79.7% of the respondents were Malaysians whereas 20.3% were non-Malaysians. 70.9% of the respondents were from Government schools; 21.5% from private schools; 6.3% from international schools and the remaining 1.3% were from other types of high schools. This is important to see whether there is an effect on the reading habits if the respondents come from different types of schools. The profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' profile

		Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	51.9
	Female	48.1
Ethnicity	Malay	22.1
	Chinese Malaysian	62.3
	Indian Malaysian	7.8
	Others	7.8
Nationality	Malaysian	79.7
	Non-Malaysian	20.3
High School Type	Government School	70.9%
	Private School	21.5
	International School	6.3
	Others	1.3

Traits of Generation Y Students

The respondents were asked to rank their traits based on a set of 22 traits. The factor analysis data reduction technique was used to categorise the common traits of the Generation Y youths which resulted in four main categories or dimensions; that is, the

Positive Natured, the Well Organized, the Ingenious and the Zest for Life. Table 2 shows the results of the factor analysis and the resulting dimensions of Generation Y traits which accounted for 72.01% of the total variance explained in the criteria variables. The Cronbach's alpha showed that the first three categories were reliable; a level of 0.7 and above is considered reliable (Nunnaly, 1978).

Table 2. Principal component analysis for Generation Y traits

Item	D1 Positive Natured	D2 Well Organised	D3 Ingenious	D4 Zest for Life
Thankful	.881			
Peaceful	.825			
Joyful	.768			
Friendly	.768			
Systematic		.926		
Organized		.882		
Efficient		.786		
Imaginative			.867	
Creative			.799	
Relaxed			.695	
Confident				.723
Energetic				.701
Eigenvalue	3.247	2.364	1.752	1.280
% of explained variance	27.056	19.698	14.597	10.663
Cumulative explained variance	27.056	46.754	61.351	72.014
Cronbach's Alpha	0.829	0.869	0.718	0.425

1. KMO test = 0.642.

2. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Sig = 0.000. Reject H_0 . Therefore, we were able to run EFA because the non-diagonal values in the inter-correlation matrix were significantly other than zero.

3. Value of Cronbach's Alpha for all items for the 3 dimensions = 0.740.

The findings show that the Generation Y respondents perceived themselves to be positive natured, with a sense of creativity and ingenuity, and yet were systematic and well organised, with a zest for life. Knowing this from the onset, would be helpful to the educators of this very energetic lot of students who would certainly prefer teaching and learning techniques that are more active, in keeping with their very nature.

Reading Habits and Attitudes of Gen Y Students

This section analyses the types of materials that are mostly read, the time spent per week on reading, the purpose of reading, the number books read per month and the kind of books read for leisure by the Generation Y students.

It was found that the most read forms of materials are from online websites or webzines and also newspapers (refer to Figure 1). The reasons for these findings could be associated with the fact that the Generation Y youth are the “Google-generation”, who are well-versed with the computer and its applications and are therefore more comfortable with online articles.

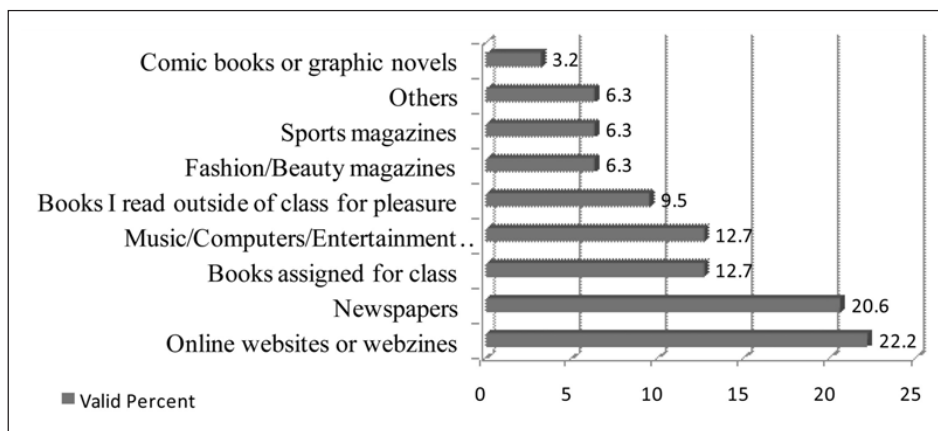


Figure 1. Types of materials read most often

On the time spent reading per week (refer to Figure 2), the majority of the respondents (39.7%) spent 1 to 3 hours reading per week, while almost one-fifth (21.8%) of the respondents spent less than 1 hour reading per week and another 21.8% spend 4 to 6 hours reading per week. These findings are of importance to educators as the amount of

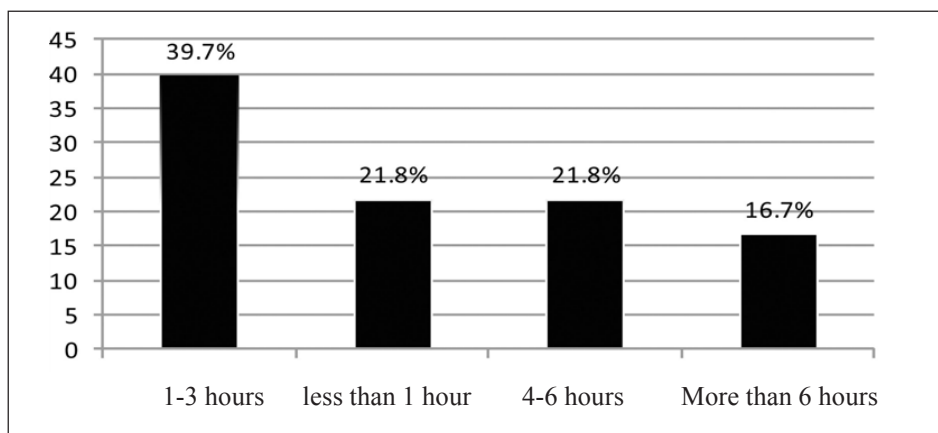


Figure 2. Time spent on reading per week

time spent on reading has an impact on the students' learning outcomes. Educators need to find ways to motivate students to do their reading so that students take ownership and make sense of their own learning.

As for the number of books read per month, the majority (32%) of the respondents read 2 to 3 books per month, followed by 26.9 % who read under one book per month (refer to Table 3). The fact that almost half (46.2%) of the respondents read only one book or less per month signifies a rather worrying trend among the youth of today. Reading is a very important activity that enhances intellectual growth and builds human capital. Countries need to produce their own human capital of knowledge workers who are skilled and self-directed in order to sustain their economic growth and to remain competitive. There must be more rigorous steps undertaken by the government through their schools and institutions of higher learning to encourage a reading culture among the youth of today, who would go on to become our future graduates and leaders of tomorrow.

Table 3. Number of books read for leisure per month

How many books do you read for leisure?	Frequency	Valid Percent
Under one book per month	21	26.9
One book per month	15	19.2
2-3 books per month	25	32.1
4-5 books per month	11	14.1
6-10 books per month	3	3.8
11-20 books per month	1	1.3
More than 20 books per month	2	2.6
Total	78	100.0
Missing	1	
Total	79	

In terms of the types of books read, the majority (51.9%) of the Generation Y students liked to read books on 'True Stories' followed by 'Mystery' books (38%). An interesting finding was that the Generation Y students least liked reading 'Factual' books (16.5%) (e.g. books on dinosaurs or space) and also 'Biographies/Autobiographies' as shown in Figure 3. The fact that the Generation Y youth is not too keen on reading factual books is rather troubling as it may lead to a future generation of workers and leaders who are not well-versed with general knowledge and facts which could be detrimental to the development and sustainability of the country. Reading factual books allows for further thinking and building of new theories, further research and newer and more creative ideas and solutions for the various problems that society faces. It is thus imperative that educators find ways and means to encourage and motivate students to read more factual

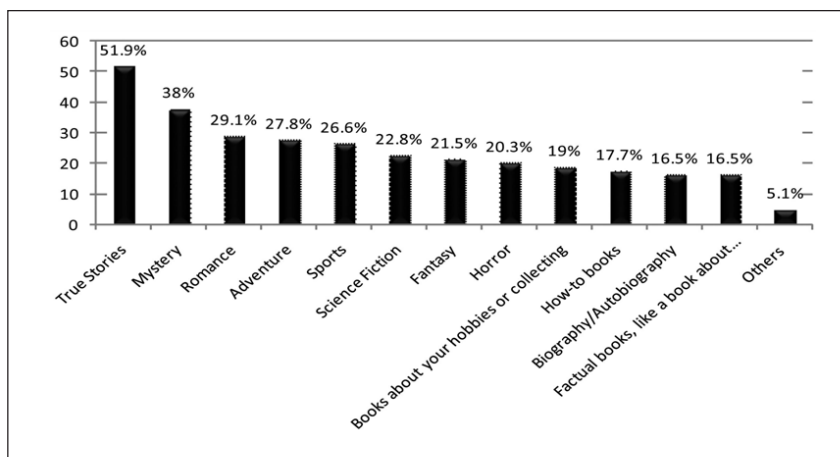


Figure 3. Types of books read for leisure

books and create more exciting lessons (active-based learning) to sustain the students' interest in the lessons. As for the greater majority who prefer to read 'True Stories', this trend could be related to the fact that the Generation Y youth is very much into 'Reality Shows' and thus prefers reading books that they can relate to their own lives.

As for the purpose of reading (refer to Figure 4), the findings show that the Generation Y students perceived their studies/exams (42.3%) as the most important reason why they read, followed by reading for the purpose of improving their knowledge (29.6%). Reading for leisure (28.2%) was deemed as not being as important. Once again, this trend reflects a 'paper-chase' culture of reading and not reading for the love of it. It is no wonder why

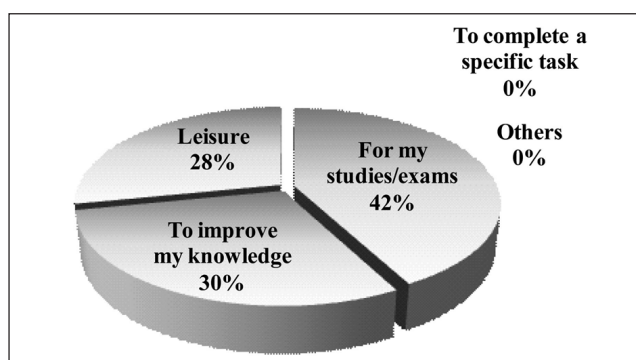


Figure 4. The purpose of reading

the Generation Y students generally find certain subjects (that require a lot of reading and reflecting) rather difficult and mundane. Educators who teach subjects such as Law, Literature, History and Economics do face an insurmountable task of motivating and encouraging their students to read and reflect on subject-specific concepts so as to better understand them.

Using cross-tabulations, the relationship between the number of hours read per week and the number of books read per month is examined. As shown in Table 4, 58.8% of those who read less than one hour a week read only one book per month. On the other hand, 70.6% of those who read from 4 to 6 hours per week read an average of about 1 to 3 books per month and almost 61.6% of those who read more than 6 hours per week read 2 to 5 books per month.

Table 4. Cross-tabulation between number of hours read per week and number of books read per month

No. of hours spent on reading per week	No. of books read for leisure per month							Total
	Under one book per month	One book per month	2 -3 books per month	4 - 5 books per month	6 - 10 books per month	11 – 20 books per month	More than 20 books per month	
< 1 hour	10	2	3	0	2	0	0	17
	58.8%	11.8%	17.6%	0%	11.8%	0%	0%	100%
1 – 3 hours	7	7	12	5	0	0	0	31
	22.6%	22.6%	38.7%	16.1%	0%	0%	0%	100%
4 – 6 hours	2	6	6	2	1	0	0	17
	11.8%	35.3%	35.3%	11.8%	5.9%	0%	0%	100%
> 6 hours	2	0	4	4	0	1	2	13
	15.4%	0%	30.8%	30.8%	0%	7.7%	15.4%	100%
Total	21	15	25	11	3	1	2	78
	26.9%	19.2%	32.1%	14.1%	3.8%	1.3%	2.6%	100%

Factor Analysis for Reading Attitudes

The use of Factor Analysis categorised the reading attitudes of the Generation Y students into three dimensions (Apathy Readers, Exam-Purpose Readers and Language-Deficient Readers) which accounted for 72.01% of the total variance explained in the criteria variables. The Cronbach's alpha showed the categories to be reliable; a level of 0.7 and above is considered reliable (Nunnally, 1978). The variables involved are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Principal component analysis for reading attitudes

Item	D1 Apathy Readers	D2 Exam- Purpose Readers	D3 Language- Deficient Readers
I don't like reading (C9)	.887		
I don't like reading for leisure (C8)	.865		
I don't care much for reading (C5)	.861		
I basically don't read much at all (C4)	.858		
I only read materials that are required in my studies (C7)		.877	
I only read what I'm supposed to for my studies (C3)		.795	
I will only go to the bookshop/library if I need to get a particular reading material (C23)		.777	
I only read the interesting sections of the newspaper or magazine (C21)		.562	
It takes me a very long time to read materials written in the English Language because I need to use a dictionary to translate the words I don't understand (C19)			.943
I find it difficult to understand materials written in the English Language because I have a poor command of the English Language (C18)			.898
Eigenvalue	4.083	1.861	1.257
% of explained variance	40.830	18.612	12.566
Cumulative explained variance	40.830	59.442	72.009
Cronbach's Alpha	0.884	0.753	0.844

1. KMO test = 0.716. These data have a very good fit with the model.

2. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Sig = 0.000. Reject H_0 . Therefore, we were able to run EFA because the non-diagonal values in the inter-correlation matrix were significantly other than zero.

3. Value of Cronbach's Alpha for all items for the 3 dimensions = 0.816.

Cluster Analysis for Reading Attitudes

Cluster Analysis was used to further investigate the deeper clusters or groups that exist within the three categories of respondents based on their reading attitudes. The 2-Cluster Analysis was initially used to investigate the two broad categories of readers, that is, the Natural readers and the Non-Readers as shown in Table 6. To capture a more meaningful cluster solution, a 3-Cluster Analysis was employed which resulted in the respondents being further grouped into 3 clusters comprising Natural Readers, Indifferent Readers (Readers having no problems with the English Language but are not interested to read or simply do not like reading) and the Disadvantaged Readers (Readers having problems with the English Language and therefore do not like to read) as shown in Table 7. These findings are of importance as it affects how and what the academics would need to do in classrooms where they find themselves dealing with students with diverse reading attitudes.

Table 6. Two cluster solution for reading attitudes

Final 2-Cluster Centers	Cluster	
	1 Natural Readers	2 Non-Readers
Apathy readers (+ don't read)	-0.797	0.757
Exam-purpose readers (+ only for exam)	-0.614	0.583
Language-deficient readers (+ problem)	-0.281	0.267
Total	38	40

Table 7. Three cluster solution for reading attitudes

Final 3-Cluster Centers	Cluster		
	1 Natural Readers	2 Indifferent Readers	3 Disadvantaged Readers
Apathy readers (+ don't read)	-0.813	1.160	0.314
Exam-Purpose readers (+ only for exam)	-0.600	1.000	0.159
Language-deficient readers (+ problem)	-0.562	-0.820	1.027
Total	33	15	30

As shown in Table 7, 42.3% of the total respondents are Natural Readers, 19.2% are Indifferent Readers (Readers having no problems with the English Language but are not interested to read or simply do not like reading) and 38.5% are Disadvantaged Readers (Readers having problems with the English Language and therefore do not like to read). It is a worrying trend that more than 50% of the Generation Y students surveyed did not like reading. Tremendous challenges are faced by educators of higher learning in getting these types of students to reflect on their learning as reflective learning requires an assimilation of past experience with the current actions and outcomes. Past experience is build upon past actions, and reading is an imperative part of that building process. Rich experiences are only gained if one reads and reflects upon theories and concepts and connects them to the real-world as they stumble upon new discoveries and knowledge and go back to the theoretical frameworks and review the existing literature to find new gaps and come up with new theories and concepts. The whole learning process becomes a meaningless exercise when one doesn't reflect on their learning to truly understand the theories and concepts that they pick up along the way. To enhance competitive advantage, countries need to develop their human capital to be reflective, life-long learners who read incessantly and think on their feet.

The Impact of Demographic Background on Reading Attitudes of Generation Y Students

The study further investigated how the demographic background of the students influences each cluster of readers and whether certain reading attitudes have a higher incidence of being associated with specific demographic characteristics. The demographic characteristics in question are gender, nationality and ethnicity. Cross tabulations are used to show this.

The Influence of Gender on Reading Attitudes

It can be seen from Table 8 that there are more natural readers among females (52.6%) than males whereas there are more indifferent readers (30.0%) among males. This concurs with gender stereotyping where females are generally perceived to be bookworms who like reading more than going out and playing.

Table 8. Cluster number of case * gender cross-tabulation

		Gender		
		Female	Male	Total
Cluster	Natural Readers count	20	13	
	% within gender	52.6%	32.5%	3342.3%
Number of Case*	Indifferent Readers count	3	12	15
	% within gender	7.9%	30.0%	19.2%
	Disadvantaged Readers count	15	15	30
	% within gender	39.5%	37.5%	38.5%
Total		38	40	78
		100%	100%	100.0%

In terms of nationality (refer to Table 9), the non-Malaysians are more likely to be the Disadvantaged Readers (readers having problems with the English Language and therefore do not like to read) as opposed to the Malaysians. The majority of the foreign students surveyed came from Khazakistan, China and Indonesia, where there are fewer opportunities to learn the English Language and as a result, reading becomes a chore rather than a pleasant activity. The academics teaching these foreign students have a heavy responsibility of ensuring that these students are first able to understand the English language, before they can be expected to understand the theories and concepts associated with the subject matter. Therefore, assessments using reflective journals (reflective learning) should be carefully assigned, so as not to disadvantage these groups of students who are already struggling with their lessons.

Table 10 reflects the cluster groupings according to race. It can be seen that the Malay and Indian students were found to be more natural readers as compared to the Chinese

Table 9. Cluster number of case * nationality cross tabulation

		Nationality		
		Malaysian	Non-Malaysian	Total
Cluster Number of Case*	Natural Readers count	28	5	33
	% within gender	45.2%	31.2%	42.3%
	Indifferent Readers count	12	3	15
	% within gender	19.4%	18.8%	19.2%
	Disadvantaged Readers count	22	8	30
	% within gender	35.5%	50.0%	38.5%
	Total	62	16	78
		100%	100%	100.0%

Table 10. Cluster number of case *ethnic cross tabulation

		Ethnicity				
		Chinese	Malay	Indian	Others	Total
Cluster Number of Case*	Natural Readers count	17	9	3	3	32
	% within gender	36.2%	52.9%	50.0%	50.0%	42.1%
	Indifferent Readers count	8	5	1	15	29
	% within gender	17.0%	29.4%	16.7%	16.7%	19.2%
	Disadvantaged Readers count	22	3	2	2	29
	% within gender	46.8%	17.6%	33.3%	33.3%	38.2%
	Total	47	17	6	6	76
		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

students who represented the more disadvantaged readers. Here, the educators need to be sensitive towards the needs of the students, while there is a need to encourage greater reading among the students, it would be useful to encourage peer learning as the students who are natural readers could become student leaders within the classroom, motivating the indifferent readers to read more and helping the disadvantaged readers to learn to read with the help of peer discussions on these readings. The academics teaching these diverse set of students need to understand the underlying clusters or informal groups that exist among these students so as to undertake various measures that will help address this diversity.

DISCUSSION

The study does have some limitations, especially with respect to the sample size which has impeded the use of advanced statistical tools for additional and more meaningful information. The questionnaire developed for this study has room for further improvement. Despite this, the study is clearly useful because it reveals the traits and reading attitudes of the Generation Y students and how their demographic backgrounds influence their reading attitudes.

The findings show that Generation Y students mostly read materials from online websites or webzines and the majority of them spent one to three hours reading per week and their favourite leisure reading books were those based on true stories. The 3-Cluster Analysis was used to further investigate the deeper clusters or groups that existed and this resulted in the appearance of 3 clusters: the Natural Readers, the Indifferent Readers and the Disadvantaged Readers. This is a significant discovery as it prepares the academics with a prior knowledge of their students' traits and reading attitudes and provides an insight for institutions of higher education and their faculty members to deeply reflect and develop course curriculum that ensures reading becomes a core component of the curriculum, with the hope of motivating students to read in a non-threatening environment so as to inculcate a culture of reading among youths in order to enhance their life long learning experience.

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