
Reading habits of university students from a gender perspective

Hábito lector en estudiantes universitarios desde la perspectiva de género

性别视角下大学生的阅读习惯

Читательские привычки студентов университета с гендерной точки зрения

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Dates · Fechas

Received: 2022/02/02

Accepted: 2022/05/05

Published: 2022/10/03

How to Cite this Paper · Cómo citar este trabajo

Hernández, M. A., Álvarez, J. S., & Sánchez-Romero, E. I. (2022). Reading habits of university students from a gender perspective. *Publicaciones*, 52(1), 121–139. <https://doi.org/10.30827/publicaciones.v52i1.20908>

Abstract

Reading is one of the processes which has been cultivated over time in order to be shown as a reflection of the situation of female and all the conditioning factors that they face. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyse some variables in relation to the reading habits of university students, from the perspective of gender. With regard to method carried out, an *ex post facto* design of single group was planned. The sample was composed of 277 university students ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.20$, $SE = 4.367$) of both genders (20.7% male; 79.3% female). The results show reading as the leisure activity practiced the most by female, especially during holidays, and a statistically significant difference regarding the types of reading was observed (books and comics for female and comics and newspapers for male). For female, their group of friends positively influences the promotion of reading, and with respect to reading competence, the promotion of imagination was the category valued by female the most, also with statistical differences. Thus, knowing the reading habits of university students in a gender-differentiated manner, contributes to helping teachers be sensitive in this educational stage.

Keywords: reading habit, types of reading, students, university, gender perspective.

Resumen

La lectura es un proceso que se ha culturalizado con el tiempo, a fin de mostrarse como reflejo de la situación de la mujer y de los condicionantes a los que se enfrenta. Por ello, el objetivo de este trabajo fue analizar variables relacionadas con el hábito lector en universitarios, desde una perspectiva de género. Por lo que se refiere al método empleado, se planificó un diseño *ex post facto*, prospectivo de grupo único. La muestra, estuvo formada por 277 estudiantes universitarios ($M_{\text{edad}} = 22.20$, $DE = 4.367$) de ambos sexos (20.7% hombres; 79.3% mujeres). Los resultados mostraron la lectura como una actividad de ocio más practicada por las mujeres, especialmente en vacaciones y se observó una preferencia diferenciada estadísticamente en los tipos de lectura (libros y revistas en mujeres, y cómics y periódicos en hombres). Para las mujeres, el grupo de amigos influyó positiva y significativamente en el fomento de la lectura, y respecto a la competencia lectora, el fomento de la imaginación fue la categoría más valorada por mujeres, también con diferenciación significativa. Así, conocer el hábito lector que presentan los estudiantes universitarios diferenciados por género, contribuye a sensibilizar a los docentes de la necesidad de fomentar la lectura en este nivel educativo.

Palabras clave: hábito lector, tipos de lecturas, estudiantes: universidad, perspectiva de género.

概要

阅读是随着时间的推移而培养的过程之一，目的是反映女性的处境和她们所面临的所有条件因素。因此，本研究的目的是从性别角度分析与大学生阅读习惯相关的一些变量。关于所使用的方法，研究计划进行事后的单组前瞻性设计。样本包括 277 名大学生 ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.20$, $SE = 4.367$) (20.7% 为男性; 79.3% 为女性)。结果表明，阅读是女性最常进行的休闲活动，尤其是在假期中。并且在阅读类型 (女性的书籍和杂志，男性的漫画和报纸) 中我们可以观察到了统计学上的显著差异。对于女性来说，朋友群对阅读的提升有显著的正向影响，而在阅读能力方面，想象力的提升是女性最看重的类别，差异也很显著。因此，了解不同性别的大学生所呈现的阅读习惯有助于让教师意识到在这个教育水平上促进阅读的必要性。

关键词: 阅读习惯, 阅读类型, 学生, 大学, 性别视角。

Аннотация

Чтение - это процесс, который со временем приобрел культурный характер, с тем чтобы быть показанным как отражение положения женщин и тех обуславливающих факторов, с которыми они сталкиваются. По этой причине целью данного исследования было проанализировать переменные, связанные с привычкой к чтению среди студентов университета с гендерной точки зрения. Что касается используемого метода, то планировался постфактумный, проспективный, однорупповой дизайн. Выборка состояла из 277 студентов университета (Mean = 22.20, SD = 4.367) обоих полов (20.7% мужчин; 79.3% женщин). Результаты показали, что чтение как вид досуга больше практикуется женщинами, особенно во время отпуска, и статистически значимое предпочтение наблюдалось в видах чтения (книги и журналы для женщин, комиксы и газеты для мужчин). Для женщин группа друзей оказала положительное и значительное влияние на продвижение чтения, а что касается компетенции чтения, то продвижение воображения было категорией, наиболее высоко оцененной женщинами, также со значительной дифференциацией. Таким образом, знание привычек чтения студентов университета, дифференцированных по полу, помогает повысить осведомленность преподавателей о необходимости поощрения чтения на этом уровне образования.

Ключевые слова: привычка чтения, виды чтения, студенты, университет, гендерный аспект.

Introduction

Reading allows the creation of an intimate and private space in which to feel free and evoke a real or imaginary world, full of experiences and sensations that contribute to forge identity, foster a critical spirit and develop fantasy. From there, adolescents “can experiment, learn and grow, resolve their conflicts and broaden their cultural background, participating in the collective imagination and literary references of our culture” (Aparicio, 2016, p.36). Traditionally, the scientific-pedagogical discourse on reading, as well as its research, has been associated with the acquisition of reading skills and reading habits of students, mostly at compulsory educational levels, differentiating academic reading from that done during leisure time. Several studies show that young people have not integrated reading as a leisure activity, despite the fact that it is significantly associated with higher academic performance, a more critical view of education, greater autonomy, initiative and the use of more participatory methodologies in the classroom (Cardoso et al., 2018; Elche et al., 2019; Valentín, 2019).

At the university level, there are few studies that analyse students' reading habits, preferences and difficulties, as well as the incorporation of these processes in the classroom. In this regard, Erdem (2015) highlights the need to investigate reading skills at university, since the current panorama yields demoralizing figures, such as the fact that less than 50% of students read more than one book monthly and less than 30% look at the newspaper daily. Likewise, Pérez et al. (2018) highlight the lack of planning, organization, execution and evaluation of the reading habit in the educational stages prior to university, which translates into a lack of ability and less taste for reading.

At university, reading competence is over-understood and students are introduced to the complexity of scientific reading, focused on a professionalizing and conceptual dimension that limits specifications of different fields of knowledge (Moje, 2007), char-

acterized by specific discursive productions that require intellectual operations with a high level of abstraction (Carlino, 2005). However, this type of reading is not always accessible to first-year university students, who are not very accustomed to these discursive and rhetorical forms (Camps & Castelló, 2013). As Ramos et al. (2017) point out, we are facing a university generation and a level of complexity in reading that requires working on new skills such as argumentation or information analysis, in order to be able to cope with the work of written productions.

Although female's approach to reading had been denied, establishing a merely masculine cultural and intellectual code, reading is now recognized as a means of empowering female through the use and production of manuscripts with a strong reactionary connotation (Tsuchiya, 2008). Similarly, reading also contributes to children constructing their understanding of the world and gender socialization, knowing that the most significant roles identified in stories are associated with care-reproduction in females, and dominance-strength in male (Ros-García, 2012). The fear of fostering critical thinking in females, which could awaken the questioning of the masculinized model of patriarchy, has now been abrogated by the dizzying increase in the level of education and reading habits of females (Espejo, 2019). But what is disconcerting is not the fact that the fracture of literary invisibility has been evidenced by a considerable increase in the female presence in literary production, but "that the incipient incorporation of females into the literary system is a reason for distorting the figures and there is talk of a boom when in reality female's production does not exceed 30% (Spanish case) and 15% (Basque case) (Lasarte, 2013).

From the questioning of gender as a differential factor in the reading habits of ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education) students, Muñoz and Hernández-Prados (2011) concluded that in general, young people read little, although gender has a significant influence in favor of girls in the motives, frequency, preference and tastes for reading. In contrast, boys and girls have similar motivational beliefs regarding the competence and value associated with school reading (Pagani et al., 2010), and the slight differences diminish as schooling progresses (Wolters et al., 2014).

Regarding reading frequency, Neira (2015) argues that while 69% of males read frequently on a weekly basis, 86% of females are frequent readers. This fact is highlighted by Gutiérrez (2013), who classifies reading as a feminized activity since females are three times more frequent readers than males. This situation can also be seen when calculating the minutes spent per day, as females spend an average of 36 minutes reading, which is considerably more than the 14 minutes associated with males (Rojo et al., 2017).

In terms of reading preferences, female students aged from 12 to 16 tend to opt for books and magazines as opposed to reading newspapers or comics, which is more common among male students (Ambrós & Ramos, 2018). Along the same direction, Lasarte (2013) recognizes the "feminization of the reading habit" as the preference shown by young females and girls towards reading works written and illustrated by females, with female protagonists, as well as a feminization of the themes. In contrast, Valdés (2013) finds no significant differences between males and females in terms of reading tastes, perception of the reader or time spent reading.

With growth and maturity, preferences for dedication of free time are consolidated or abandoned depending on the levels of satisfaction and enjoyment they promote. In relation to reading as a leisure activity, Caballo et al. (2017) find that nearly 70% of females choose reading as one of their leisure time priorities, compared to almost

40% of males, who are more likely to choose sports activities. The same occurs at younger ages, with 36.5% of girls considering reading as one of their favorite activities compared to 25% of boys (Neira, 2015). All this leads to the recognition of reading as an activity more closely associated with female's leisure profiles, despite the low use of reading among both boys and girls, finding that 90% of both sexes never read with a weekly frequency (Fraguela-Vale et al., 2016).

Finally, the gender perspective in relation to digital reading has been studied by Wang et al. (2016), showing that males subjects had a greater mastery of reading using mobile technology compared to females. Likewise, the use of the *Kahoot!* tool in English reading class led Taiwanese university students to report learning in a more efficiently and fun, feeling more motivated to learn, although without statistically significant differences based on gender (Chiang, 2020). Another clear example occurs with the use of digital newspapers, as 62.75% of males users read online newspapers compared to 37.25% of females, highlighting a digitized reading profile in males compared to females (Anderson et al., 2010).

The gender differentiation in reading habits evidenced in previous studies leads us to ask ourselves: Are there gender differences in the reading preferences of Social Education bachelor's degree students? The choice of the degree in Social Education was motivated by the profile of this student body, highly sensitive to sociocultural issues, and with specific training in inequality and gender within the subjects studied in the degree.

Based on the above, the aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between certain socio-demographic and educational variables with the level of reading habits of university students, as a function of gender. According to the review of the scientific evidence in the area, the starting hypothesis is that there is a difference in reading habits according to gender: 1) The types of reading are related to gender, so that males read more newspapers and comics, and females read more books and magazines; 2) Leisure reading is associated with gender, with females reading more frequently than males; and 3) The peer group is a variable related to gender, encouraging reading more in females than in males.

Methodology

Sample

The sample, selected by incidental sampling, consisted of 227 university students (20.7% male; 79.3% female) of the bachelor's degree in Social Education (34.8% first year; 29.1% second year; 36.1% third year), aged between 18 and 55 years ($M = 22.20$ years; $SD = 4.367$). Of the 65 municipalities of origin, Murcia was the city with the highest frequency of students (28.2%), followed by Cartagena (4.8%) and Molina de Segura (4.4%), of whom studied secondary education in schools of different types (2.2% private; 12.3% private-subsidized; 84.6% public).

Design

For the present study, an ex post facto design was planned, specifically a prospective single-group design, in which the relationship between the reading preferences and

habits of university students of Social Education and their gender was measured. This type of design allows the researcher to approach the study of certain problems which, due to their complexity, could not be approached using other methods, while at the same time possessing greater external validity (León & Montero, 2003).

Procedure

Although it is true that universities have telematics applications that allow students to complete surveys without the need to be present and use pencil and paper, previous experience has shown that there is greater participation when the instruments are applied during class time in the corresponding classroom. Therefore, after obtaining the approval of the Ethics Commission of the Murcia University, the collaboration of at least one teacher per group and course was requested to ensure greater participation. Since the questionnaire was provided during the months of April and May, second semester subjects were used. Before the questionnaire was handed out, all participants were informed of the importance of answering honestly, as the process is completely anonymous, and of their commitment to the research as part of the university community. A standardized procedure was used to ensure that the instructions were the same for all participants. Prior to completing the booklet, the students voluntarily signed their collaboration in the study, as the students were of legal age, informed consent from their families was not required

Instruments

In order to measure the variables under study, the students were administered a specifically designed questionnaire for this research, which was submitted to the judgement of fourteen experts, who assessed its relevance, suitability and clarity. This instrument contemplates, on one hand, socio-demographic data, and on the other hand the reading habits of the participants through eight items measuring three dimensions (Table 1).

Data analysis

All statistical analyses were carried out with the IBM SPSS program, version 22.0 for the Windows operating system. An initial description of the variables under study was carried out, for which descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and frequencies were calculated. Prior to the contrast of means, the assumptions of normality of the dependent variables of the study were checked, performing non-parametric tests: Pearson's χ^2 and contingency tables for the contrast of hypotheses on the relationship between variables, and Mann-Whitney U for the contrast of hypotheses on the difference of means between groups.

Table 1

Questionnaire dimensions and items

Block	Items	Answer
Variables Partner- demographic	Gender	Male; Female
	Age	Numerical open response
	Course	1st; 2nd; 3rd
	place of origin	Open written response
	Nature of the educational center	Private; Concerted; Public
	Mode of access to the degree	Baccalaureate; Higher education training cycle; Selectivity (over 25 years old; over 40 years old); University degree
I Dedication to reading	Studies of fathers and mothers	Without studies; primaries; secondaries; university students
	Reading of different media: newspapers, books, e-books, magazines and comics	Likert scale 1-5 (Not at all, very little, somewhat, quite a bit and a lot)
	Number of books read last year	None; Between 1 and 5; Between 6 and 10; Between 11 and 15; more than 15
II Books at home	Free time reading frequency: weekdays, weekends and holidays	Likert scale 1-5 (Not at all, very little, somewhat, quite a bit and a lot)
	Number of books at home	None; Between 1 and 20; Between 21 and 100; Between 101 and 500; More than 500
III Reading competence and reading promotion	Number of books purchased in the last year	None; Between 1 and 5; Between 6 and 10; Between 11 and 15; more than 15
	Promoting learning, imagination, expression, satisfaction and vocabulary	Likert scale 1-5 (Not at all, very little, somewhat, quite a lot and a lot).
	Agents promoting reading: Compulsory school stage, university, family and friends	

Analysis and Results

Types of readings by gender

Table 2, in addition to the frequency and percentages of reading types based on time spent and gender, shows, at the 99% confidence level, that the variables newspaper reading (Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 18.20, p < .001$; Cramer's $V = .28, p < .001$) and comic book reading (Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 22.67, p < .001$; Cramer's $V = .32, p < .001$) are associated with gender, showing a moderate effect size in both relationships ($r_{\chi^2} = .28$, and $r_{\chi^2} = .32$) (Rosenthal, 1991). For the remaining types of readings, no statistically significant differences were detected in the relationship with the gender variable.

After contrasting means, as shown in Table 3, male were more frequent readers of newspapers than female, with statistically significant differences being detected ($U = 2667, p < .001$), a fact also observed in the reading of comics ($U = -3083, p < .001$). The trend was reversed for the other types of reading, as books, magazines and e-books were the types of reading preferred by female, with statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female and the reading of books ($U = 3220.5, p < .01$) and magazines ($U = 3328, p < .05$).

Books in the household, and books purchased and books read in the last year by gender.

Although male university students live in households with more books than female university students, it was female who bought and read more books in the last year (Table 4). However, it cannot be said that the number of books in the household (Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 4.38, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .14, p > .05$), books bought in the last year (Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 2.48, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .11, p > .05$) and number of books read in the last year (Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 1.21, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .73, p > .05$) are variables related to participants' gender.

Results were similar after contrasting means between males and females. Although male participants reported a higher number of books in their households than females ($U = 3992, p > .05$), females reported higher book purchases ($U = 3702, p > .05$) and read more books in the last year ($U = 3880, p > .05$), with no statistical difference in either case.

Leisure time reading by gender

Table 5 shows the frequency and percentage of the variable Reading in leisure time, according to the time spent and gender of the participants, showing that female read more in leisure time than male. It is affirmed (at 99% confidence level) that leisure reading (Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 12.52, p < .05$; Cramer's $V = .24, p < .05$) is related to participants' gender, with a moderate effect size value ($r_{\chi^2} = .24$). However, weekday readings (Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 2.62, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .11, p > .05$) and weekend readings (Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 6.13, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .16, p > .05$), were not variables associated with gender.

Table 2
Frequency and percentages of types of reading according to time spent and gender

RF T	Any		Very little		Something		Quite		Much	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Newspaper	2(4.3%)*	34(18.9%)*	9(19.1%)*	58(32.2%)*	17(36.2%)*	59(32.8%)*	15(31.9%)*	2(11.7%)*	4(8.5%)*	8(4.4%)*
Books	7(14.9%)	10(5.6%)	14(29.8%)	35(19.4%)	12(25.5%)	56(31.1%)	11(23.4%)	56(31.1%)	3(6.4%)	23(12.8%)
ebooks	23(48.9%)	89(49.4%)	12(25.5%)	33(18.3%)	8(17%)	28(15.6%)	3(6.4%)	16(8.9%)	1(2.1%)	14(7.8%)
Journals	13(27.7%)	28(15.6%)	14(29.8%)	46(25.6%)	13(27.7%)	60(33.3%)	6(12.8%)	34(18.9%)	1(2.1%)	12(6.7%)
Comics	26(55.3%)*	143(79.4%)*	6(12.8)*	18(10%)*	8(17%)*	16(8.9%)*	4(8.5%)*	3(1.7%)*	3(6.4%)*	0(0%)*

Note: RF: reading frequency; T: types of readings; M: male; F: female. n(%); *p < .001

Table 3

Descriptive statistics and average ranges of the types of reading according to gender

		Newspapers	Books	ebooks	Journals	Comics
<i>M(SD)</i>	Male	3.21(1.00)	2.77(1.17)	1.87(1.06)	2.32(1.09)	1.98(1.29)
	Female	2.51(1.07)	3.26(1.09)	2.07(1.31)	2.76(1.13)	1.33(.71)
Average ranges	Male	147.26***	92.52**	109.63	94.81*	138.40***
	Female	105.32***	119.61**	115.14	119.01*	107.63***

Note. ****p* < .001; ***p* < .01; **p* < .05

Table 4

Frequency and percentages of the number of books in the home and number of books read in the last year according to gender

		None	Between 1-20	Between 21-100	Between 101-500	More than 500
Books in the home	Male	0(0%)	8(17%)	22(46.8%)	16(34%)	1(2.1%)
	Female	0(0%)	32(17.8%)	98(54.4%)	38(21.1%)	12(6.7%)
		None	Between 1-5	Between 6-10	Between 11-15	More than 15
Purchased books	Male	8(17%)	27(57.4%)	9(19.1%)	2(4.3%)	1(2.1%)
	Female	22(12.2%)	95(52.8%)	41(22.8%)	10(5.6%)	12(6.7%)
Read books	Male	4(8.5%)	34(72.3%)	5(10.6%)	3(6.4%)	1(2.1%)
	Female	11(6.1%)	122(67.8%)	27(15%)	14(7.8%)	6(3.3%)

Note. n(%)

Table 5

Frequency and percentages of reading in free time according to time spent and gender

		Any	Very little	Something	Quite	Much
Weekday	Male	9(19.1%)	16(34%)	19(40.4%)	3(6.3%)	0(0%)
	Female	32(17.8%)	56(31.1%)	65(36.1%)	24(13.3%)	3(1.7%)
Weekends	Male	14(29.8%)	9(19.1%)	18(39.3%)	5(10.6%)	1(2.1%)
	Female	32(17.8%)	48(26.7%)	57(31.7%)	35(19.4%)	8(4.4%)
Holidays	Male	13(27.4%)*	7(14.9%)*	10(21.3%)*	10(21.3%)*	7(14.9%)*
	Female	18(10%)*	18(10%)*	43(23.9%)*	52(28.9%)*	49(27.2%)*

Note. n(%); **p* < .05

After contrasting means, the average ranges (Table 6) confirmed the trend described in the previous data. Females were the most assiduous readers during all leisure time: on holidays ($U = 3019.50, p < .01$), on weekdays ($U = 3888.50, p > .05$) and on weekends ($U = 3629.50, p > .05$).

Table 6

Descriptive statistics and average ranges of leisure time reading according to gender

		Weekday	Weekends	Holidays
<i>M(SD)</i>	Male	2.34(.87)	2.36(1.09)	2.81(1.44)
	Female	2.50(.99)	2.66(1.11)	3.53(1.27)
Average ranges	Male	106.73	101.22	88.24**
	Female	115.90	117.34	120.73**

Note. ** $p < .01$

Reading literacy by gender

As Table 7 shows, it can be stated (at 99% confidence level) that the category It helps me to imagine things (Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 12.18, p < .05$; Cramer's $V = .23, p < .05$) is related to the gender of the participants, with a moderate effect size value ($r_{\text{VA}} = .23$). For the other categories of reading competence (I learn a lot from reading: Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 3.29, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .12, p > .05$; It helps me express myself better: Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 2.05, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .10, p > .05$; Reading makes me feel good, males and females obtained the highest percentage in the rating quite a lot: Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 6.82, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .17, p > .05$; and Reading makes me know what the words mean: Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = .58, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .05, p > .05$), no statistically significant differences were detected in the relationship with the gender variable.

The mean ranks for all categories showed a majority trend for females over males (Table 8). For female, reading helps them to imagine things ($U = 3096.50, p < .05$) and makes them feel good ($U = 3476, p < .05$), more so than male, with statistically significant differences in both cases. This trend of higher mean ranks in females was maintained in all categories: with valuing reading as an aid to learning ($U = 3740, p > .05$), helps to express oneself better ($U = 3896.50, p > .05$) and with reading I know what the words mean ($U = 4118, p > .05$), although no statistically significant differences were observed.

Agents of reading promotion according to gender

Table 9 shows that all categories of the variable Reading encouragement (at compulsory stage: Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = .76, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .06, p > .05$; at university: Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = .92, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .06, p > .05$; in the family: Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 2.82, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .11, p > .05$; and in the group of friends: Pearson's $\chi^2_{(4)} = 6.00, p > .05$; Cramer's $V = .16, p > .05$), were not variables associated with gender.

Table 7

Frequency and percentages of reading competence based on the assessment of the degree of achievement and gender

	Any		Very little		Something		Quite		Much	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
I learn	1(2.1%)	1(0.6%)	7(14.9%)	16(8.9%)	7(14.9%)	21(11.7%)	24(51.1%)	104(57.8%)	8(17%)	38(21.1%)
I imagine	1(2.1%)*	3(1.7%)*	6(12.8%)*	7(3.9%)*	3(6.4%)*	11(6.1%)*	28(59.6%)*	82(45.6%)*	9(19.1%)*	77(42.8%)*
Express	1(2.1%)	2(1.1%)	1(2.1%)	6(3.3%)	4(8.5%)	12(6.7%)	25(53.2%)	81(45%)	16(34%)	79(43.9%)
I feel	1(2.1%)	3(1.7%)	10(21.3%)	16(8.9%)	3(6.4%)	15(8.3%)	21(44.7%)	78(43.3%)	12(25.5%)	68(37.8%)
Words	1(2.1%)	2(1.1%)	5(10.6%)	15(8.3%)	3(6.4%)	13(7.2%)	28(59.6%)	111(61.7%)	10(21.3%)	39(21.7%)

Note. I learn: I learn a lot; I imagine: It helps me to imagine things; Express: It helps me express myself better; I feel: It makes me feel good; Words: I know what words mean.
M: male; F: female. *n*(%); **p* < .05

Table 8

Descriptive statistics and average ranges of the degree of achievement of reading competence according to gender

		I learn	I imagine	Express	I feel	Words
<i>M(SD)</i>	Male	3.66(1.01)	3.81(.97)	4.15(.83)	3.70(1.14)	3.87(.95)
	Female	4.24(.86)	4.24(.86)	4.27(.82)	4.07(.98)	3.94(.85)
Average ranges	Male	102.81	89.88*	105.33	97.96*	111.62
	Female	116.92	120.30*	116.26	118.19*	114.62

Note. * $p < .05$

Table 9

Frequency and percentages of reading promotion from different instances based on the assessment of the participants and gender

		Any	Very little	Something	Quite	Much
Compulsory stage	Male	3(6.4%)	17(36.2%)	3(6.4%)	17(36.2%)	7(14.9%)
	Female	11(6.1%)	55(30.6%)	16(8.9%)	71(39.4%)	27(15%)
College	Male	2(4.5%)	16(34%)	4(8.5%)	19(40.4%)	6(12.8%)
	Female	9(5%)	53(29.4%)	23(12.8%)	74(41.1%)	21(11.7%)
Family	Male	9(19.1%)	13(27.7%)	5(10.6%)	14(29.8%)	6(12.8%)
	Female	21(11.7%)	45(25%)	16(8.9%)	68(37.8%)	30(16.7%)
Friends	Male	16(34%)	20(42.6%)	3(6.4%)	6(12.8%)	2(4.3%)
	Female	39(21.7%)	70(38.9%)	14(7.8%)	50(27.8%)	7(3.9%)

Note. *n*(%)

The mean ranks of all categories showed a majority tendency for females over males (Table 10). In contrast to the previous data, after contrasting means, statistically significant differences were detected between the mean rank of males and females and the variable Encouragement to read from the group of friends ($U = 3381, p < .05$). In the other categories (Compulsory stage: $U = 4056, p > .05$; University: $U = 4206, p > .05$; and Family: $U = 3644, p > .05$), no statistically significant differences were observed between the mean rank of males and females, as occurred in the relationship between variables (see Table 8).

Table 10

Descriptive statistics and average ranges of reading promotion according to gender

		Compulsory stage	College	Family	Friends
<i>M(SD)</i>	Male	3.17(1.26)	3.23(1.18)	2.89(1.37)	2.11(1.15)
	Female	3.27(1.22)	3.25(1.15)	3.23(1.31)	2.53(1.22)
Average ranges	Male	110.30	113.49	101.53	95.94*
	Female	114.97	114.13	117.26	118.72*

Note. * $p < .05$

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to analyze the relationship between certain socio-demographic and educational variables and the level of reading habits of university students according to gender. The results obtained confirm the initial hypothesis that there is a difference in reading habits according to gender.

In detail, it was expected that the variable type of reading would be related to gender, with male reading more newspapers and comics, and female reading more books and magazines. In light of the results obtained, the first hypothesis was confirmed, coinciding with works such as that of Muñoz and Hernández (2011), who observed that the female population was more assiduous in the consumption of books and magazines of an amorous or dramatic nature, while boys were less interested in this type of reading, preferring comics or newspapers.

Likewise, reading in digital format (e-book) was not a variable related to the gender of the participants, in addition to being the fourth most preferred format for reading despite it is associated with reading comprehension and long-term textual memory (Soria-Andurell, 2015). In this regard, Okagbue et al. (2020) found that the gender of Nigerian secondary school and university students was not a variable associated with content preferences in reading and study. On his hand, Alamri (2019) recorded that American college students preferred reading in print versus electronic texts, finding statistically significant differences based on gender, with females reporting better understanding of text content than males when reading print text. The results also revealed that students preferred to use electronic devices for personal rather than academic uses. In the present research, regarding the frequency of reading electronic media, 8.5% of males and 16.7% of females reported reading a lot and quite a lot on electronic media, 42.5% of males and 33.9% of females somewhat and very little, and 48.9% of males and 49.4% of females not at all. Similar results are reported by Elche and Yubero (2019), who found that 39.1% of Spanish university students read digitally every day, half of them read once a month or a week, and 9.6% never read digitally.

Another interesting aspect of this research consisted in identifying the presence of reading as a leisure activity in students according to their gender. Likewise, the second hypothesis was confirmed, since reading on vacation was associated with gender, so that female read more in this period, with statistical differentiation, coinciding with previous studies (Fraguela-Vale, Pose-Porto, & Varela-Garrote, 2016; Yubero, Larraña-

ga, & Pires, 2014). Vacation time is considered key to gender differentiation in reading since, in line with the vacation leisure profiles established by Neira (2015), female show more predilection for reading than male in non-working periods such as summer or Christmas.

It was also found that the number of books in the household, as well as books purchased and books read in the last year, were not related to the gender of the university students. However, the number of books read and purchased in the last year was higher for female than for male. Numerous studies conclude that reading is a female-dominated activity (Clark, 2011; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). More recently, McGeown and Warhurst (2019) found that it was not gender that was the strongest predictor of reading frequency, but gender identification, with children who identified with female traits reading more than those who identified with male traits. A look at similar studies highlights the greater predisposition and willingness of females towards reading, which contributes to their better academic performance (Mendoza et al., 2014).

In addition, the results showed that fostering imagination and feeling good about reading were abilities reported more highly by female, with statistical differentiation. There were no statistically significant differences in the relationship of the gender variable with increasing vocabulary or improving expression from reading. Therefore, being a boy or a girl does not seem to be a conditioning factor with respect to reading-related abilities such as expression or lexical skills, thus banishing several of the ideals that place biological condition as a cause of differences in these cognitive precepts of reading (Hyde, 2016). In contrast, the relevance and potential of reading for personal construction, imagination and satisfaction are reinforced in female, in line with the results of Rovira and López (2017). However, the results of previous literature are based on subjective measurement systems that make it impossible to generalize the finding, which highlights the need to design studies based on objective and rigorous measurement systems.

Finally, it was expected peer group to be a gender-related variable encouraging reading more in female than in male. This fact was also confirmed. Several studies (Arévalo et al., 2017; Miranda, 2019) have shown the relevance of the peer group as a means of influence for the maturation processes of children and adolescents, as it is also the case with reading. Reading activity as a leisure profile depends on personal tastes or preferences and is conditioned by the experiences and time shared with the members of the social cohort of reference: friends, a conditioning factor for the development of beneficial or harmful leisure behaviours (Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2015). In the present study, higher ratings were recorded in the group of female in terms of the promotion of reading by the group of friends, with statistical significance. In this line, and as Ruíz et al. (2013) point out, female have better sociability skills compared to boys with more superficial social relationships, giving these interactions greater validity and importance in terms of influencing the promotion of reading.

As most of the research (Caride et al., 2018; Márquez, 2017) announces, despite administrative attempts to encourage and promote the taste and habit of reading, this continues to be a pending issue, a challenge to achieve.. Hence the need to work on and research the reading habit at an advanced age, in university contexts and in different degrees or qualifications. Therefore, in order to contribute to developing the habit of reading in the student community, regardless of the educational level at which it is found, it is necessary to break with the traditional teaching model, in favour of the creation of a new system that connects language, culture and ethics (Romero et al., 2017). Likewise, given that in this study we have focused on the reading habit,

in the near future we plan to explore the relationship between reading and writing, following the line developed by Petersen (2018), who found notable differences in reading, but, above all, in the writing process, which translate into greater justified verbal performance. In addition, the development of the left hemisphere, where the language area is located, is more slowed down in boys compared to girls (Miller & Halpern, 2014). On the other hand, one of the limitations of the present study lies in the numerical disparity with respect to gender (20.7% male; 79.3% female), which may affect the results obtained, which should be interpreted taking these differences into account. For this reason, further research on reading and writing, but with a more homogeneous sample with respect to gender, is emerging as a line for future studies.

However, the meta-analysis work by Voyer and Doyle (2012) has not been able to support this claim of verbal performance and gender in relation to brain lateralization. In this regard, Hyde (2016) argues that this differentiation as psychological research stereotypes from 20th century, which has little validity, finding that 80% of the correlations of the different reading and gender research found little or no effect size. According to the above, the challenge is not only to promote the necessary measures to encourage reading, some of which have been pointed out by Muñoz and Hernández (2011), but also to encourage literary creation and composition in the female sector.

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