RELEVANCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS IN DETERMINING READING HABITS USING UTAUT: A THEORETICAL PROPOSITION

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Abstract

Reading is an essential life skill that keeps students informed and updated. However, reading habits are cultivated only when reading is seen as more than a means to pass exams. In the 21st century, reading patterns have changed due to various factors, including demographics. This study examines the relevance of socioeconomic factors in determining reading habits, using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as its theoretical framework. Adopting a narrative review approach, the study analyzes textual materials from reputable databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar to provide a holistic understanding of the topic. The findings reveal a significant disparity between developing and developed countries, particularly in the acceptance and use of technology that predicts reading habits. The study concludes that the UTAUT model's failure to include socioeconomic factors as a mediating variable contributes to the reading habit gap between these countries. Therefore, the study recommends that socioeconomic factors be incorporated into the UTAUT model as mediating variables to help address this disparity in developing countries.

Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill essential for students to stay informed and updated. To become independent learners, students must cultivate good reading habits that extend beyond the need to pass an examination. The way we read has changed in the 21st

century, influenced by factors such as demographic characteristics. Reading is a medium for developing and promoting the human mind (Eiriemiokhale & Sulaiman, 2024). This means that widespread reading broadens a university student's knowledge base, giving them an advantage over those who only read for specific purposes (Sulaiman & Akanbi, 2020). Reading improves students' knowledge and promotes a better understanding of society and the world at large.

Sulaiman et al. (2024) argued that reading enables students to develop the ability to engage with a wider society, providing access to opportunities beyond their immediate surroundings and unlocking academic achievement. Reading is a complex, interactive process between the reader and the text (Ashraf El Taweel et al., 2024). Ogunbodede and Sawyerr-George (2023) described reading as an individual's capacity to recognize letters and symbols to derive meaning from them. Ukpenor (2017) noted that reading involves the meaningful interpretation of words, phrases, and sentences, requiring various types of thinking, including critical, analytical, creative, imaginative, evaluative, judgmental, and problem-solving skills. Agbenyag (2016) added that reading goes beyond simply recognizing and pronouncing words; it involves the ability and enthusiasm to gain knowledge and perceive the meaning of arrangements within their total context. This shows that readers must develop critical and creative thinking that will enable them to engage with and relate to people in society. Bana (2020) noted that reading is a process of thinking, recalling, and relating concepts within a text's function. Reading is often referred to as a mechanism for collecting ideas, opinions, information, and knowledge that cannot be communicated verbally (Olszak, 2015). Naz et al. (2022) affirmed that reading is an art that provides a foundation for an individual's worldview. Reading refers to the ideas, knowledge, and information a writer conveys to a targeted audience. Miranda et al. (2023) noted that reading is an important language skill with various characteristics, such as gaining information, acquiring new vocabulary, and stimulating readers. The importance of reading makes it a necessary habit for anyone who wants to succeed in life; a positive reading habit is crucial for students' academic and social success.

Theoretically, two major ways to measure reading habits are frequency and purpose (Sudla et al., 2023). In other words, understanding students' reading habits involves observing how often they read and their reasons for doing so. Etuk (2016) identified the virtues of reading as providing individual welfare, social progress, international understanding, and the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and the right attitude that frees individuals from idleness. Labra (2019) noted that reading is a benchmark of academic success and is fundamental to human development. Therefore, individuals who engage in reading become habitual readers. Bamise and Akande (2021) noted that reading becomes a habit when done repeatedly and consistently. It is a typical behavioral pattern acquired and reinforced involuntarily in all situations (Samaranayake et al., 2022).

Reading habits are calculated based on how much a person reads, how often they read, when they read, and what they read (Rosli et al., 2017). A reading habit is described as the amount of material being read, the frequency of reading, and the average time spent on reading (Ovu et al., 2022). The behavioral patterns that prompt an individual to read and develop a taste for reading are regarded as reading habits (Haliru et al., 2015). Sulaiman and Akanbi (2020) observed that a reading habit is a behavioral pattern in which an individual organizes their reading at particular intervals and periods.

Exeala (2020) described a reading habit as the habitual and regular reading of books and informational materials. Habitual readers tend to exhibit an increased reading habit. Saleh et al. (2022) noted that a reading habit refers to the practices and behaviors associated with acquiring knowledge or information. Krashen (2020) noted that reading habits promote all aspects of literacy and improve educational success. Owusu-Acheaw (2014) observed that a reading habit is a well-planned and deliberate pattern of study that has attained a form of consistency in students toward understanding academic subjects and passing examinations. Oriogu et al. (2017) noted that reading habits promote students' ability to acquire in-depth knowledge, skills, and information across different domains and help establish retention capacity in a chosen field. Reading habits enable students to acquire knowledge that can form the basis for intellectual development and the capacity to learn—factors that may be influenced by various variables, particularly socio-economic ones.

In this study, socio-economic factors are defined as the influence of income and parents' education levels on the reading habits of undergraduate students. Sun (2020) described socio-economic status (SES) as the income of parents and core family members, including occupation and education level. SES is defined as having three dimensions: family income, parents' education level, and parents' occupational prestige (Chen et al., 2018). This definition is essential because undergraduates' socio-economic backgrounds could be potential predictors of their reading habits.

Okolo and Ivwighreghweta (2020) reported that socio-economic status significantly affects reading habits, either positively or negatively. Popoola et al. (2020) noted that SES appears to influence learners' reading preferences, indicating that socio-economic factors impact students' reading habits. Singh and Singh (2014) affirmed that the socio-economic status of parents does not have a significant effect on students' educational achievement. However, Raiza (2015) observed a significant relationship between reading habits and socio-economic status, which impacts academic achievements. Wheldall and Beaman (2013) noted that students can develop and maintain reading habits through their families' high-income levels. Chen et al. (2018) noted that SES can indirectly influence children's reading performance through the parent-child relationship.

Other scholars hold differing views. Zainol Abidin et al. (2014) argued that there is no relationship between socio-economic status and reading habits. Similarly, Aramide (2015) stated that parents' socio-economic factors do not affect the reading habits that students exhibit in tertiary institutions. However, Liswaniso and Mubanga (2019) noted that students from low socio-economic homes are often not exposed to reading materials that can support their reading habits, unlike students from high-income homes. Osunrinde (2018) also agreed that students' socio-economic factors have no significant influence on their reading habits. Despite these conflicting views, the literature suggests that socio-economic factors, especially parents' income and education, significantly affect the reading habits of undergraduates in tertiary institutions.

Against this background, this study examines the relevance of socio-economic factors in determining reading habits using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT): a theoretical proposition.

Objectives of the Study

To find out if socio-economic factors influence reading habit through UTAUT model

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, review-based methodology, using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as its theoretical framework. The research investigates the relevance of socioeconomic factors to reading habits. I've synthesized available theoretical, empirical, and conceptual works related to socioeconomic influences on reading habits and technology adoption models through a narrative literature review. The UTAUT model provides a framework for understanding how socioeconomic factors interact with the fundamental factors influencing technology use, ultimately shaping reading preferences. Scholarly databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCOhost were thoroughly searched to find relevant books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and credible conference proceedings.

This review-based methodology is limited by the quantity and accessibility of secondary materials. While it provides a solid theoretical foundation, the lack of primary data restricts empirical validation. Since the findings are interpretive, they should be considered a propositional framework for future empirical research. Finally, because the study exclusively used secondary data, there were no direct ethical issues involving human subjects. To preserve academic integrity, all sources were properly cited.

Review of Related Literature

Socioeconomic factors are often defined as an assessment of an individual's or family's social and economic status. For example, Muhammed and Maruf (2015) described them as a status index based on information about parents' education, occupations, and household possessions. Similarly, Sun (2020) defined socioeconomic status (SES) by the income, occupation, and education level of parents and core family members. This study adopts the three-dimensional definition proposed by Chen et al. (2018): family income, parents' education level, and parents' occupational prestige. This definition will be used to determine how these factors influence the reading habits of postgraduate students. According to Aramide (2015), SES is often subdivided into high, middle, and low categories.

Studies on the influence of socioeconomic factors on reading habits have yielded mixed results. Salihu and Mohd (2019) found that socioeconomic factors, including study hours and family size, were determinants of students' academic achievement. Darji (2019), however, found that adolescent students' study habits were not affected by their socioeconomic status. In contrast, Rosli et al. (2017) noted that SES plays a significant role in influencing reading habits, such as encouraging students to read more and fostering a positive attitude toward reading.

Several Nigerian studies have explored this relationship. Okolo and Ivwighreghweta (2020) found that parental SES positively or negatively affects the reading habits of undergraduate students at Michael and Cecilia Ibru University. Conversely, Osunrinade (2018) revealed that socioeconomic factors had no significant influence on senior

secondary school students' reading habits in Ogun State, Nigeria. However, a separate study by Aramide (2015) on secondary school students in the same state found that family income and fathers' occupation positively influenced reading habits.

Other researchers have also highlighted the impact of SES. Popoola et al. (2020) noted that SES appears to influence learners' reading preferences. This aligns with the findings of Kabir and Jeromes (2022), who argued that a family with a good monthly income is better able to provide reading resources that promote children's cognitive skills and reading habits. Hamidiah and Yusoff (2021) reported that economic factors, such as the ability to purchase books and subscribe to online reading platforms, support students at various levels. Buckingham et al. (2013) also noted that students with high family income are more likely to engage in regular reading. However, some studies present a different view. Singh and Singh (2014) found that parents' socioeconomic status did not have a significant effect on students' educational achievement, while Zainol Abidin et al. (2014) argued there is no relationship between SES and reading habits. Nevertheless, Liswaniso and Mubanga (2019) pointed out that students from low-SES homes often lack exposure to reading materials, which can hinder the development of reading habits.

The influence of parents is a recurring theme in the literature. Celik (2020) posited that families play an important role in shaping their children's reading habits. Caliskan and Ulas (2022) found that parental involvement in reading activities positively affected students' reading comprehension and motivation. Similarly, Imeh and Selina (2021) discovered that parental occupation significantly influenced their children's reading comprehension. Lara and Saracostti (2019) noted that educated parents often have more informational materials at home and read to their children from an early age, thereby shaping their habits. Vazquez-Cano et al. (2020) confirmed that parents' academic qualifications, professions, and educational roles were the most influential aspects of children's reading habits, based on a multi-country analysis.

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), is one of the most recent developments in technology acceptance models. The theory aims to explain users' intention to use an Information System (IS) and their actual usage behavior (Alshehri et al., 2013). The model includes four key elements that influence a user's behavioral intention to adopt a particular technology:

Performance Expectancy: The degree to which an individual believes that using a system will help them achieve gains in job performance.
Effort Expectancy: The perceived ease associated with using the system.
Social Influence: The degree to which an individual perceives that others, whom they consider important, believe they should use the new system.
Facilitating Conditions: The degree to which an individual believes that an organizational and technical infrastructure exists to support the use of the system.

In addition to these core elements, the model includes moderating variables such as gender, age, experience, and the voluntariness of use (Kissi et al., 2017).
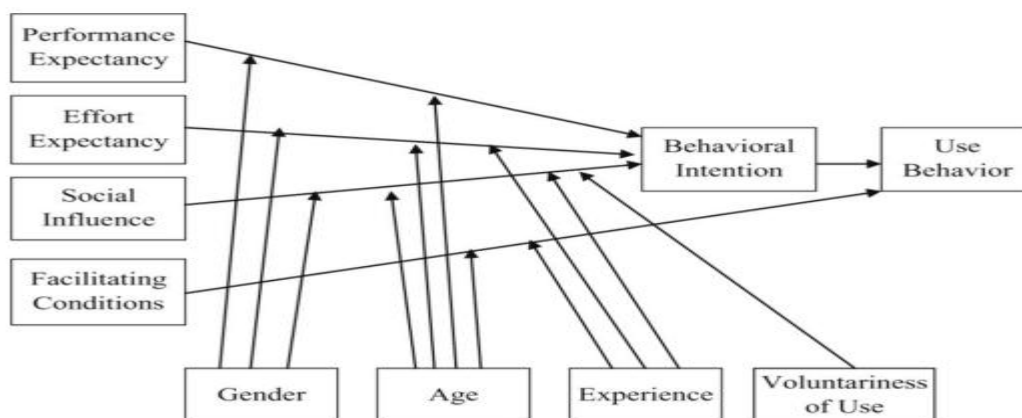
Figure 1:   Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)
Source: Sana'a (2016)

It is widely believed that a student's age can significantly impact their reading habits, especially when technology like text-to-speech is involved. This is because younger students, who are digital natives, tend to adapt more easily to new technologies. Research by Bamidele (2021) and Adepoju (2017) supports this, suggesting that age, as a variable in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), influences reading habits through technology use. Furthermore, a study by Comber et al. (1997) found that younger people generally have a more positive attitude toward using technologies like text-to-speech for reading. This suggests that a student's age, in conjunction with their use of technology, can be a positive predictor of their reading habits, a finding consistent with the UTAUT theory.

In addition to age, gender is another key variable in the UTAUT theory that influences students' reading habits when using technologies like text-to-speech. Studies have shown that a student's gender can affect their engagement with reading technology. For instance, Dar et al. (2019) found that female students are often more active readers than their male counterparts when using text-to-speech tools. Similarly, Allahi & Khandai (2015) demonstrated that female college students exhibit stronger reading habits than males through the use of such technology. These findings reinforce the relevance of the UTAUT theory in the context of developing countries.

Socio-economic factors are also a crucial influence on students' reading habits through technology in developing nations. Unfortunately, the UTAUT model does not include this variable. However, studies by Ajiboye et al. (2013) and Frias-Martinez and Virsesa (2012) have confirmed that socio-economic status significantly affects a student's reading habits and their use of technology. For example, income and education levels have been shown to be strong determinants of reading habits by enabling access to technological innovations (Ajiboye et al., 2013; Jiriko et al., 2015).

Therefore, despite not being part of the original UTAUT framework, socio-economic factors are highly relevant in developing countries, where significant disparities in status exist. This study recommends that socio-economic factors be included as a mediating variable in the UTAUT model, particularly in the context of developing nations.

Implications of the Study

This research highlights that socio-economic factors have a tangible influence on the reading habits of undergraduate students in developing countries. From a theoretical perspective, this means that socio-economic circumstances significantly shape reading habits, especially when analyzed through the lens of the UTAUT paradigm. This implies that a person's socio-economic status plays a major role in determining individual differences in access, motivation, and use of reading-related technology, extending the issue beyond a purely technological one. The study provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers, emphasizing the need to consider socio-economic disparities when promoting reading, especially via digital platforms. By incorporating socio-economic factors into the UTAUT model, this study offers a theoretical extension that better explains user behavior in reading environments. Future research should empirically test this claim and explore how various socio-economic circumstances interact with key UTAUT dimensions like performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and enabling conditions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study confirms that socio-economic factors are highly relevant to reading habits. However, a significant gap exists because the mediating variables in the UTAUT model do not account for these factors as influences on technology adoption. The research concludes that the disparity in reading habits between developing and developed countries can be partially attributed to the UTAUT model's failure to incorporate socio-economic factors. It is therefore recommended that socio-economic factors be integrated into the UTAUT model as mediating variables to help bridge this disparity in developing regions.

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