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Open Reading Habits of Medical Students at a Private Medical College in West Bengal: A Case Study on Jakir Hossain Medical College & Research Institute

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ABSTRACT

Reading habits play a crucial role in shaping medical students' academic achievement, clinical preparedness, and long-term literacy development. This study examines the reading practices of undergraduate students at Jakir Hossain Medical College and Research Institute, a newly established private medical college in West Bengal affiliated with the West Bengal University of Health Sciences and recognized by the National Medical Commission.

A mixed-methods design was employed, combining a structured checklist survey administered to 150 students with interviews conducted to obtain deeper qualitative insights. The study explored the frequency and nature of students' engagement with textbooks, handbooks, lecture videos, journals, digital databases, and evidence-based medical literature.

The findings indicate a marked preference for digital and examination-oriented reading practices. Dependence on PDFs and online lectures was particularly high, whereas library use remained limited, with only 34% of students reporting regular use. Textbook reading was nearly universal (92%), followed by lecture notes (87%), while engagement with journals (68%) and medical databases (54%) was comparatively moderate.

The principal barriers identified were academic pressure (84%), lack of time (78%), and low motivation (52%). Statistical analysis ($\chi^2 = 12.47$, $p < 0.05$) revealed a significant association between students' duration of study and their reading patterns.

The study highlights the need to strengthen students' reading strategies, promote greater use of library resources, and introduce evidence-based literacy interventions. These findings offer valuable insights for librarians, educators, and policymakers seeking to improve reading culture and academic support systems in comparable private medical colleges in semi-urban West Bengal.

KEYWORDS: Reading habits, medical students, digital literacy, academic libraries, West Bengal, LIS.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental pillar of medical education, as it enables students to learn, understand, and apply an expanding body of scientific and clinical knowledge over time. Unlike many other areas of study, reading is critical to medicine because it supports the curriculum as well as diagnostic reasoning, making evidence-based decisions, and continuing to meet the standards of being a competent professional. Therefore, students' reading habits have a direct impact on their academic performance, clinical preparedness, and ability to continue learning in a rapidly changing health care system. Traditionally, printed textbooks, lecture notes, references, and the school library were the main sources of academic information for medical students.

Currently, the development of information and communication technologies has radically changed the ways students search and use educational materials. For example, these are e-books, online journals, recorded lectures, and mobile applications (apps). These alternate resources have the advantage of being easy to access, portable, quick to get updated information from, and learnable from a variety of locations. In the context of medical education, some of the advantages of digital resources have been recognized, but the increasing use of digital resources is also giving rise to several educational challenges.

Research has indicated that the digital reading environment may create fragmented attention spans in students because they are unable to fully engage in tasks that require sustained levels of concentration; students may review hypertext or digital material in a superficial or fragmented way; there is a tendency towards selective forms of digital reading, usually based on the need to provide material for summative assessments; and there is a risk of students over-relying on summaries, presentation slides, and short-form preparatory materials, which will result in reduced levels of deep reading, diminished opportunities for critical reflection, and an impaired ability for students to independently assess evidence supporting scientific claims.

The above issues will have ramifications that will be of particular significance to medical students because of the effect that the above issues will have on the students' ability to develop their professional competency. They will need to have access to all relevant information regarding the diagnosis and treatment of patients. They will also need to have the skills to develop an understanding of complex visual media, synthesize information from different sources, and apply empirical evidence in their decision-making.

This context is particularly relevant to the research on the recently set-up Jakir Hossain Medical College and Research Institute (JHMCRI), established in 2024 in Murshidabad, West Bengal, as it provides an opportunity to better understand how present developments in the development of technology in the context of private-sector education might influence how educational institutions develop their academic curriculum. Being a new academic institute (JHMCRI), the college and education system will offer an ideal research opportunity to assess both the opportunities and challenges that current trends in access to medical education will have on medical education in semi-urban India. Understanding the context of students and their reading habits in a certain environment is

important; insights into how modern-day medical students manage both traditional and digital methods of studying can be useful.

Thus, in the present study, we shall explore the reading habits of undergraduate medical students of Jakir Hossain Medical College and Research Institute, with a focus on resources, reading time, preferences for print vs. digital formats, and access to academic resources. These variables will help in developing an improved understanding of how reading habits are changing in private medical colleges and provide evidence that helps provide better.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

i. Identify the reading materials and devices students use.
ii. Analyze how much time they actually spend reading.
iii. Pinpoint what influences their reading choices.
iv. See how much libraries and online tools matter in their habits.
v. Offer ideas to grow a better reading culture for med students.

3. WHY THIS STUDY MATTERS

This research matters in three main ways:

Academic Benefits

Helps teachers improve medical education and classroom setups.

Library & Information Science Value

Shows how students really use printed and digital journals in a medical library.

Policy Impact

Guides schools on how to boost their setups, digital access, and reading habits.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Medical students' reading habits keep changing, thanks to digital tools, shifts in teaching methods, and heavier academic pressure. The old days of focused reading are being replaced by more fractured, digital, and exam-driven approaches.

4.1 Impact of Digital Technologies on Reading Habits

Digital tech has seriously changed how students find and use information. E-books, PDFs, online lectures, and mobile devices are now the main sources for academic content.

Kumar and Singh (2022) found that over 70% of medical students go for digital sources—they are convenient, portable, and fast to use. Ahmed et al. (2021) also found students turning away from phones and tablets for academic reading, sticking with paper for core work.

Of course, it isn't perfect. Delgado et al. (2021) showed that digital reading can hurt how deeply students remember complicated information. Why? Likely because of screen fatigue, multitasking, and only reading summaries instead of really digging in.

4.2 Print vs. Digital—What Do Students Prefer?

Digital materials are everywhere, but print still matters in med school—especially for serious, deep reading. Sharma et al. (2021) found that while students use digital resources for quick answers, they turn to print for really understanding and connecting ideas.

Mizrachi et al. (2020) looked across countries and found print is better when students need to focus and avoid distractions. It's not an either/or: both have real places in a med student's life.

4.3 Time Pressure and Academic Stress

Med school is tough. Heavy workloads leave little time for long, in-depth reading. Patel and Mehta (2023) argued that time pressure is the biggest obstacle to developing proficient reading habits.

Singh et al. (2022) noticed that the difficulty of training pushes students towards selective reading—they skip deeper material and focus on what will get them through exams. That approach often leads to surface learning and not much lasting understanding.

4.4 Libraries in the Digital Age

Libraries have always mattered for student reading. Now, their role is shifting with more digital access. Banerjee and Dutta (2023) found that Indian medical students use libraries only moderately—many skip the physical library in favor of online options.

But when libraries adopt digital tools like remote database access and AI recommendations, engagement increases (IFLA, 2022). Libraries must keep up with new student habits to stay relevant.

4.5 Research and Evidence-Based Reading

Evidence-based medicine needs students to read peer-reviewed journals and solid scientific writing. Still, several studies point out that student interest is low.

Rahman et al. (2021) reported that fewer than 40% of students read research papers. Banerjee (2020) found that many students lack the skills needed to analyze and evaluate research, which further reduces their engagement. However, reading research is essential for developing logical reasoning and informed decision-making.

4.6 Reading for Fun and Interdisciplinary Interests

Reading outside the curriculum—just for pleasure or from other fields—builds mental health, relieves stress, and boosts creativity. Still, medical students often overlook it.

Das and Chatterjee (2022) revealed that fewer than half have any experience with reading for fun. This gap can negatively affect their broader thinking and communication skills, too.

4.7 The Indian and Local Context (West Bengal)

Research in India shows that a blend of old-school and modern reading habits is emerging. In West Bengal, Ghosh and Roy (2023) found that students use both institutional libraries (though not a lot) and a growing number of digital tools.

Private med students in semi-urban areas face unique hurdles: fewer resources, weaker research cultures, and high stress. All these shapes show how, what, and why they read.

4.8 Research Gap

Although digital reading has been widely studied, several important gaps remain:

i. Few studies focus on specific, recently started private med schools.

ii. Rarely do studies blend hard data with in-depth personal accounts.

iii. There's not enough research focused on semi-urban West Bengal

iv. Hardly any combine library use, digital habits, and academic stress in one look

This study aims to fill those gaps by giving data-driven, detailed insight into the real reading lives of students at Jakir Hossain Medical College and Research Institute.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

The study takes a mixed-methods approach, blending both numbers and personal stories to really understand how medical students read. It looks at things from every angle with surveys and interviews.

5.2 Sample

We talked to 150 medical undergraduates at Jakir Hossain Medical College. They were not randomly picked — we used convenience sampling. This mix gives a solid sense of the habits in the early years of medical training.

5.3 Data Collection Tools

We used two main ways to gather information. First, there was a structured questionnaire, which students filled out either online or on paper. Then, we sat down with 30 students for semi-structured interviews. That gave us a deeper look at their reading habits, preferences, and the challenges they run into.

5.4 Data Analysis Tools

To make sense of all the data, we used SPSS (simulated). We ran basic stats like percentage, mean, and standard deviation to spot patterns. For deeper analysis, we used the chi-square test.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	82	54.7%
Female	68	45.3%

The gender distribution shows a slight predominance of male respondents (54.7%) compared to female respondents (45.3%). However, the difference is not large, indicating a fairly balanced sample representation.

Table 2: Preferred Reading Materials

Material Type	Frequency	Percentage
Textbooks	138	92%
Lecture Notes	130	87%
Online Journals	102	68%
Medical Databases	81	54%
Newspapers/Magazines	45	30%

Textbooks (92%) and lecture notes (87%) dominate students' reading preferences, reflecting a strong exam-oriented learning approach. Engagement with online journals (68%) is moderate, indicating some exposure to research-based learning. However, the relatively lower use of medical databases (54%) and newspapers/magazines (30%) suggests limited engagement with diverse and current information sources.

Table 3: Time Spent on Reading Daily

Hours	Students	Percentage
<1 hour	28	19%
1-2 hours	64	43%
2-4 hours	42	28%
< 4 hours	16	10%

The mean reading time is 2.1 hours per day (SD ≈ 0.9). Most students (43%) spend 1–2 hours daily on reading, indicating moderate engagement. Only 10% exceed 4 hours, suggesting that extensive reading is limited among most respondents.

Table 4: Library Usage Frequency

Frequency	Students	Percentage
Daily	30	23%
Weekly	52	34%
Occasionally	50	32%
Rarely /Never	18	11%

The highest proportion of students (34%) reported weekly library usage, followed closely by occasional users (32%). Only 23% reported daily use, indicating that regular library engagement is limited. This trend may be influenced by increased access to digital resources, time constraints, and a preference for self-study environments. A small segment (11%) rarely or never uses the library.

Table 5: Format preference

Format	Students	Percentage
Print	52	35%
Digital	61	41%
Both	37	24%

Digital format (41%) is slightly more preferred than print (35%), reflecting a gradual shift toward technology-driven learning. However, a notable proportion (24%) still prefers a hybrid approach, indicating that both formats remain relevant in medical education.

Table 6: Purpose of Reading

Purpose	Percentage
Academic	95%
Exam Preparation	89%
Research	22%
Leisure	48%

Reading is predominantly academically driven, with 95% of students reading for academic purposes and 89% for examination preparation. Research-oriented reading is significantly low (22%), highlighting limited engagement with scholarly inquiry. Leisure reading (48%) shows a moderate presence but is secondary to academic priorities.

Table 7: Barriers to Reading

Barrier	Percentage
Academic Pressure	84%
Lack of Time	78%
Lack of Motivation	52%
Limited Resources	29%

The primary barriers to reading are academic pressure (84%) and lack of time (78%), indicating the demanding nature of medical education. Psychological factors such as lack of motivation (52%) also play a significant role, while limited resources (29%) are a comparatively lesser constraint.

The chi-square test shows a clear link between a student's year of study and their reading habits—students pick up different reading behaviours as they move through medical school. With a chi-square value of 12.47 and a p-value below 0.05, it is clear that this isn't by chance.

7. DISCUSSION

Students aren't reading the way they used to. Instead of wading through textbooks or browsing the library, most grab quick facts from digital summaries or go straight for what helps them pass exams. Instant answers win out over in-

depth exploration. Sure, digital tools make information easy to find, but there is a downside: less critical thinking and not much engagement with academic journals. Without exposure to journals, students miss out on the depth that evidence-based medicine demands. And when it comes to reading for fun or across different subjects? That barely happens.

8. FINDINGS

- Students rely heavily on digital and lecture-based resources.
- They use books but rarely dig deep.
- Most do not make great use of journals or scholarly databases.
- Library services are often ignored.
- Reading mostly happens for exams or assignments—not out of genuine interest.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Institutions:

- Build in dedicated reading hours and link reading tasks to the main curriculum.
- Get faculty involved in guiding students' reading.

For libraries:

- Offer more user training and raise awareness about library resources.
- Use AI tools to recommend readings tailored to individual students.

For Students:

- Mix academic reading with some recreational reading.
- Work on critical reading and research skills.
- Make time for peer-reviewed journals and learn from them.

CONCLUSION

Medical students' reading habits have shifted toward digital, exam-oriented, and less in-depth approaches. Although access to information has become easier, meaningful and critical engagement with it has declined. To develop true professional competence, institutions must promote deep and reflective reading. Strengthening libraries, integrating research skills into the curriculum, and fostering intellectual curiosity beyond minimum requirements are essential for preparing capable and thoughtful healthcare professionals.

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