Sustained silent reading: Pleasure to treasure

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ABSTRACT

Recognizing reading as an indispensable tool for learning, students need to be adept either in oral or silent reading activity. This study explored the students' reading motivations, causes of reading demotivation and preferred leisure time activities. It further verified the effects of the ten-minute sustained silent reading (SSR) for two months to the student' reading scores and their attitude towards reading after SSR sessions. Using the quasi - experimental design along with the descriptive survey method and focus group discussion, the research findings revealed that the experimental group, who underwent a 10-minute SSR twice a week for a period of eight weeks showed significant improvement in their reading test scores. By contrast, the control group, with no SSR time, obtained no significant mean gain difference. Students had placed high regard on the importance of pleasure reading, as evidenced by their positive attitude towards reading after SSR sessions.Factors like intrinsic motivation and choice of leisure time activity contribute to the quality and quantity of SSR engagements. Since SSR is an essential aid in developing and enhancing the students' reading proficiency, it is highly recommended that both school and home take a conscious effort in providing a print-rich environment and that SSR be made part in the developmental reading curriculum among students in the university.

Keywords
Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Reading Motivation, Reading Attitude, Pleasure Reading

Introduction

Reading is an important survival skill. The success in school and beyond greatly depends in a person's ability to understand what has been read. Exposure to reading enriches a person's word schema making him/her relate better to any text. Like any other skill, reading competence is developed through constant practice, as it is affected by a number of factors.

Children acquire involuntarily and unconsciously almost nearly all of the so-called "language skills" when they read for pleasure or as they get hooked on books. They will become adequate readers, acquire a large vocabulary, gain the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style, and spell well (but not necessarily perfectly). Although free voluntary reading alone will not ensure attainment of the highest levels of literacy, it will at least reach an acceptable level. Through reading, the students' vocabulary is increased and fluency and background schema are built (Krashen, 2010). It has been noted in the study that reading for pleasure has become the major source of reading competence, vocabulary and the ability to handle complex grammatical constructions. Satija (2002), as cited by Lone (2011), appended that regular and systematic reading sharpens the intellect, refines the emotions, elevates tastes and provides perspectives for one's living; thereby prepares a person to participate effectively in the social, religious, cultural and political life. Reading loads the mind with new software.

As students read, they become better readers; acquire greater content

knowledge which will help them to perform better across disciplines (Stanovich, 1986).Observations are noted on the discrepancy the way college students approach assigned academic reading and pleasure reading. Students find pleasure reading more engaging, because there is no monitoring from the teachers, that is, no assessment of any kind and no reaction or summary is required. In most SSR studies reported, no accountability was used; subjects simply read for pleasure and were not required to do any sort of book report. Even if the students are not assessed, independent reading shows positive effect on their reading interest which cuts across other disciplines.It has been proven to be superior to traditional approaches on measures of reading comprehension as well as measures of writing and reading(Mason and Krashen, 1997).

For their part, Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) stressed that individuals who read frequently also participate more in their community. Using a national database, he added that the amount of reading predicted participation in community organizations, after home background and level of schooling were controlled.

It is axiomatic that all formal education involves reading as a communicative act. Success in schooling heavily depends on a student's facility and command of thelanguage across the spectrum of modes. Like other age groups, teenagers read for a wide variety of purposes with personal "tastes" in reading (Manuel, 2012). They may for instance read for pleasure, escape, relaxation, affirmation, comfort, discovery, fun, information, to connect with others and to complete required school-based tasks.

Reading independently for sustained periods helps students become self-reliant readers. Researches show that more time spent reading had significant effect on achievement compared to a control condition. (Samuels and Wu, 2004). In this information revolution age, students are constantly challenged how to productively use their time in and out of school. With enormous workloads, students, during their free time, must not disregard looking for adequate

means to improve their critical thinking skills, analytical reasoning and written communication skills.

Studies have shown that reading outside of typical class work, reading a novel or general non-fiction for pleasure, has been associated with heightened creativity and with improved academic success. Reading researchers have looked primarily at two motivation-related constructs. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) cited these constructs. The first is one's attitude towards reading, which is defined generally as individual's feelings about reading. Alexander and Filler (1976), in Wigfield and Guthrie (1997), stated that these feelings about reading influence how much individuals involve themselves in reading, thus attitudes about reading should relate to individuals' motivation for reading. A second construct is the interest in reading that is related to the work on intrinsic value and motivation. Schiefele (1996), in Wigfield and Guthrie (1997), found that college students who were interested in the text materials used in the study understood those materials more deeply than those less interested in the materials, even when the students' prior knowledge of the materials and general intelligence were controlled.
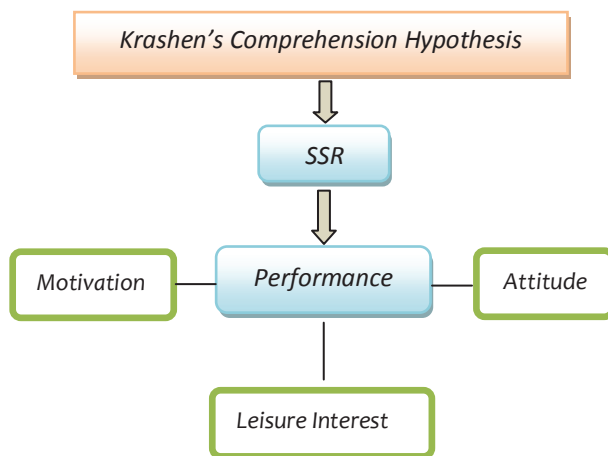

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Krashen (2004) underscored that the success of in-school free reading is consistent with the more general Comprehension Hypothesis, the hypothesis that one acquires language when he/she understands messages.

The large quantities of meaningful and comprehensible input provided by SSR activate that potential, thereby fostering language acquisition, as learners induce the rules of grammar and other language elements, such as spelling, from the data they receive in their environment. Hence, school performance is affected by one's exposure to language in education. Contrastingly, several factors can also contribute to performance, like students' motivation and attitude towards learning. In the same vein, the quality and quantity of pleasure reading greatly depend on a student's reading motivation, reading attitude and preferred leisure time activities. Influence of peers and modern technology shape the way how students spend their leisure time. It is their interest that heightens their engagement to sustained silent reading.

Pilgreen and Krashen (1993), in Krashen (2004), after observing SSR classes concluded that it is more effective to do a little each day than to devote large segments of time once or twice a week to free reading. The goal of SSR is to develop a taste for reading, to stimulate the once-reluctant reader to read more outside of school. Rather than forcing reading, and possibly making it distasteful, small doses are much more likely to work. It is not the actual time reading during SSR that counts but the desire to read. Thus SSR is not for very advanced readers. Studies confirm that those who participate in SSR programs read more on their own when the program is over. The key belief underlying SSR implementation is that students can best learn the parts of a language indirectly by reading whole text, whole-to-part, supplemented by some instruction (Anderson, 1996, Yu, 1993 as cited in Lituanas, 1999). SSR provides one mean of supporting the efficacy of instruction focused on whole texts (Mason and Krashen, 1997, Elley, 1996 in Lituanas, 1999).

Rationales for the advantages of extensive reading range from the common sense - one learn to X (in this case, read) by doing X (in this case, reading) - to the currently more esoteric - e.g., chaos theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997 in Lituanas, 1999) which postulates that dynamic, complex non-linear systems such as human language are self-organizing, given sufficient input and feedback, and reading provides one source of such input and feedback.

Pleasure reading is comprehensible input and students make better in classes that supply more "comprehensible input."

Acknowledging the importance of reading and the paucity of research on sustained silent reading among university students, this paper investigated the students' reading motivation, causes for reading demotivation during off-class time and the effect of SSR in their test scores and attitude towards reading.

Research Objectives

This study ascertained the effects of sustained silent reading among the Education students' reading test scores and attitude towards reading. Likewise it determined the students' reading motivations, causes of reading demotivation and preferred leisure time activities.

Method

Making use of both the descriptive survey, the study relied on the questionnaire and the quasi-experimental design. Purposive sampling was used to compose the 107 students in the second year of teacher-preparation. Since both classes were held every Tuesdays and Thursdays, in the same classroom, the researcher found more reasons for consistency of results. For 16 meetings (in eight weeks), students in Block B, the experimental group, spent 10 minutes of SSR. They were made to bring any material they love to read for the first 10 minutes of the 90-minute class. Students of Block A, the control group had the full 90 minutes for the subject. The test was personally administered by the researcher to the informants on the 8th week. She saw to it that the room and the testing conditions were the same for both groups.

To find out the students' motivations for reading, the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) by Wigfield and Guthrie in 1997 was utilized. The original scale contained 82 items (Wigfield & Guthrie,

1995), but was revised by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) and now only contains 53 items.

To find out the causes of reading demotivations and preferred leisure time activities, the researcher-made and student-completed checklists were used. It is a student rated assessment of the extent to which each is motivated to read. To ensure validity and reliability, the same test was pilot-tested to second year Block C. Revisions on the instructions and inclusion of "others" in the Options were among the changes made andresponses were tallied using frequency and percentages.

The questionnaires (Set A and Set B) in Reading Comprehension were used during the pre-test (Set A) and post-test (Set B) respectively. Each set is composed of 50 multiple choice test items. The test went through pilot testing. It was administered first to other classes in Second Year.

In Quantitative data analyzed the students' scores in MRQ, causes of reading demotivation and preferred leisure time activities were tallied following frequency analyses. The use of paired t-test identified the significant mean gain between the pre-test and post-test results while the Pearson r tested the correlation time in SSR and their test scores.

Results and Discussion

Students' Motivations for Reading

Figure 2 presents the data gathered on students' motivations for reading.

Motivations

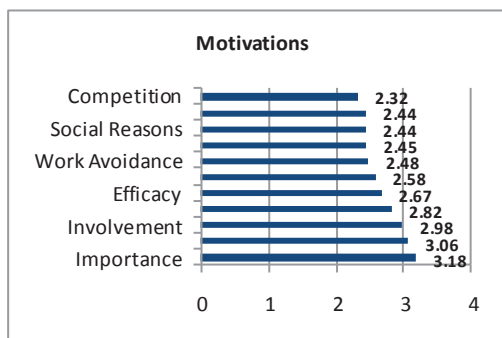|				
Competition	2.32			
	2.44			
Social Reasons	2.44			
	2.45			
Work Avoidance	2.48			
	2.58			
Efficacy	2.67			
	2.82			
Involvement	2.98			
	3.06			
Importance	3.18			

Figure 2. Motivations for Reading

Of the 11 constructs, it was found out that students were motivated to read because they had placed highest regard on the importance of reading (3.18 or 79.5%). For curiosity and reading for involvement come second and third respectively. Reading for social reasons, grades and reading for competition were least of their motivations to read. With the motivations as shown by the means, 2.44 and 2.32, respectively, it can be construed that intrinsic motivations were stronger than extrinsic ones. Students have acknowledged that reading skills are vital to their success in school and in work. As future teachers, they are fully aware of the immense possibilities to succeed when one regularly reads. Reading doesn't occur merely because of compliance, hence, it ranked 6th of the 11 constructs. Moreover, students don't read for grades much less for competition,but more out of fun and imaginative activity that they engaged in pleasure reading. Considering the subjects they have coupled with numerous workloads, the students desire to find some sort of a breather and there is no better way to do that than to indulge in free voluntary reading. Although they are much motivated to get good grades but competition is farfetched so that they even shared their materials to others and found joy in doing so.

The result partly confirmed the findings of Gutrie and Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) when they assessed the children's levels of reading motivation of children in a school in mid-Atlantic state where the children's mean scores were highest on the aspects of reading importance and grades and lowest on the competition, social and work avoidance aspects. The result of their study showed that the students rated both intrinsic motivation- importance of reading, high and extrinsic motivations- competition, relatively low. It can be deduced that although students are intrinsically motivated to read, still, they are driven to improve themselves in whatever endeavor they have. Notably, most of a person's activities are reading- related and one cannot do away with life without involving the skills in reading.

Overall, the result of the study confirmed that Education students are intrinsically motivated to read and the availability of academically challenging books

and favorable environment spawn their interest to read. However, motivations alone could not make the students choose to read at all times. Differing reasons can become causes of reading demotivation. In a survey, the informants identified inaccessibility of books as the top most reason for not being able to have intensive reading and poor environment as the least cause of reading demotivation. Figure 3 presents the identified causes of the students reading demotivations.
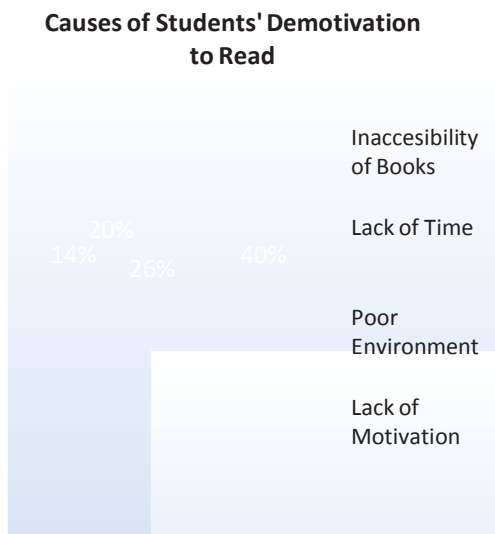
Causes of Students' Demotivation to Read

20% 14% 26% 40%

- Inaccesibility of Books
- Lack of Time
- Poor Environment
- Lack of Motivation

Figure 3.Causes of Students' Demotivation to Read

As seen in Figure 3, 40% of the students (43 out of 107) believed that the main cause of their reading demotivation is the inaccessibility of books. This is followed by the lack of time, then lack of motivation and poor environment.Most of the students did not grow up in a print-rich environment. Scarce books are in public elementary and high schools, neither mini-libraries grace in their classrooms, just as few reading materials are readily available at home. Aside from one or two academic books they acquire for a semester, they only have the local newspapers, in most cases, in the mother tongue, readily available in most of the households. Although the library is stocked with reading resources, students have not found much time to indulge in pleasure reading. With the number of units they have for the semester, they would have little, if not no time to visit at all to visit the library. Most

of their free time would be spent in group planning and accomplishing coursework requirements. While they conceded that reading is important, their motivation to read is not very promising. In a study on teaching practices, Al-Barakat and Bataineh (2011), as cited by Bouchamma, *et.al* (2013), found that the fact of having a library in the classroom has a positive influence on the level of interest and reading achievement, as does the school library or public library.

Aina, et. al. (2011) stressed that libraries provide materials that offer more extensive and varied information than classroom study alone. Voluntary reading helps develop reading skills and mastery of language, extends students knowledge and assists them in their academic work. Students and youths who read from time to time are likely to have some background knowledge, familiarity with new topics or subjects and thus, find learning and discussions easier and interesting. Libraries seek to enrich young people by introducing them to good reading literature which will eventually increase their understanding, broaden their horizons, shape their aesthetic sense, and help them develop their moral, spiritual and psychological growth.

What makes required reading a problem among university students is that the students don't have much time to read. Average students are reading somewhere around 4 hours a week – and this doesn't include the hours spent reading social media. Reading was not a popular activity because students didn't have enough time and money, too tired to read and there were a number of more exciting multimedia experiences (Hill, 2013). It can be deduced then, from the result, that resources such as books and time contribute to students' demotivation to read.

Students' Preferred Leisure Time Activity

With the advent of technological advancements, students are always caught in dilemma between reading and doing something else during their free time. Table 1 presents the informants' preferred leisure interests.

Table 1
Students' Preferred Leisure time Activity

Preferred Leisure Time Activity	(P)
watch a tv program (news, sitcom, telenovela or teleserye)	36%
check my facebook account	27%
read a novel (in English or in Filipino)	21%
research a topic in google	11%
make school projects	7%
view clips in Youtube	5%
read downloaded e-books on topics related in the class	4%
Others: visit a friend (to chitchat)	2%
go to a mall	0%
do enrichment reading on topics discussed in the class	0%
read a textbook in one of my subjects	0 %
read in advance topics for discussions in the class	0%

As seen in the table, the largest percentage of the total number of informants (p=36%) chose to spend their leisure time in watching a television program. This was followed by checking their facebook accounts, as denoted by 27% as its percentage. Some 21% of the informants preferred reading novels in English or in Filipino, while 11% indicated researching a topic in Google. About 7% were also interested in making school projects, in contrast to 5% favoringviewing clips in Youtube, with opting to read downloaded e-books on topics related in the class. Four of the listed leisure interests were unpopular choice- visiting a friend (2%), reading a textbook, doing enrichment reading on topics discussed in the class and going to a mall with (0%).

The findings of Cato and Kunstler (2008) affirmed the result where the use of media in the home accounted for about one-third of all the free time of each of three groups in French, Americans and Russians. Pratt (1983) in Cato and Kunstler (1988), cited also that Americans found their leading daily activities to be watching television (72%) and reading newspaper (70%). Admittedly, the offshoot of technological advancement has brought changes in family, social and economic conditions. Generally, poor reading habit occurs in children and young people because: reading is not considered a relevant leisure activity, as it does not form part of children's social interaction; reading is considered a solitary pursuit and is not unpreferred in comparison

with interactive chats on the internet. Adults and children alike glue more to televisions watching drama or home videos as a way of enjoying their leisure, instead of reading (Aina, *et, al.*, 2011)

It appears then that various forms of media and physical activities of low complexity were among the most popular leisure, while complex physical activities which require cognitive undertakings were least popular. The data provided the teachers with a snapshot of the students' reading lives. To address these demands, teachers need to recalibrate their approaches to teaching in the digital age- while at the same time nurturing student's intrinsic purposeful engagement in learning. It is imperative that teachers deepen their understanding of the forces that can motivate students to shape their preferences in reading. With the teachers' initiatives, schools and public libraries can develop programs and activities intended to strengthen the amount of free voluntary reading among university students. They can offer such service like downloading e-materials from acknowledged sites or provide students access to these during their free time. In this way and along the latest collection of books and magazines spawns the students' desire to frequent the library.

Effects of SSR to Reading Test Scores

It was hypothesized that there was no significant mean gain between the pre-test and post-test results in the students' reading test. Table 2 reveals the pre-post test results of the test as well as their respective mean and standard deviation. It also contains the critical interval, the P-value and its description and the number of informants in the study. Block B, the experimental group, shows significant improvement after comparing the post-test result to that of the pre-test. Block A, the control group, had an increase in mean but the increase insignificant. Table 2 presents the significant mean gain of the pre-post test results in the test on reading comprehension.

Table 2
Significant Mean Gain of the Pre-Post Tests Results of the Test in Reading Comprehension

Students	N	Mean	SD	T-Value	P-Value
Block A					
Pre-test	55	41.346	2.685	1.06	.296
Post-Test	55	42.058	5.089		
Block B					
Pre-test	52	41.583	2.565	2.92*	.0.005
Post-Test	52	43.145	2.831		

*significant at a=0.05

Notably, the pre-test mean of Block A is 41.346 with a standard deviation of 2.685. However, the post-test results indicate that the students' actual mean is 42.058 and standard deviation of 5.089 with a mean difference of 0.712. Comparing the two data, the analysis revealed a P-value of .296, a=0.05. Therefore the null hypothesis of no significant mean gain is accepted. Thus, there is no a significant mean gain between the pre-test and post-test results in students' test scores.

Furthermore, the pre-test mean of Block B is 41.583 in a 50-item test, withthe standard deviation of 2.565. However, the post-test results indicate that the students' actual mean ranges 43.145 and standard deviation of 2.831, with a mean difference of 1.564. When the two data were compared, the analysis revealed a P-value of 0.005 with a significant mean gain a=0.05, as shown in the table above. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant mean gain is rejected. Thus, there is a significant mean gain between the pre-test and post-test results in students' reading test scores. Along with many other factors not explored in this study, SSR affects the students' reading performance.

The findings of significant mean gain affirmed those of Krashen's (2004) where readers pass vocabulary tests and non-readers fail. Test scores indicate that free voluntary reading stands superior to explicit or direct instruction. It can be deduced that teachers and parents need to provide a regular time and a pleasant environment for reading.Krashen (2004) in the same paper cited that those in in-school reading programs do better on tests than those who follow the regular curriculum of direct instruction. They do better on tests of reading, writing, listening, vocabulary, and even grammar. Readers do well on tests because they have acquired, not learned, grammar, vocabulary, and the conventions of writing during free voluntary reading. This has been supported by Krashen's Comprehension Hypothesis- the hypothesis that we acquire language when we understand messages. As students engage in SSR, they are exposed to comprehensible input, a rich avenue to see how words are stringed to come up with a meaningful structure.

Influences of SSR to Students' Attitude towards Reading

Through a focus group discussion, 70% of the informants in the experimental group revealed that they love and enjoy reading even more after they were exposed to the 10-minute SSR for two months. Here are some of their accounts, when asked if they still read after the period of SSR in the class.

"I always looked forward to buying a second hand book at Booksale." I enjoy reading as much as watching my favorite teleserye."

"My friend and I used to exchange our reading material. I could not forget how much she loved my book."

"Mas daghan nako'g nakat-unan nga bag–o nga mga words. (I learn more new words.)"

"Before, I don't like to read during my free time pero karon ganahan nko (but now I enjoy reading.) It makes me more participative in the class because I have something to share from what I have read. "

"One time I was waiting for my friend. Gasabot mi magkita para magpraktis mi sa among epresent. Dugay kayo siya naabot. Maayo nalang gani naa koy nadada nga pocket book. Nalingaw ra sad ko ug basa. Mao na pirme nako nay dad on nga book sa akong bag. (Once, I waited for a friend. We agreed to meet to rehearse for our presentation. She did not come on time. Lucky enough I have brought a pocket book. I enjoyed reading while waiting for her. That's

why I always make sure I have a book in my bag.)"

Generally, the majority of the students felt that SSR is valuable. Although it does not guarantee a student to get exceedingly better than one without engaging in SSR sessions, however, the acquisition of positive attitude towards reading impacts greatly in the lives of these future educators. It opens an array of benefits, one of which is the development of reading habits that will make them lifelong readers. In so doing, their level of participation in social and other civic-related affairs increases as well as heightens.

Reading during one's free time provides an avenue to see how words are stringed together to form one's coherent thought. Unconsciously, a student who engages in sustained silent reading has for himself an opportunity to widen his imagination. When asked what made her read during her free time, a student stressed that it was the only time she was made to read a material she liked, not to mention the absence of pressure since there were no questions asked after reading. She added that anytime she could drop the book if she did not like it anymore and grabbed a new one. A study of Chou and Chou (2000), as cited by Birmingham (2001), indicated that students enjoyed SSR because of its relaxed environment. The students not only had a quiet time during the day to read but also a non-threatening reading atmosphere for struggling readers.

True enough, such SSR time among the university students is not strictly supervised, as opposed to that employed in most schools as part of their institutional program to enhance the students' competence in English. Teachers' supervision among elementary and secondary school students during SSR time is evident along with other conditions that affect the quality of SSR where comprehensible input is provided. Krashen (2004) mentioned in his paper that many children do not actually read during sustained silent reading sessions, but only pretend to read. Von Sprecken and Krashen (Krashen, 2004) examined the behaviour of middle-school children in SSR classes in the middle of the academic year, and reported that 90% of the children they observed were reading, a result similar to that of Cohen's (1996), as cited by Krashen (2004) , who made a special effort to make observations unobtrusive. Both concluded that children were more likely to be reading during SSR when certain conditions were met: When there was access to interesting reading in the classroom and students were not required to bring their own reading material, when teachers read while students were reading, and when teachers made efforts to promote and discuss certain books. Even in a class in which none of these conditions were met, however, Von Sprecken and Krashen (Krashen, 2004) found that 80% of the students were reading when observed.

Conclusion

It is, therefore, concluded that SSR is a motivational activity which develops the students' positive attitude towards reading. Equally, the use of SSR is effective in improving the students' reading achievement. Factors like motivations and choice of leisure time activity contribute to the quality and quantity of SSR engagements.

Recommendations

It is recommended that both school and home take a conscious effort in providing a print-rich environment. To augment the quantity and quality of SSR university students do, schools should develop reading programs; empower students to take lead in organizing reading centers or reading dens. There must be an easy access to varied materials- print or electronicthat are fascinating and appealing to all ages and tastes.

To ensure success in this endeavour, all the significant adults in the lives of the students-parents, teachers, school and community officials, need to collaborate in designing tasks and restructuring the entire learning milieu towards the love for SSR. They can turn it as well as other pleasure reading activities as part in the developmental reading curriculum among students in the university.

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