

## BOOK READING AND SOCIAL STATUS IN TURKEY

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes book reading and purchasing behaviors as a leisure time activity in Turkey with respect to socio-economic and demographic characteristics of households. The study used the raw data of "Household Budget Survey" questionnaires conducted with 17,310 households by the Turkish Statistical Institute in 2005 and 2006. Eleven percent of the respondents declared reading and purchasing books as a leisure time activity. The most statistically significant factors in book expenditures, in order of significance, are income, postgraduate, college education and gender. In order of importance, income level is the most, education is the second and gender variable is the third most important determinant of leisure time book reading and purchasing.

*Keywords:* Leisure, book reading and purchasing, Turkey.

*JEL Classification:* D10, R20, Z13.

### Introduction

This paper analyzes book reading and purchasing behaviors as a leisure time activity in Turkey with respect to the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of households. The study used the raw data of "Household Budget Survey" questionnaires conducted with 17,310 households by the Turkish Statistical Institute in 2005 and 2006. There is a widely held view that book reading and purchasing behavior in Turkey is generally lower than that of the developed nations. The low rate of book reading may pose socio-economic problems in the long term in terms of socio-economic development and modernization to keep certain level of socio economic development.

In this study, we used descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis to identify if there is a systematic relation between socio-economic forces and book reading behavior. On the other hand, we wanted to test whether settlement, education, income and gender have effect on book purchasing and reading behavior or not. To test the relative effect of these demographic and socio-economic factors we utilized descriptive statistic such as mean, median, standard deviation and the multiple regression analysis techniques.

The study consists of four parts. In the first part, a literature review was performed on book reading and purchasing as a leisure time activity in Turkey and the research results were summarized. The second part includes information about the analyzed data and the structure of the questionnaires. The third part introduces the statistical methods used in the analyses. In the last part, the book reading and purchasing behavior was analyzed with respect to monthly income, education level, occupational status, rural-urban settlement, gender and age groups of households. A summary and suggestions are presented in the conclusion.

### Book Reading and Purchasing Behavior in Turkey

With the gradual proliferation of visual media and press outlets, there is a common consensus on the decrease of book reading as a leisure time activity. Policy makers have developed new methods to maintain book-reading habits at reasonable levels. In particular, they highlight the importance of reading in maintaining an informed population. No matter how widespread visual media becomes, it can never replace reading. Furthermore, individual development requires reading (Sven, 2006).

The stratification of culture and art consumption is a subject that has almost not been studied in Turkey. The issue of book reading is frequently brought to the agenda in Turkey, as well as in other countries. Previously conducted research has reported that reading habits in particular are already low and decreasing gradually (Eğitim-Sen, 2007; Özcelebi & Cebecioglu, 1990; Öztürk, et al., 2006; Urgan, 2008). Turkey, as a developing country, falls behind other industrialized countries in the subject of reading books. Yet, book reading rates have risen regularly each year since the 1990s. According to the data obtained from the Turkish Ministry of Culture, 150,601 books (i.e., annually approximately 10,750 new books) were published between 1992 and 2004 with the International Standard Book Number (ISBN). According to the statistics of UNESCO, the number of books published in 1999 was 110,965 in England, 78,042 in Germany, 68,175 in the United States, and 2,920 in Turkey. The data from the Ministry of Culture for subsequent years revealed that approximately 20,000 new ISBNs were allocated in 2005 and this number would increase about

20% each year and reach 24,000 to 25,000 in 2006 (Ungan, 2008). In the United Nations Human Development Report (2009), Turkey ranked 86<sup>th</sup> among 173 countries in comparison of reading rates.

It is no surprise that book reading rates are low in Turkey compared to developed countries, and economic and cultural reasons are significant factors in these low reading tendencies. According to the statistics, people can spare only 2.5% of their household income for cultural expenses (Turkstat, 2008). As book prices are relatively higher, purchasing books are given less priority among basic needs. When the issue is evaluated from a cultural perspective, this outcome is associated with acquiring the habit of watching television before developing a habit of reading in Turkey. According to Saunders (1999), regarding communication development, the world goes through the stages of oral culture, written culture, and electronic visual culture. In this respect, societies that have completed their industrialization process went through these phases with full saturation over an extended period, whereas these stages followed one after the other without sufficient time intervals in countries like Turkey. Since transition to the visual age is experienced before fully assimilating into the reading age, the culture of reading has failed to penetrate and spread into all layers of society (Ungan, 2008).

### **Reading and Social Status in Turkey**

Another consistent result is the assessment that cultural consumption does not vary depending on the individual as proposed by the individualization approach (Featherstone, 1987; Lash & Urry, 1994). Rather, the socio-cultural environment of the individual is a substantial factor in determining cultural consumption. Some researchers have concluded that there is a very strict homology (Bourdieu, 1984) (i.e. members of upper classes consume products of high culture, while members of lower classes consume products of popular culture); on the other hand, other research results concluded that members of upper classes are better characterized as cultural omnivores (Peterson & Kern, 1996). Social stratification and cultural consumption have been extensively studied, particularly in the areas of art performances, music, cinema and attendance to museums. However, the subject of book reading and purchasing has not been studied adequately (Van Rees, Vermunt, & Verboord, 1999). A limited number of studies indicate that the habit of book reading is closely associated with the level of education (Gans, 1999; Kraaykamp and Nieuwbeerta, 2000; Van Eijck & Van Rees, 2000). The higher the level of education, the stronger the habit of reading becomes. These research results noted that educated people's taste for reading books develops a habit, because familiarity with reading further reinforces a taste for reading books (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; Torche, 2007). In addition, the habit of book reading has a positive relationship with social class and income level. The research indicates that the most powerful determinants in establishing the habit of reading are education, income and social class (Katz-Gero & Shavit 1998; Zavisca, 2005).

In terms of cultural and social stratification, there are significant differences when Turkey is compared to other countries because the national income in Turkey is about \$10,000 per capita, while it is about \$35-40,000 per capita in developed countries. Additionally, reading, culture and art activities in developed countries have spread within the social strata of these countries over centuries. There are noticeable differences between countries where the written culture started in the 1600s, in contrast to Turkey, where compulsory education started only 100 years ago. Furthermore, Turkey, as a developing and changing country for the last 50-60 years, has gone through those stages later and slower than the developed countries. Stratification of culture and art consumption is a subject that has been studied very little in Turkey. Previously conducted studies generally reported the rate of reading books, but the distribution of this rate in accordance with socio-economic and demographic factors is not studied in detail. This research is one of the few studies that examines the relationship between socio-economic status and cultural consumption with respect to reading books. The hypotheses tested in other studies conducted in different countries on book reading and purchasing behaviors are valid for Turkey. In other words, book reading and purchasing behavior has a very strong positive relationship with the level of education. In order of importance, the second most important determinant is income and the third one is the white-collar occupational groups including professional occupations. The following section will discuss the data and the statistical techniques employed in this research study.

### **Data, Variables and Methods**

Household Consumption Expenditure Surveys conducted periodically every year in Turkey consist of questionnaires that demonstrate the consumption patterns, habits and life styles of households. In these

questionnaires, consumption habits, types of consumption expenses and the variety of expenses on goods and services are recorded in accordance with the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of households.

In the analyses presented in this article, monthly reading habits and expenses of 8,559 households from 2005 and 8,751 households from 2006, 17,310 households, were recorded in Turkish Lira (TL) according to categories like monthly income, education level, occupational status, rural-urban settlement, gender and age groups. The methods used in these questionnaires include periodic face-to-face interviews, observation and recording techniques performed by the subjects themselves. The following tables summarize book reading rates and mean expenditure on books in TL with respect to months of the year, rural-urban, age groups and gender, and finally the effects of major social status variables such as income, education and occupation is analyzed by the ordinary least squares method.

## Results

The tables below present the basic descriptive statistics about book reading and purchasing rates. Settlements with a population of up to 20,000 were defined as rural, while settlements with a population of more than 20,000 were defined as urban settlements. Expenditure was calculated in TL. Ten percent of the subjects were women and 90% were men. The following descriptive statistics show the monthly book reading and expenditure rates from 2005 and 2006, respectively. The first column in the tables shows the number of total subjects with expenditure on books in the month of the questionnaire, the second column shows the percentage of households with expenditure on books, the third column shows the mean amount in TL spent on books in the month of the questionnaire, the fourth column shows the standard deviation, the fifth column shows the median values and the last column gives the total number of subjects who participated in the questionnaire. The mean amount calculated as expenditure on books is 18 TL, which corresponds to US\$12 (i.e. \$1 is equal to 1.5 TL).

**Table 1.** Monthly mean expenditure on books by year (2005-2006)

Years	n	%	Mean (TL)	Std. Dev.	Median	Total N
2005	996	11,6	19,7	37,5	10	8,559
2006	956	10,9	19	40,2	10	8,751
Total	1952	11,2	17,4	34,6	8,5	17,310

As shown in Table 1, among the 17,310 households, the number of households declared to have purchased books every month between 2005 and 2006 is 1952. This rate corresponds to 11.2%. The mean amount spent on books between these years is 17.4 TL (US\$12). The mean standard deviation and median value are 34.6 and 8.5 respectively.

**Table 2.** Monthly Mean Expenditure on Books by Rural-Urban Settlement

Rural-Urban	N	%	Mean	Std. Dev.	Median	Total N
Rural	340	6,5	16,1	26,8	8,5	5201
Urban	1,612	13,5	18,2	37,4	8,5	11,914
Total	1,952	11,2	17,1	32,1	8,5	17,310

Three hundred forty or 6.5% of a total of 5201 households in rural settlement areas and 1612 or 13.5% of 11,914 households in cities reported to have read books in the months when the survey was conducted, and the mean amount spent on books was determined to be 16.1 TL in rural settlement areas and 18.2 TL in cities.

**Table 3.** Monthly Mean Expenditure on Books by Age

Age	N	%	Mean	Std. D.	Median	Total %N
29 & below	79	10,8	20,3	42	10	1,395
30-39	668	15,2	15,6	32,1	7	4,268
40-49	746	13,6	18,2	29,2	10	4,757
50-59	306	9,1	19,5	37,1	10	3,513
60+	153	5,3	17,4	36,3	8	3,375
Total	1,952	11,2	18,2	35,4	8	17,308

As shown in Table 3, the ages of household heads were categorized into five groups. The lowest rate of book purchasing was observed in the age group of  $\geq 60$  years with a rate of 5.3%. The group of household heads between 30 and 50 years of age had the highest book purchase rate with a rate of approximately 14 percent. The mean amount spent on books in all age groups was 18.2 TL. Inter-group expenditure on books was 15 to 20 TL.

**Table 4.** Monthly Mean Expenditure on Books by Gender

Gender	N	%	Mean	Std. Dev.	Median	Total N
Male	1789	11,6	18,4	34,1	9	15362
Female	163	9,4	20,1	38,6	10	1750
Total	1952	11	19,2	36,5	9,5	17112

One thousand seven hundred and eighty nine (12%) of 15,362 households with male household heads and 163 (9%) of 1750 households with female household heads spent a mean amount of 18.4 TL and 20.1 TL on books, respectively.

In summary, the book reading rate is determined to be 11% and the monthly mean expenditure on books corresponds to US\$12 according to the results obtained from the demographic analyses of questionnaires. It has been observed that the book reading rate is higher in cities compared to rural areas. Reading rates are two times higher in cities than in rural areas. The age group between 30 and 50 is observed to reveal the highest reading rate of 14% among all age groups. Although there is a slight difference of 2% between female and male subjects, it has been determined that female subjects spend more on books on a monthly basis than male subjects. In the model presented below, multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the direction of relationships between social status and book purchasing. In the analyses pertaining to the year of 2005, variables such as secondary school and professional occupation membership, being a male household head and rural settlement are used as control variables. In this model, monthly book expenditures were used as a dependent variable, while income, education, occupation, rural vs. urban, and gender were used as independent variables.

**Table 5.** Multiple Regression Analysis Results: Monthly Spending in Books (2005-2006)

	b	std. error	beta	t	sig.
(Constant)	2,106E7	2,328E6		9,044	,000****
Year (2006)	1,195E6	1,298E6	,036	2,462	,742
Income 1. 20%	-7,513E6	2,008E6	-,061	-3,742	,000****
Income 2. 20%	-6,662E6	1,752E6	-,061	-3,802	,000****
Income 3. 20%	-6,376E6	1,472E6	-,070	-4,331	,000****
Income 4. 20%	-4,382E6	1,251E6	-,056	-3,503	,000****
Below primary	-4,791E6	2,735E6	-,030	-1,752	,040*
Primary	-1,432E6	1,615E6	-,020	-,887	,375
High school	-743169,201	1,698E6	-,010	-,438	,662
College	3,876E6	2,003E6	,028	1,286	,054*
Graduate	1,286E7	3,792E6	,052	3,391	,001***
Administrators	-1,914E6	1,625E6	-,020	-1,178	,239
Assoc. professionals	-4,027E6	2,173E6	-,028	-1,854	,064
Office & service	-1,792E6	2,366E6	-,011	-,757	,449
Trade workers	-4,906E6	2,006E6	-,038	-2,446	,014*
Agricultural workers	-544753,465	2,236E6	-,004	-,244	,808
Craft workers	-4,758E6	1,707E6	-,047	-2,787	,005**
Machine workers	-3,429E6	1,903E6	-,029	-1,801	,072
Unskilled workers	-262,445,046	2,108E6	-,002	-,125	,901
Female	3,916E6	1,860E6	,028	1,836	,056*
Urban	708,158,478	1,354E6	,009	,523	,601
Adjusted r square	0,02				
Number of cases	17,310				
F	5,8****				

Note: \*p, \*\*p, \*\*\*p, and \*\*\*\*p indicate significance at the level of \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001, \*\*\*\*p < 0.0001. Excluded Categories: Top fifth quintile, year of 2005 secondary school, professionals, male household head and rural used as control variables

As demonstrated in the Table 5, expenditure on books is statistically higher for upper income groups, postgraduate, college education and female subjects compared to all other socio-economic and demographic factors. Variables such as income level, graduate and college degree and gender seem to be the most important factors in book reading. There are no statistically significant differences between rural and urban areas between the years 2005 and 2006 in terms of money spent on books. According to the result revealed by the model, book expenditures of primary, secondary and high school graduates are close. Those with an education level lower than primary school have statistically the lowest expenditure on books compared to all other education levels. When people with professional occupations are compared with other occupation groups, it is observed that book expenditures of those with professional occupations and all other occupation groups (i.e., excluding trade and craft workers) are not statistically different. In this study, the most statistically significant factors in book expenditures are income, graduate and college degree and gender in order of significance.

The multiple regression analyses indicate that female subjects spend more money on books than male subjects. The results of other studies reported that women are more inclined to “highbrow” cultural consumption compared to men (Bihagen & Katz-Gerro, 2000; Lamont & Fournier, 1992). However, when considering book reading habits, the results indicate that cultural consumption does not emerge in line with a certain hierarchy. Especially when occupational categories and educational status are considered, there is not much significant difference between them in terms of an individual’s book reading behavior. According to other international research results discussed in the literature review, education, income and social class have been determined to be the most effective factors. However, multiple regression results in this paper revealed that income, higher education and gender, but not occupations, are the most effective factors for book reading and purchasing in Turkey.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the monthly book reading and purchasing rate is approximately 11%, and the mean amount spent for the monthly expenditure on books is about US\$12. The most important factors for book reading and purchasing were income, higher education and gender.

In the information age we are living in, we believe that at least 50% of the population of any society should be involved in reading books to catch up with the developments of the era. In order to raise the reading rates to at least 30-40%, the authorities or institutions influential in determining the culture, arts and science related policies must place significant emphasis on this issue and remedy this deficiency.

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