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The Need to Read: An Unexpected Demand of the New Generation at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)

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THE NEED TO READ – AN UNEXPECTED DEMAND OF THE NEW GENERATION USERS AT THE CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (CPUT).

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Abstract

The new generation of users is often typified as '*digital natives*', and seen as being characterized by a technology-driven lifestyle with an emphasis on the use of technology. This has been seen to affect the behavior and needs of users. In particular, there has been a strong emphasis on the effect of the new generation's demands for electronic access on the collection development practices of universities.

However, in the context of South African education a paradox has arisen. Many of the students at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology come from a specific educational background, characterized by a poor reading culture and in some instances a lack of printed reading material. In a surprising move this has actually led to lecturers demanding print material for use by students as recreational reading with the aim of improving language ability.

This paper outlines how this demand was articulated and then realized by the library, including a description of some of the mechanisms by which the demand was determined. The reaction to these demands, in changes to the collection development of the library so as to promote the provision of suitable material is outlined. The effect on the new generation of the provision of reading material and their response to this material as determined by a focused survey is shown.

Finally recommendations are made, including that for a clearer distinction between different populations within a single generation, which can include both digital natives and para-digital natives.

Keyword: Reading; digital natives; collection development; fiction

1. Introduction

The phrase '*digital natives*' as coined by Prensky (2001), was used to typify the new generation of users who have grown up surrounded by technology. In the higher academic context this new generation is sought in the first-year intake and amongst the recent school-leavers (Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray, & Krause, 2008). The main characteristic of being immersed in technology all their lives, would appear to make them very different in their educational demands from previous generations (Bennet, Maton & Kevin, 2008).

The demands that this generation places on the workplace and on the academic project are usually seen as requiring changes that are not incremental, but fundamental (Prensky, 2001). The digital natives have been described by VanSlyke (2003) as having grown up reading less and engaging with digital media more. This has been reflected in the demands that the digital natives have placed upon the place in which they work. These demands include increased access to technology and cloud computing for faster, more efficient information sharing (Puybaraud, 2012).

This demand for increased use of technology has already had an impact in libraries, where as early as 2003 a survey conducted found that not only were users now finding more material on the internet, but that "*the Internet had changed the way that they used libraries*" (Marcum, 2003). An important part of the challenge that this change has caused has been taken up by the libraries themselves, who have rapidly adapted to provide access to this digital world

through provision of computer facilities, but also through the acquisition of digital content and even conversion of print (or in some cases, older formatted) content into digital content (Dunlap, 2008).

However concerns that have been expressed about the homogeneity of this new generation by Palfrey & Gasser (2008) who see them rather as a population – a subgroup of the new generation, are increasingly born out in the South African context. First year students coming into university are from a variety of backgrounds and bring with them a variety of experiences (Thinyane, 2010). These experiences stem not only from social and economic background, but also from a wide variety of educational experiences at school level. In South Africa schooling is the mandate of the provincial structures to carry out. In this regard there are wide discrepancies between the provinces with regard to the level of the schooling that is offered. Seventeen years after independence the main factor in the inequalities in schooling is still seen as being able to be

“... attributed to the Bantu Education which was designed solely to deprive the majority of our people access to resources and empowerment initiatives.” (Zikalala, 2012)

One of the key resources to which is referred is the access to libraries. In the townships and rural areas, school libraries are lacking in many of the schools. For example, in Khayalitsha only a few schools of the 53 have functional libraries. The public library situation is just as bad, with only 5 public libraries serving some 700,000 residents (Bourke, 2010). The flagship library, Harare Public Library, only occupies some 1800 square metres, and the five public libraries are described as “noisy, overcrowded and not well resourced” (Bourke, 2010). It is just as much against the idea of a new generation or population of users of technology as students coming from this educational background that the 32000 students at CPUT and their perception and use of libraries must be understood.

2. Academic interventions

During the library’s surveys of library use and perceptions of library use, not only the students but also the academic staff were asked about their concerns. The first full-scale survey to do this at CPUT libraries was the 2008 LibQual survey which was run at all of its sites. Immediately after this, still in 2008, the library did an internal audit, involving all stakeholders, as part of the cycle of audits in Higher Education in South Africa. The results of this audit, and the subsequent actions taken, were reflected in an institutional audit in 2011. From these audits and surveys, and also through their own academic audits and general experience, academic staff realised that they were facing a problem with the ability of students to write at an academic level and also in proper English.

The poor writing ability was postulated as being from the poor educational background of many students and this was further reinforced by students writing in the way that they were used to communicate when using social media such as Facebook and when using SMS texting. For many of these students, English is not their first language and, in some cases, even the third or fourth language. The table below shows the home language division of students, followed by a graph showing the percentage of non-English speakers at the different sites. From this it is clear that only at Granger Bay (a small campus) and Mowbray are there 50% English speakers. Mowbray represent a special case, as the Faculty of Education does training in English at Mowbray. The same training is done in Afrikaans at the Wellington Campus, which therefore has a high number of Afrikaans speakers, and the highest percentage of non-English speakers.

| | AFRIKAANS | ENGLISH | OTHER | XHOSA | TOTAL |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| CAMPUS NAME | Enrolments | Enrolments | Enrolments | Enrolments | Enrolments |
| ATHLONE CAMPUS | 334 | 178 | 30 | 533 | 1,085 |
| BELLVILLE CAMPUS (MAIN) | 1,861 | 3,403 | 1,545 | 4,126 | 10,969 |
| CAPE TOWN CAMPUS (MAIN) | 1,385 | 5,339 | 1,873 | 5,849 | 14,503 |
| GRANGER BAY CAMPUS | 56 | 283 | 94 | 138 | 572 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| GROOTE SCHUUR HOSPITAL | 23 | 73 | 23 | 48 | 169 |
| MOWBRAY CAMPUS | 416 | 1,056 | 83 | 604 | 2,163 |
| TYGERBERG HOSPITAL | 203 | 89 | 16 | 60 | 375 |
| WELLINGTON CAMPUS | 1,905 | 135 | 14 | 121 | 2,181 |
| WORCESTER CAMPUS | 92 | 8 | 0 | 31 | 132 |
| Grand Total | 6,275 | 10,564 | 3,678 | 11,510 | 32,149 |

Table 1: Home language distribution of students per campus

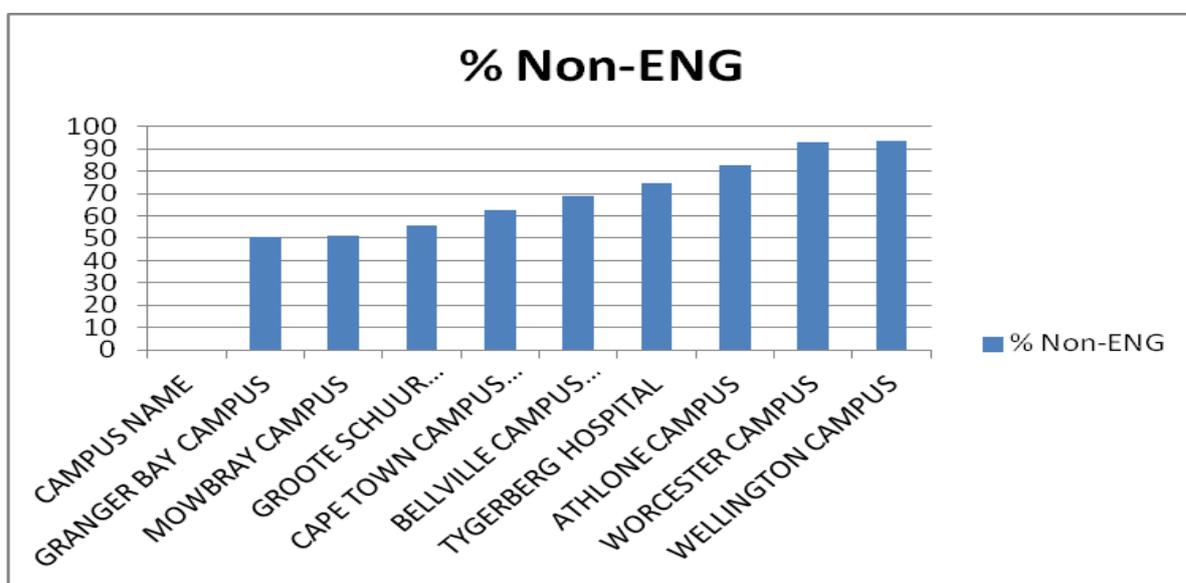


Figure 1: Percentage of non-English Home Language speakers per campus

This problem was raised and discussed at the Dean's forum already in 2009, soon after the library's internal audit had taken place, and with the results of the Libqual survey being available. With the Library Director also having seating on the Deans' Forum, in the discussion by academic staff on the intervention needed, the Library was able to make a direct input.

As part of the strategy to address this problem and to assist the students with their academic writing skills, a decision was taken at the Deans' Forum that the library would be asked to top-slice 1% of the annual book budget for purchasing fiction and light reading materials. The Director of CPUT Libraries was therefore able to task the Senior Librarian: Technical Services with the responsibility of implementing the decision. This implementation required both internal Technical Services actions, as well as actions involving all the relevant role-players, and implementation was expected to be immediate, using unspent money from the existing book budget.

3. Library steps taken

Firstly, the Collection development policy had to be reviewed and changed to effect the change in policy regarding the purchasing of fiction. Previously, fiction books had only been purchased for the campuses which offered Education courses. These campuses were Wellington and Mowbray, which had previously been education colleges, and Bellville. The Collection development policy was amended as follows:

The library will purchase copies of fiction books to support the reading needs of CPUT students. For this purpose 1% of the annual book budget will be allocated for these purchases and it will form part of the Library's special project allocation. The preference is on paperbacks as it is far cheaper than the hardback. The fiction collection is also to

be a roving collection between all CPUT libraries to ensure that students on the different campuses have access to more fiction books. (CPUT, 2010)

Secondly, the library identified vendors who could supply fiction at low cost. Two vendors were identified and arrangements made to visit their premises. This was also a departure from normal practice of ordering material from vendors, irrespective of whether the material was in stock or not. However, as the matter was considered urgent, arrangements were made with these vendors that material directly selected could be immediately supplied and paid for. The two identified vendors were Reader's Warehouse and Bargain Books. As time was also of the essence, the usual practise that the Faculty, Information and Branch Managers, working with academic staff, did all the selection was dispensed with, and a smaller team, including the Senior Librarian: Technical Services did the selection.

However, Branch Managers and Faculty Librarians were consulted. Although the majority were very positive about the fiction purchases, two branches felt that they did not need the fiction material but rather preferred material of a motivational nature. For these branches therefore, no fiction was purchased but non-fiction considered motivational was identified and purchased.

As all these books had been immediately available, delivery was immediate and the purchase paperwork including the official order form, was, in fact, done after the books had already been received in the Acquisitions section. There they were given priority in terms of cataloguing, processing and dispatching to the relevant branch libraries where they were put on display so that users could easily see them and take them out. The first of these were received at the beginning of 2010, thus the collection has been available to users for some two years.

The following table shows the fiction collections that were established largely through this policy. The four campuses at which the research was undertaken are shown as at the other campuses other conditions prevailed. Bellville, Mowbray and Wellington had large existing fiction collections; Tygerberg did not take part in this exercise and Thomas Patullo and Worcester were not yet established.

| Site | English | Afrikaans | African languages | Total |
|---------------|---------|-----------|-------------------|-------|
| Cape Town | 509 | 345 | 19 | 873 |
| Athlone | 491 | 132 | 36 | 659 |
| Granger Bay | 50 | 2 | 1 | 53 |
| Groote Schuur | 103 | 0 | 0 | 103 |
| Total | 1153 | 479 | 56 | 1688 |

Table 2 Fiction collection at selected sites, by language

4. User survey

Looking at the reaction of the users to these items, it could be expected that with the launch and arrival at the beginning of 2010 there would be initial interest. However, what we wished to discover was the longer term effect of having these collections, in particular those with fiction. To this end a survey was done at some of the sites at which this collection had been placed. As previously stated, Wellington, Mowbray and Bellville had already had collections, and so they were excluded from the survey.

Similarly, Worcester was too new as a branch (not having existed at the start of the project), and Thomas Patullo and Tygerberg had been the two branches choosing not to have fiction but rather motivational material. The survey was therefore done at Groote Schuur, Athlone, Cape Town and Granger Bay only. These branches are radically different in the populations they serve and so therefore give us a very good cross-section of the overall student body.

The surveys were undertaken by a group of students, working simultaneously at each of the branches being surveyed. These students were all third year Public Relations students who have survey-taking as part of one of their modules. This enabled the interviews to be more reliable as the person doing the survey was not a member of the library staff, and was a student peer. In addition, the students doing the survey were not only trained in doing a survey in general, but were taken to the Mowbray campus (one of those not surveyed) to do a trial run with the survey instrument itself. This enabled the survey to be undertaken with no logistical problems in terms of capacity of the students doing the survey.

The time chosen was the final week of the first term. As students using the library's fiction collection were targeted, it was easier to find these students then, as traditionally that was one of the times that most fiction was taken out. The table below shows the actual number of fiction items borrowed during this period, as well as the percentage of all loans represented by the fiction. This shows great variation between the different sites surveyed.

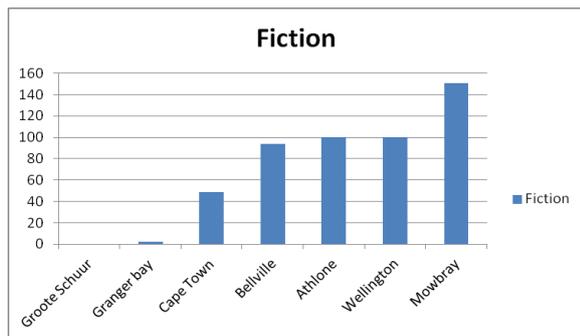


Figure 2: Total fiction on loan 10 April 2012

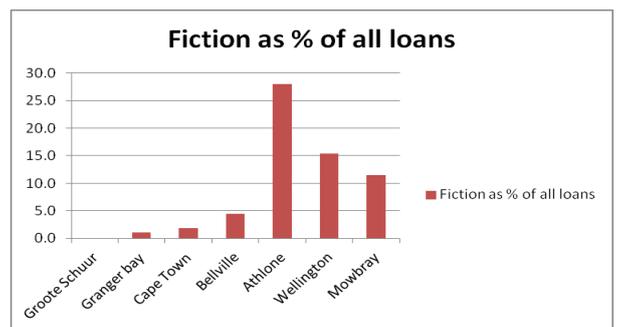


Figure 3: Fiction as % of all active loans 10 April 2012

The survey contained several questions to determine the demographics of the student being surveyed, and then several questions on their actual use of fiction, including preferences as to type of fiction. In addition their behaviour with regard to the use of fiction in a wider context, such as their use of public libraries and support of fellow students, was surveyed. The full survey is available at www.cput.ac.za/library_2/

The number of students surveyed at each branch is contained in the following table, together with the total number of students at each site, with an indication of the percentage of students surveyed at each site. With a total population of more than 13000 as the potential, and each survey being done on a one-to-one basis, the total number surveyed can only be seen as a small cross-section and not necessarily representative of all students at CPUT. Nonetheless, certain tendencies can be seen and extrapolated from these results which could have significance for the determination of the success of the fiction intervention.

| Site | Students surveyed | Total on campus | Surveyed as % of campus |
|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Cape Town | 51 | 14506 | 0.33 |
| Athlone | 32 | 1085 | 2.9 |
| Granger Bay | 67 | 572 | 11.7 |
| Groote Schuur | 28 | 169 | 16.6 |

Table 3: Students surveyed as % of all students on campus

5. Analysis of results

In the analysis of the results, emphasis is placed on the reasons students gave for using the library. This is to determine to what extent the library plays a role in the achievement of the goal of language improvement, as well as the suitability of the library collection for voluntary reading. It also gives an indication of how the students react to the presence of a print collection of material designed for their enjoyment, as opposed to an electronic environment for the same purpose. This analysis also sets out to determine whether there are significant differences in their choices when looked at in terms of the gender, home language and campus of the respondents.

5.1. Overall results

Question 10 of the survey contained the core element of the reason that students gave for reading fiction at CPUT. As these students were not all chosen on the basis of their being active library users in the sense of borrowers, a certain percentage were students that did not borrow books. Unfortunately, it was not always clear whether this could be understood as not borrowing any books at all, or merely those who did not borrow books for reading (with the main implication here being fiction). However, from the group that admitted to reading books from CPUT Libraries there were three distinct groupings of answers:

- Students who admitted to using books for academic or research purposes
- Students who borrowed books to improve their language ability
- Students who borrowed books for enjoyment or leisure reading

Using this, in Figures 4 to 9 these answers are grouped into the following four reasons for use:

- 1 Use for academic purposes/research
2. Use for leisure reading and enjoyment
3. Read to improve language
4. Do not use the fiction collection or library for reading

From Figure 4 we need to note the following two important facts:

- There were 10 students who borrowed books specifically to improve their language ability – this was one of the drivers behind the original project and showed that the goal of helping students to improve their language ability is being met
- Just more than one third of the students (63 out of 183) were voluntary users of the library collection – they were not using it to answer a direct academic demand.

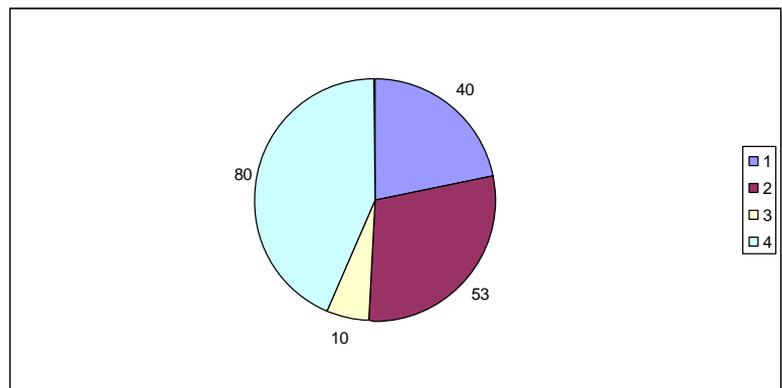


Figure 4: Overall analysis of reasons for use

In the latter case, these students actually chose to borrow paper-based material – a stark contrast to the expected outcome that students would be rather committed to using electronic media for their leisure or voluntary enjoyment.

5.2. Gender

When looking at the results in terms of the gender of the individuals, there are significant differences to be found. The male respondents were more likely to read for academic purposes than for leisure, and very few saw reading as a way of improving their language. In contrast the

female respondents were not only more likely to read, but were greater voluntary users. The two charts below illustrate the differences clearly with the categories of use being:

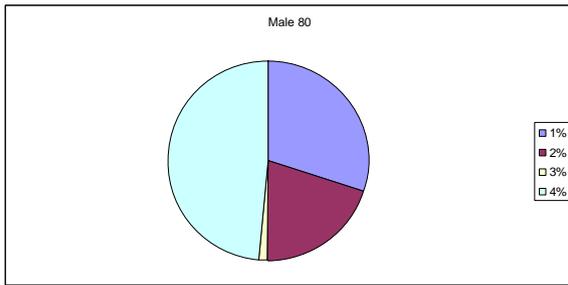


Figure 5: Male use in percentages

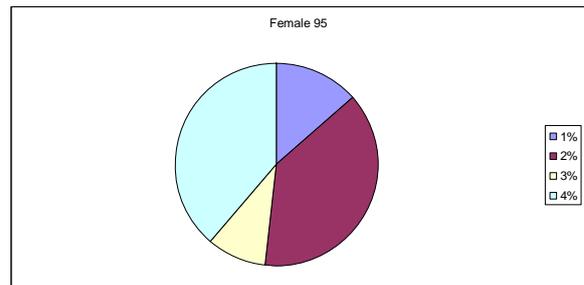


Figure 6: Female use in percentages

5.3. Campus

The overall results were then analysed in terms of the different campuses to look at the response per campus. Besides the number of students at each campus, the campuses also differed in the Faculty and/or courses offered at the campus, and thus in the type of student. The different focuses of the campuses can be described as follows:

- Cape Town: Faculty of Business and Faculty of Informatics and Design mainly, with some Engineering and Applied Science students.
- Athlone: all Nursing students.
- Granger Bay: equally divided between Maritime students and the Hotel School students
- Groote Schuur: Radiography students.

From the graphs below significant differences do appear. Athlone has the highest percentage of voluntary readers, and this is also born out by the circulation figures given earlier. Interestingly, no respondents at Athlone indicated the need for reading for academic purposes. Groote Schuur, although having students reading for academic purposes, still had more that read for enjoyment. This is in stark contrast to the Granger Bay scenario, where a significant number used the library for academic reading, with fewer using books for leisure or enjoyment.

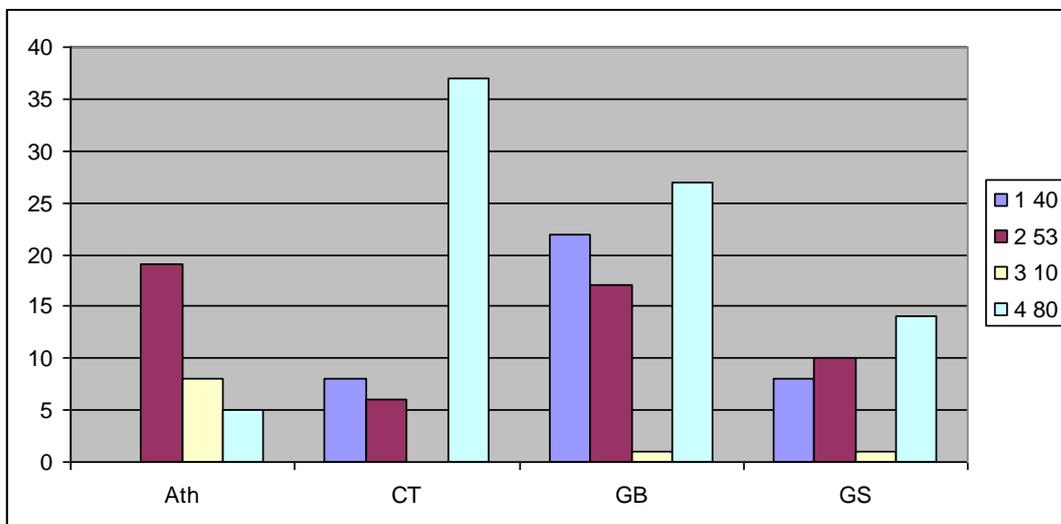


Figure 7: Campus breakdown of reason for use

At all three these campuses there were also respondents who used reading to improve their language, with the majority of these being at the Athlone campus. The results for Cape Town would appear to be significantly different to the other three campuses in that there is a much higher response of non-reading. Similarly to Granger Bay, those who did read, were more likely to do so for academic purposes.

This lack of use by users at Cape Town warrants further investigation. It is a trend noticeable through other research done that there would appear to be a greater level of engagement at the branches serving the smaller sites, with those at the two large CPUT sites (Bellville and Cape Town) being proportionately less used.

5.4. Home language

A final parameter of analysis was the home language of the respondents. This analysis was done, firstly in an overall division, and then per campus. In the graph shown here (using the same divisions as above) showing the overall division into English and non-English speakers, the patterns of use were very similar.

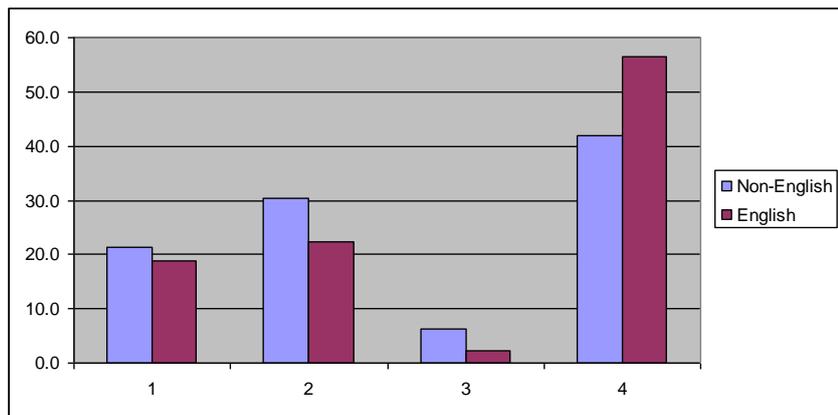


Figure 8: Reason for use by English/Non-English

However, when the overall results were looked in greater depth with the non-English speakers differentiated into Afrikaans, Xhosa and Other, the Afrikaans group showed a far greater use of the material for leisure reading and enjoyment as well as language improvement, and far fewer were non-users. The few Xhosa, and no other language users, using the collection for language improvement is also a significant result.

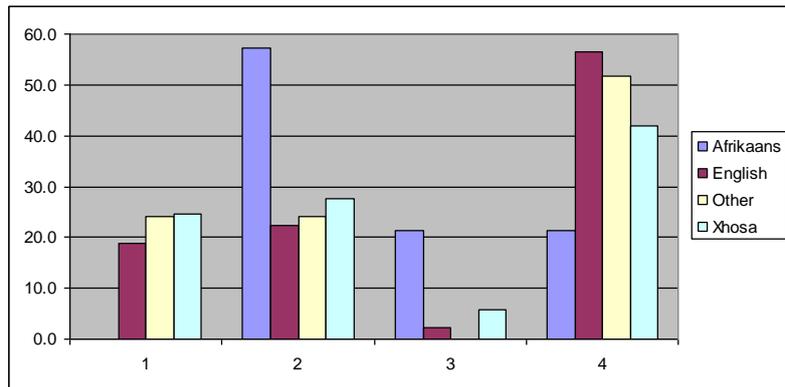
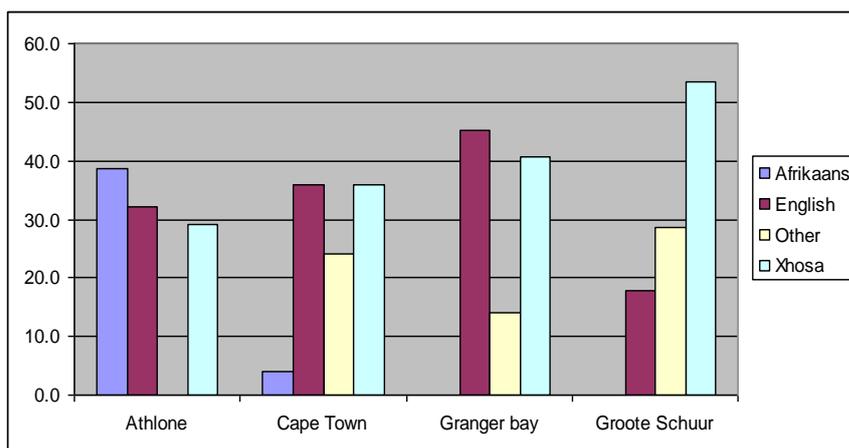


Figure 9: Reason for use by Home language

When looking at individual campuses, the effect of the home language composition on the usage of the collection also becomes clearer.

However, it must also be emphasized that the composition of the respondents per campus did not necessarily actually reflect the language composition on campus, which we outlined earlier. In terms of the respondents, then, Athlone, with

the highest usage, also had the greatest number of Afrikaans speakers, who, as shown above, are the best users. Granger Bay, in contrast, had the greatest number of English respondents, with no Afrikaans – and they had a very low usage. Groote Schuur also had no Afrikaans respondents, but a larger number of Xhosa than other groups. Cape Town, too, had few Afrikaans respondents, but a better balance of the other three groups.



In looking at these results, it was also felt that the methodology used may have affected the choice of respondents to be interviewed, with the interviewer being predisposed to specific language (and possibly also gender) groups at a particular site.

Figure 10: Respondents home language by campus

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The above survey of the use of the library collection was neither exhaustive, nor even based on rigid sampling methods. Any conclusions drawn are therefore not based on this being a representative sample, or accurate reflection of the overall use of the collection by the students, but rather a qualitative analysis of the respondents' feelings about the use of the collection, particularly shown by their response to Question 10, an open-ended question asking: "What do you use the collection for?"

From their responses we can see that the original aim of the collection, to have material which students could access to improve their language use, including vocabulary, is being partially met. This varies not only with language group, but also per campus, and shows that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done by CPUT Libraries in order to publicize and promote this use of the collection.

However, we also find that there is a need for recreational reading that this collection meets in a larger number of students. This underlines the dangers inherent in generational theory, which would postulate that the students as Generation Y would be digital natives and thus less desirous of reading a paper-based collection. Instead, we agree with Palfrey & Gasser (2008) that there may be a population rather than a generation of digital natives. We would further suggest that, as a result of the socio-economic and educational background of many of the students at CPUT, there is a greater population of non-digital natives, or even 'para-digital natives'.

The term 'para-digital native' is used to refer to those who have grown up in a technologically based world, but have only been able to access and grow up with certain aspects of it. In the case of our students, this is largely the mobile phone, as Internet access and computer use prior to tertiary study is largely absent in many of the communities from which the students come.

This has implications for the way CPUT Libraries configures its services moving forward, including the extension of the fiction collection, not only on the campuses where it already exists, but also at our other sites of delivery. We need to better understand the different needs of our different user populations (Auman, 2002). From this better understanding, and based on the results of this survey, we fully expect the demand for the paper-based collection, particularly in terms of voluntary reading, both for enjoyment and language improvement, to be an integral part of our focus on being a user-centred library service.

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