

Reading habits of undergraduates at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

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This study is an attempt to understand the reading habits of undergraduates at the Department of Islamic Studies at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. The study employed a questionnaire survey under six categories of measures. 40% of the sample is drawn from the total student body of 508. Accordingly, 203 printed, structured questionnaires were administered. Results indicated that 76% of the respondents' reading habits are nurtured by their parents or teachers. Significant differences exist between academic and recreational reading. 78% of the first year, 67% of the second year, 59% of the third year and 33 % of final year students had engaged in leisure reading during the previous month. The students' three major sources for reading material are libraries, internet and friends. Romance, Fantasy and Classics are the top most popular genres of reading. Results (69%) indicated that they engage in listening to music and eating while reading both academic and recreational materials. 82% of the respondents prefer online electronic format over printed format. However, reading online material is limited to online news and gossip web sites. The majority (83%) spends more than 2 hours to read online news and gossip web sites, while only one-third of the students (34%) spend less than 1 hour daily in reading academic material. The study concludes that recreational reading is popular over academic reading and considerable time is spent over reading information on the web. Academic reading is not regularly undertaken. Parents and teachers have significant authority over nurturing reading habits. More time allocation for librarians to interact with students to boost reading habits and teaching students to balance the utilization of both new and traditional methods of extracting knowledge to be lifelong readers and learners is suggested. Limitations of the study are attributed to the inadequate number of variables studied and the inclusion of only one faculty. This research could contribute towards carrying out future research in similar areas with a wider scope and a broader population. Findings are significant for authorities of the university in making future decisions on undergraduate students as well as on library allocations.