

LEISURE READING HABITS OF DENTAL SCIENCES UNDERGRADUATES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA: A PILOT STUDY

B. N. G. S. Premarathne¹ and B. E. S. Bandara²

¹*Dental Sciences Library, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka*

²*Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya*

Introduction

Leisure reading habits of undergraduates have not been widely studied in most universities. Leisure reading is the reading students choose on their own, as opposed to reading that is assigned to them. Also referred to as 'voluntary reading', 'independent reading', 'spare time reading', 'recreational reading', 'reading outside of the university' and 'self-selected reading', leisure reading involves personal choice, choosing what one wants to read, and reading widely from a variety of sources not just a book. Dental Sciences undergraduates at the University of Peradeniya have to cover continuous assignments, practical clinical assignments, viva voce assessments and other study commitments required by the faculty. This keeps students busy and they have difficulty in finding time to visit libraries or otherwise engage in leisure reading.

Leisure reading is essential for any person to acquire current information, to spend spare time wisely, as a hobby, for literary knowledge, and also to gain knowledge in their subjects of interest. Therefore the present study will be of great significance for all to identify current existing leisure reading habits of undergraduates, barriers for allocating more time for reading, and suggestions to overcome those barriers.

The main objective of this study was to identify leisure reading habits of the undergraduates of the Faculty of Dental Sciences. Additional objectives were, to identify their favorite reading materials at leisure time, frequency of leisure reading and barriers for leisure reading, and to make recommendations to improve leisure reading habits of the undergraduates.

Methodology

The survey research method was applied to this study and a structured questionnaire was distributed among the undergraduates who visited the Dental Sciences Library during the first week of November 2015. Only second, third, fourth year Bachelor of Dental Sciences (BDS) undergraduates were selected for this survey, with a total student population of 258. Convenience sampling was used to select the sample as this is a pilot survey. First Year students were not selected as they had registered for the course only in October 2015. The questionnaire was distributed among 62 students, with 49 completed questionnaires returned, yielding a response rate of 79%. These students were asked to specify their preference of leisure reading, time spent for leisure reading, hobbies, type of reading materials used for reading, barriers for reading in their leisure time and the use of the library for their leisure reading. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods.

Results and discussion

Leisure time activities of students

The questionnaire asked for the time allocation of students in various types of leisure time activities. The following graph (Figure 1) shows the percentages of their behavior pattern of leisure time activities.

53% of the students use their leisure time for reading books ‘sometimes’ but 31% ‘often’ read books at leisure time. Students have shown a lower priority (about 26% students) to read newspapers. More than 25% of the students watched television ‘often’ in their leisure time. More than 30% of the students played computer games ‘sometimes’. (An equal percentage of students ‘rarely’ played computer games). 30% of the students ‘rarely’ used leisure time for sports activities. This shows that they give less priority for the sports activities. The majority of the students reported that they are willing to attend music, drama in their leisure time. There was a positive response with regard to activities such as music and drama. It seems that students are more engaged in activities connected with music and drama in comparison with reading books and newspapers.

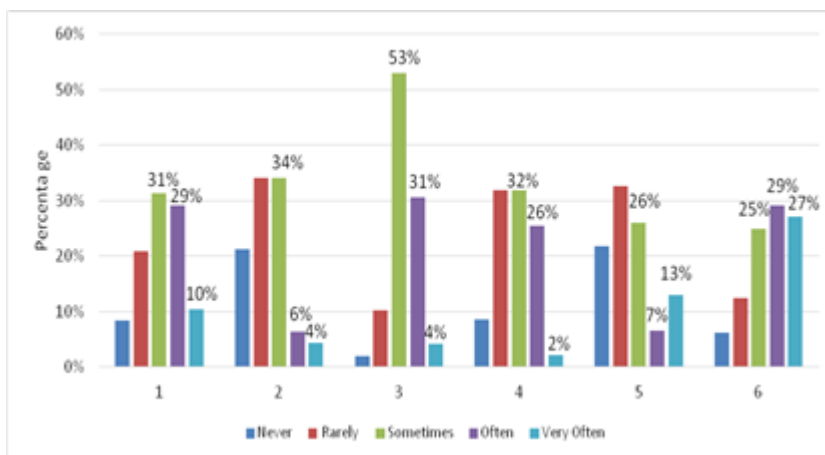


Figure 1: Activities involved in leisure time

Key:

- 1 Watching TV 2 Playing computer games/video games 3 Reading Books
 4 Reading newspapers 5 Playing games/sports
 6 Music programs /Drama/Listening music

Reading material in leisure time

Table 1 shows student responses pertaining to the most interested areas which they like to read on. Novels / Short Stories took first place with a rate more than 45%. More than 30% of students like to read newspapers and magazines. In contrast, 6% stated that they do not like to read books and prefer playing software games.

Table 1: Reading material at leisure time

What do you like to read at leisure time?	Final Rank Based Quotient (RBQ)%	Rank
Fiction (Novels/ Short Stories)	45.93%	1
Printed newspapers	39.26%	2
Magazines	34.81 %	3
Biographies	24.07%	4
Sports news	19.63%	5
Electronic news papers	18.40%	6
Historical Descriptions	16.30%	7
Stories of Animals	15.56%	8
I don't like to read books I prefer to play software games rather than read books.	6.91%	9

Purpose of reading at leisure time

Students were asked the purpose of reading at leisure time. Figure 2 shows that the students positively responded to the statements given in the questionnaire.

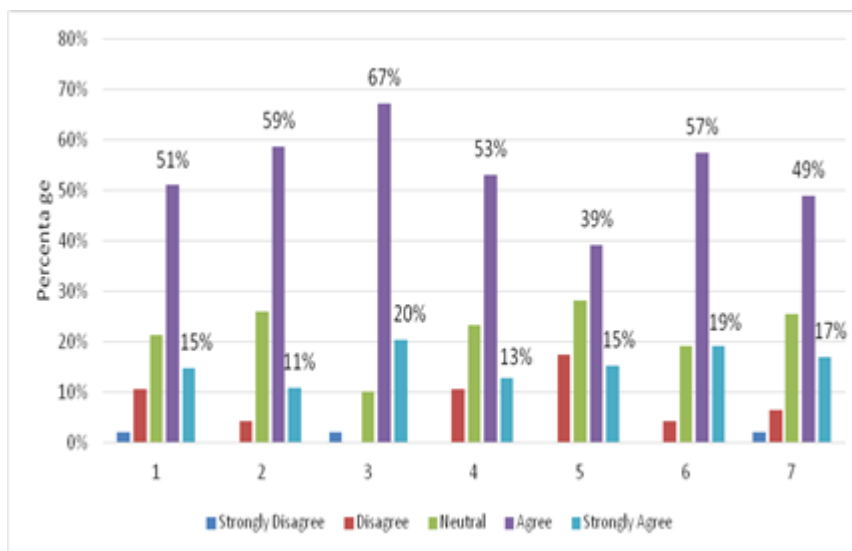


Figure 2: Purpose of reading in leisure time

Key:

- 1 Improve language skills
- 2 Pass time or to relax
- 3 Learn new things
- 4 Reading as a hobby
- 5 Brain stimulation
- 6 Pleasure or enjoyment
- 7 Reduce stress

67% agreed with the statement of learning new things and 53% with reading as a hobby as the purpose of reading in leisure time. 39% agreed that they read for the purpose of brain stimulation. According to the above statistics, the students have agreed with all the statements given in the questionnaire with a higher than 35% rate. Most of the students would like to read in leisure time to learn new things. The second priority has been to pass the time or to relax. They also would like to read for pleasure or enjoyment and for brain stimulation.

Reasons for minimum time allocation for leisure reading

Students were asked about the minimum time allocation for reading in leisure time. The following graph (Figure 3) shows that the majority of the students prefer to spend their leisure time with friends. They have too

many assignments, practical sessions and have to read subject related textbooks and notes to prepare for examinations. Therefore allocating time for leisure reading is a challenge. More than 30% have agreed with all statements. It shows that they have severe issues with time allocation for leisure reading.

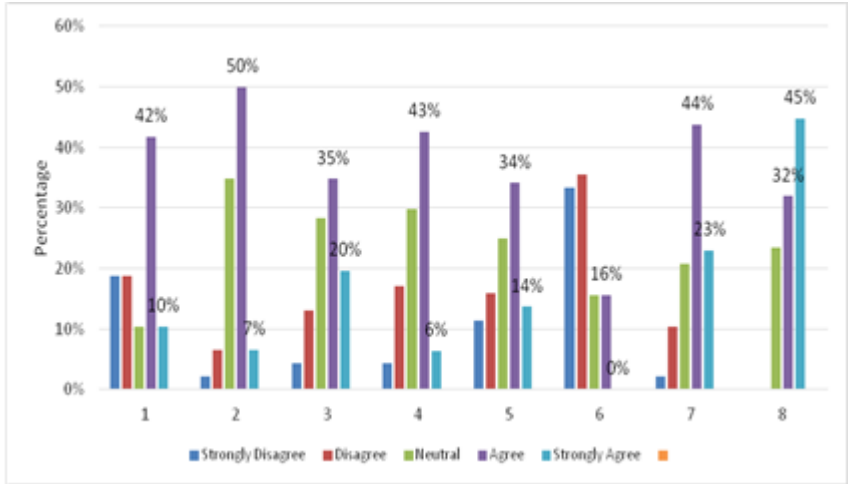


Figure 3: Reasons for minimum time allocation for leisure reading

Key:

- 1Prefer to watch TV
- 2 Prefer to spend time with friends
- 3Like surfing on the web
- 4Too busy or no time to read
- 5 Difficult to find a suitable book
- 6 Reading makes me tired
- 7Too many assignments and practical sessions
- 8 Have to read subject related textbooks and notes to prepare for exams

Conclusion

The students of the Faculty of Dental Sciences at Peradeniya have a positive attitude towards leisure reading. A majority of the students read books, newspapers and magazines. The students stated the main reason for not engaging in leisure reading as their having many assignments. They also prefer to spend time with friends in their leisure time and have to read subject related textbooks and notes for examination preparation. Therefore, allocating time for leisure reading is a difficult task. A lesser number of students don't like to read and they use their leisure time for sports, computer games, watching T.V. etc.

Leisure reading is essential for students' mental relaxation, acquiring new knowledge, enjoyment, development of language skills etc. Therefore, it is very essential to promote leisure reading habits among the students.

The following recommendations might be of assistance for future planning.

- 1). Encouraging students to use leisure reading materials the same as text books.
- 2). Library awareness should be expanded to all categories of students in order for them to use various types of reading materials.
- 3). National campaigns promoting the recreational reading aspect of libraries.
- 4). Create leisure reading corners at hostels, common rooms and other public places and provide multicultural resources that are relevant to students lives, as well as resources in their first language.
- 5). Training and networking to share the knowledge of experienced staff.
- 6). Organize seminars or workshops to promote their literary awareness.
- 7). Motivate students to watch award winning films, dramas as part of promoting reading.
- 8). Library allocation should increase for purchase the leisure reading materials.

References

- Alvermann, D. (2001) 'Reading adolescents' reading identities: Looking back to see ahead'. *Journal of Adolescents and Adult Literacy*, 44 (8), 676-690.
- Greaney, V. (1980) 'Factors related to the amount and type of leisure reading'. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 15:3, 337-357.
- Hughes-Hassell, S., & Rodge, P. (2007) (September). 'The Leisure Reading Habits of Urban Adolescents'. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 51(1), 22-33.
- Knulst, W. & Kraaykamp, G. (1998) 'Trends in leisure reading: forty years of research on reading in the Netherlands'. *Poetics*, 26:1 (September), 21-41.