

Study of extensive reading preferences among the science-based undergraduates in Sri Lanka: A case study of Medicine and Agriculture faculties at Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Extensive reading of undergraduates would be more influential & valuable habit in so many different ways during their academic lives as they become confident, happy readers can be both challenging and immensely gratifying. Since measuring this habit quantitatively would be bit difficult due to the various aspects, however this study attempts to measure the ratio level of extensive reading of undergraduates instead of their intensive reading. Finally it tries comparatively analyzing the extensive reading preferences among the science-based undergraduates in Sri Lanka with reference to the Medicine and Agriculture faculties at the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka (RUSL) based on the time-series data retrieved from the Koha Integrated Library System. The main objective of the study was to identify the level of extensive reading of general reading books by science-based undergraduates. The specific objectives of the study were to find out the level of availability of library resources related to the extensive reading, to find out the existing extensive reading behaviors and to identify the comparison and gaps of extensive reading by the science-based undergraduates of RUSL. The case study method was used to conduct the study and time series data set retrieved from the Koha: Open-Source Library Integrated System called 'ISURa' which has been installed at the file server of RUSL during the time period from 2016 to 2019. The main assumption of the study was that checking out books from the library by the above students is the only use for them. The limitation of the study was not considering the Adhoc reading at the library during the selected period. The major finding of the study was that science-based student's extensive reading behavior is satisfactory compared with their intensive reading (Agriculture students 50% and Medicine students 20%) further authors were recommended to enhance the available resources by increasing the annual budget proportionately.

Keywords: *extensive reading, knowledge mining, reading habits, science-based undergraduates, Universities in Sri Lanka, Reading for life*

Introduction

A graduate is a person who is one step ahead of the rest of the population in his ability to see, understand and make a positive difference in the world in which he lives. For that, he must have consciousness, prudence as well as a good imagination. It should be achieved by every student entering a university with great effort and development of his intellectual capacity. One of the easiest strategies for this is to develop an intellect through reading books and create an environment where one can look at a problem logically. It is the full responsibility of every university to provide the necessary infrastructure for undergraduates to develop their knowledge in this way. But the question is whether they will take advantage of the facilities provided by the university and absorb something in addition to their basic education. This is contained in the old saying that “reading makes a man perfect”. Numerous recent studies have also revealed that people are gradually moving away from the use of books and increasingly turning to social media instead. According to Lone et.al (2019), today's student builds tomorrow's future. Accordingly, it is essential that university students, who are increasingly turning to social media networks, be freed from it and taught to read books that go beyond their curriculum. Shehr and

Gaffer (2018) also emphasized that the benefits of reading a traditional book cannot be found in using an e-book. Thus, it is timely to study the levels of general book reading of science-based university undergraduates.

Harris (2020) discussed about four reading methods of human beings as Scanning reading, Skimming reading, Intensive reading (IR) and Extensive reading (ER). It is defined as “involves someone reading books for enjoyment or happiness and to develop general reading skills”. ER can be considered as more influential & valuable habit of people in so many different ways during their general or academic lives as they become confident, happy readers can be both challenging and immensely gratifying. This study aims to conduct a case basis investigation on extensive reading methods with Medicine and Agricultural students at the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka with the basic assumption of whole check out books from the library by above students are only use of them. The common phenomenon of extensive reading is defined by Harris (ibid) as a kind of general reading for general information. Generally, this technique is used for pleasure reading, like reading a novel for pleasure.

The Rajarata University of Sri Lanka is a national University administered under the University Grant Commission of Sri Lanka and it consists of 6 academic study faculties with more than 400 teaching staff and 8000 student population. The Library system of RUSL is distributed with the Main Library and 5 faculty libraries geographically in a different location based in Mihintale city in Anuradhapura district of Sri Lanka. Faculty Libraries of Medicine, Agriculture and Applied Sciences are fully served as Science-based Libraries however maintain the extensive reading collection for the users’ general reading purposes. If those libraries maintain the said extensive reading collections, there was no study or investigation taking place to identify the reading behaviors of Science-based students’ extensive reading capacity. Therefore, this study would be most significant about this topic. Therefore, the following research objectives are intended to facilitate research in accordance with the above research topic.

Research objectives

The general objective of the study was to identify the level of extensive reading of general reading books by science-based undergraduates.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. to find out the level of availability of library resources related to the extensive reading
2. to find out the existing extensive reading behaviors and
3. to identify the comparison and gaps of extensive reading by the science-based undergraduates of the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.

Research methodology

Case study method was used to conduct the study. The two faculties (Faculty of Medicine & Agriculture) of the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka was selected as the study area and the study used the time series data set retrieved from 2016 to 2019 from the Koha: Open-Source Library Integrated System called ‘ISURa’ which has been installed at the file server of above University by using the following post-written source code under

its report module:

```
SELECT b. title, b. author, i. itemcallnumber, i. barcode, c. issuedate, p. cardnumber
FROM (SELECT iss. issuedate, iss. itemnumber, iss. borrowernumber FROM issues iss,
(SELECT @StartDate: ='2019-01-01', @EndDate: ='2021-08-05') AS var
WHERE date (iss. issuedate) BETWEEN @StartDate AND @EndDate UNION ALL
SELECT oi. issuedate, oi. itemnumber, oi. borrowernumber FROM old_issuesoi WHERE date (oi. issuedate)
BETWEEN @StartDate AND @EndDate) AS c
LEFT JOIN items i USING (itemnumber)
LEFT JOIN biblio b USING (biblionumber)
LEFT JOIN borrowers p USING (borrowernumber)
WHERE i. homebranch='AGRI'
```

The retrieved data was filtered and tabulated using the MS Excel Spreadsheet application and the analyzed data related to the above two faculty students were presented over the table and graphs. It was assumed that none of the medical students' library usage at the faculty of medicine during the few months of the year 2017 was due to the South Asian Institute of Technology and Medicine (SAITM) issue.

Result

Study Profile

To understand the nature of the existing resources of the selected libraries, the authors collected some data from secondary sources. As shown as in table 1

Table 01: Profile of the study area

	Medicine	Agriculture
Location of the Library	Saliyapura and Teaching Hospital Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, 50000	Puliyankulama, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, 50000
Total book collection	12000	16000
The ratio of general reading books /Total Collection	2200/12000 =18%	4200/16000 =26%
Total seating capacity	265	100
Total Allocation	2 Million	2 Million
The ratio of allocation for purchasing general reading books / Total purchasing books	100,000/2,000,000 0.05%	100,000/2,000,000 0.05%

Source: Annual report of the library, 2020 - RUSL

Levels of the extensive reading by the students

One of the objectives of the study was to find out the existing level of extensive reading behaviors. The following table showed the checkout details of the students during the selected time series.

Table 02. Number of checkouts by the students (2016 - 2019)

Year	Medicine			Agriculture		
	Total checkouts	Extensive checkouts	%	Total checkouts	Extensive checkouts	%
2016	5454	1250	22.9%	3794	2083	54.9%
2017	3271	777	23.7%	3230	1621	50.19%
2018	6997	452	6.46%	2821	1702	60.33%
2019	7976	801	10.0%	2139	1200	56.10%

Source: KOHA, RUSL library Integrated management software

Gap and comparison of the extensive reading by the science undergraduates

The final objective of the study was to identify the comparison and gaps of extensive reading by the science-based undergraduates of the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. Following table shown

Discussion and conclusion

Discussion

The most highlighted significance of the study profile was both libraries have been allocated an equal amount to purchase extensive reading materials. The seating capacity of both libraries is more than 100 (Medicine = 265, Agriculture = 100).

Conclusion

Based on the time series data retrieval from the existing RUSL Library integrated system regarding the extensive reading habits of science-based undergraduates over the past four years, it can be concluded that their reading behavior is satisfactory. However, when comparing the number of annual existing resources checkouts in both libraries, the level of using extensive reading materials is satisfactory by Agriculture (50%-60%) and still less satisfactory by medicine (10%-20%). And also research revealed that both faculties extensive reading behaviour based on their science-based field activities such as Agriculture students spend their time on fieldwork and medicine students spend their time on clinical appointments.

Recommendations

The study revealed that since the Library system of RUSL had provided certain facilities to access extensive reading materials for their users, there was a lack of extensive reading materials usage by the Medical Science-based students instead of the Agriculture Science-based students. The researchers guessed the main root causes for the less usage of extensive reading by the medical students as their study schedules, more clinical practices as well as overstress due to heavy workload during the entire study period. Therefore, it is recommended that

- Find ways to mitigate the tight study schedule and motivate the students to utilize more extensive reading materials with their subject-oriented reading materials.

- Propose to extend the by-law of check-in period for the extensive reading materials up to 3 weeks. Then it could provide the extra more time to the users to read those books.
- Waving off the fines for the overdue extensive reading books are also one of the recommendations.
- Further, researchers are encouraged the authorities to provide an attractive learning environment at the Library premises to enhance the users' readability.
- Increasing the ratio of annual allocation to purchase more extensive reading materials.
- Introduce the exchange program of extensive reading materials among the sister libraries of RUSL and,
- Provide more access to digitized extensive reading materials among the users are noted as the fruitful other initiatives further to the above major recommendations.

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