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English language reading habits of the undergraduates of the University of Kelaniya

The purpose of this interdisciplinary study is to investigate the English language reading habits of undergraduates in the University of Kelaniya. Universities in Sri Lanka today are changing their medium of instruction to the global language in order to cater to the global knowledge economy. As there is a burgeoning demand for graduates who are conversant in English it is essential for them to become confident users of the language.

Many co-relational studies have consistently shown that those who read more show more literacy development. The development of reading habits contributes towards knowledge gaining and language acquisition. Many studies have been done on the subject of reading habits and they involve different categories of individuals. But, an adequate number of studies has not been conducted at the tertiary level in Sri Lanka.

The objective of this research is to investigate the existing reading habits and the root causes for poor reading habits in the tertiary level students. This is also aimed at identifying problems they encounter and recommending solutions to minimise the problems. A questionnaire survey was carried out with hundred students belonging to two faculties: the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Sciences.

The results revealed that the reading habits of the students are very poor and there is a strong relationship between reading habits and social status with respect to their families. Among the problems they face when reading, are the lack of proper guidance by the teachers, poor English language reading habits at the primary level, lack of motivation to read English reading material, comparatively higher motivation to refer to media than to read, and lack of attractive reading materials.

Keywords: Reading habits, Knowledge economy, Tertiary level, Undergraduates.