CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes and discusses the results of the study with comparisons made to previous studies found in published literature. This chapter concludes with some implications and recommendations for further research. This study is undertaken to examine the leisure reading habits among secondary school students in Sri Lanka. The analysis of the study is based on responses from 300 students from selected ten secondary schools in Western Province in Sri Lanka. The questionnaire is the instrument used to collect data.

5.2 Summary and Discussion of the Findings

This section discusses the main findings of the study by answering the main research questions listed in chapter one.

5.2.1 What do secondary school pupils read for leisure?

Most of the secondary school students in the sample are readers. The vast majority who read books do so for general knowledge and examination requirements. The majority of these students are moderate readers, with the females reading slightly more than males. The significant differences between the genders lie in what is read. The males read more non-fiction than the females, even through, as a whole for both genders non-fiction reading is small.
The findings reveal the types of reading materials chosen by Sri Lankan students. The majority of respondents read text books (90%). Stories occupy second position (73%), followed by magazines (41%) and newspapers (37%). The habit of leisure reading of magazines and newspapers are more predominant than the habit of reading books. Reading text books appears to be a well established habit among students.

The results also provide data on the types of material read by gender. Males have a greater preference for sports and science books while females on the other hand prefer popular magazines. Both males and females show almost equal interest in newspapers. The results corroborates with Shelly’s (1999) whose sample of secondary school students indicate a prefer for books in the categories of humour and horror. They also have high interests in mystery, sports, historical fiction, adventure, science fiction and non-fictions. She also indicated that there differences in interests by gender. The females have stronger interests in romance, and historical fiction, while the males prefer books in the categories of sports and science. However, whatever is being read undoubtedly broaden the space of students’ experiences and knowledge.

5.2.2 How regularly do pupils read during their leisure time?

The data obtained shows that the students normally spend most of their leisure time outside school hours either by reading non-text books, magazines and newspapers. Most of the students (58.2%) read between one to three hours or more daily. Out of the sample 35% read less than one hour daily. Only a negligible proportion (8%) answered that they never read books or other materials out of school text books. Reading time is found to be significantly
related to parental reading time. This means that students tend to read more books, magazines and newspapers if their parental reading habits are high. Reading of text books seems to be the predominant habit among Sri Lankan students. The fact that a large number of students rarely read, or they lack the skill or simply do not care enough to take the time to read would pose Sri Lankan society with serious problems in the future.

5.2.3 What are their purposes and motivation for reading?

Reading is regarded as one of the most powerful ways of learning, which allows the students to gather an in depth knowledge of whatever the subject matter they are studying. The habit of reading regularly should be cultivated among school children, who usually think that reading is part of their school curriculum. The results indicate that the students read more for acquiring specific knowledge and for study to pass their examinations than for leisure. The chief motivation for reading is self or academic interests. They also read materials recommended by teachers and parents. The most important source of motivation shown by the data is parents. Students read widely when their parents also read at home. Those who claim to enjoy reading or prefer reading to other activities make up only about 10% of the sample. The majority of the students regard reading as a means of learning, or a means of satisfying personal interests or curiosity.

Children should be motivated to read and to utilize reading materials to improve their own personality and their social skills. In this context the roles of libraries, teachers and families are very important to promote reading habit awareness among students.
Turner (1999) hypothesized five basic reading effects. The list of effects represent various motivations of reading in broad personal and social terms. These are:

- The instrumental effect. (Fuller knowledge of a practical problem and greater competencies to deal with it).
- The percentage effect (Relief of inferiority feelings by increasing self approval).
- The reinforcement effect (Reinforcement of an attitude or conversion to another attitude towards controversial issues).
- The aesthetic effect (Obtaining aesthetic experience from specimens of literacy art).
- The respite effect (Finding relieve from tensions by reading whatever offers pleasant experience).

Students in Sri Lanka generally do have a favorable attitude and motivation towards reading. However, they seem to need further encouragement to inculcate the willingness to read more widely especially reading of materials outside the school texts and school hours.

5.2.4 What are their personal feelings towards reading as an activity and their school library?

Regularly reading of text books seems to be the predominant habit among students. Those who read books other than text books tend to read more non-fiction than fiction materials. The habit of leisure reading thus reflects the students' general attitude towards reading as a functional rather than a recreative activity.
The results indicate that the majority of the respondents (63%) have positive feelings about the school library. They find the school library to be a cheerful place to study and that they do not mind going there to borrow books. The data shows that more male than female students visit the library almost regularly even though more of females have a better feeling about the school library. Similarly most of the art students tend to rate school library highly compared to the science students. They are also more independent in their reading choices based on recommendation from friends and peers. The Sri Lankan teacher librarian could help motivate students to visit the school library more regularly. They could organize reading groups and reading clubs, reading competition, story telling, serious chorus reading and book reports among students. This could play a positive role in encouraging them to read. Establishing school library associations or library groups can also help foster students' leisure reading habits.

5.2.5 What are the problems perceived by students which hinder their leisure reading?

The results reveal some of the reading and library utilization problems, which need to be solved if the habit of reading for enjoyment as well as for information is to be further encouraged and developed among students.

One of the major problems identified in this study is the over-attentiveness and excessive concern of the students with text book reading. While text book may be a convenient form of reading materials, which helps the students prepare for their examinations, there is a need to constantly remind the students that there are other sources of knowledge which could help them in their studies.
Another problem is the students' attitude towards reading. They should not all the time regard reading merely as a means of learning or a means of acquiring information. Besides the formal and functional aspects of reading, the recreational aspect of reading for pleasure should also be encouraged. While techniques of reading can be taught, the ability to derive pleasure out of reading can perhaps be acquired through experience and proper reading guidance. It is quite difficult to convince the student that reading can be pleasurable. Nevertheless, teacher librarians can play an important role in engaging students to read for entertainment or recreation in their leisure time. They can guide them in the selection of materials, which are most relevant to their personal needs and interests and there by helping to stimulate in them the desire to continue reading without instruction.

This study has shown that school libraries in Sri Lanka have a lot of room to improve book collection to stimulate reading. The library board can set up programmes to revitalize school libraries, in close cooperation with the private sector. Besides having basic permanent collection of books, each school library should have the chance to borrow thematic book collections from the public libraries in order to support the teaching programme. The habit of reading regularly should be cultivated among school student' who only think that reading is part of their school curriculum. However, students' reading seems to be limited for examination purposes and there is a lack of supplementary reading or reading for life long learning.
5.2.6 What are the relationships between reading interest as well as habit and students educational and demographic background?

The study shows how student’s leisure reading habits and interests are strongly related to various variables of the home such as parental educational background and availability of reading materials. Parents therefore should invest time to encourage their children to read widely. The finding of the study indicates that students perceive their parent as an important source of encouragement for development of positive reading habits and interests. This strongly recommends that parents themselves should become good models to their children. They should spend more time reading general materials such as fiction, non-fiction, magazines and newspapers.

The results also indicate that students with highly educated parents are more likely to purchase books. Also, students with least well educated parents are most likely to borrow books from the school library. This study found that availability of books in the home also plays a key role. Students who have access to a large number of books have a tendency to be more interested in reading a broader range of materials. There was also some evidence that reading newspapers, magazines and comics could be just as effective as reading books. Parents who discuss books, magazines, articles, politics and current affairs with their children also helped boost their literacy skills. However, Daily (2002) reveals that students who are highly engaged readers are those whose parents have the lowest occupational status but who were poorly engaged in reading. It is reassuring to know that while socio economic background plays a role, it is not a dominant factor.
5.2.7 Where do they obtain their reading materials?

The effects of the home on the reading of these students are considerably reduced. During puberty, peer groups form an important part of students’ lives. This is substantiated by the fact that 42.0% of students from the present sample regard ‘friends recommendations’ as the prime factor, which influences them when choosing what to read. The findings indicate that there is greater tendency among students to rely on certain sources for reading materials. Friends are an important source for reading materials especially those who share similar interests. A high number of students also purchase their reading materials, while the rest access through friends and particularly from family members.

The school must make a concerted effort to provide a good collection of books in the library. Reading materials on various subjects related to the curriculum should be more readily available to the school population. This certainly will encourage students to read widely is a step towards the development of a sound reading habit.

5.3 Recommendations

This study explores the issue of the leisure reading habits of students in secondary schools in Sri Lanka. In general, the major findings that emerged from several sets of analysis are that reading books is a relatively popular leisure pursuit for both female and male respondents from various demographic background and their academic streams.

Based on the findings and the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for parents, secondary school classroom teachers, librarians and administrators in
selecting and providing reading material for secondary school students in Sri Lanka. It is hoped that the findings will also benefit Sri Lankan researchers, policy makers and educational administrators who are interested in the leisure reading habits and interests of Sri Lankan students. The recommendations of this study are as follows:

1. In view of the fact that the most important factor behind leisure reading is dependent on the individuals themselves as can be seen from the summary finding where the highest percentage of responses is an indication of motivation. Perhaps the mass media or even the library itself should play a major role in reaching out to the students. Cultivating a genuine love towards leisure reading among students should prove to be a challenge for the school libraries. Students should be drawing upon the world of books not solely for information, but also as escapism and as a means of inner enrichment. Escapism used in this sense means a door to freedom and consequently desired and deliberatively sought after to new horizons of knowledge.

2. The results indicate that students are not very happy with the reading collections of leisure materials in their school library. It should be a shared responsibility among librarians and students to ensure that libraries stock is of interest and relevant to students. Encouraging students to read may seem a futile attempt if the books that appeal to them are not readily available.

3. The library should be able to play the role as a place, where books can ensure good contacts with all media that express the joys, sufferings and concerns of daily life, be it on sports or politics, technology or love, social or religion problems. The Sri
Lankan school curriculum is moving towards the direction of resource based and independent learning. In the light of this development, library instructional programmes would help guide and facilitate students to become independent in their search for resources for reading and research.

In view of the limited sample of this study, no generalization can be made. It is recommended, therefore, that a nation-wide study, be undertaken by the Ministry of Education with the cooperation of some experienced researchers at any other university’s or institutions in Sri Lanka.

There exists a need to ascertain the discrepancies between what is available and what is actually desired. This involves determining the nature of the readers and their reading needs. The research should be directed at reviewing the present method of distribution of books and other reading material. Other than the question of selection and distribution, researchers need to examine ways of how to develop additional and suitable materials for Sri Lankan students.

Education authorities in Sri Lanka must establish more in-service training for teachers who are connected with library facilities, and must set up regular library classes in order that students may become proficient in their use and understanding of library arrangements and facilities. The Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka has adequately recognized the importance of promoting reading habits and interests among secondary school students. The National Library Documentation Services Board (NLDSD) is one of the institutes which is combined
to develop reading habits among school children in Sri Lanka. The National Book Development Council, Educational Publication Department will be engaged in the promotion of reading habits. They will hold seminars, workshops, and training programs for teachers, authors, publishers, illustrators, and they also can hold book exhibitions, and literacy competitions. It also promotes the book publishing industry and makes more reading materials available for public. According to the book promotion scheme of National Book Development Council authors can provide grant and assistance in the form of purchasing books and books bought under the project and distribute free of charge among rural and underprivileged school libraries. Finally more funds must be allocated by the educational authorities for the construction, and the improvement of school library facilities.

The findings of this study have helped to focus on some of the salient points about reading habits and interests among Sri Lankan secondary school students. More specifically, the study has brought to the surface some of the difficulties faced by students, especially with regard to the difficulty in acquiring books. It is clear that a concerted effort is needed to help students overcome some of these difficulties. The school, the home and the educational authorities must work together to ensure that students are encouraged and motivated to read. The study confirms earlier research that reading is a relatively popular leisure pursuit. Nevertheless, maintaining and improving reading skills, motivating students to adopt reading as a recreational activity and providing the right leisure periodicals and books in adequate quantities are among the challenges to be met through a combination of foresight and careful planning.
5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Further findings could be subjected to more complex statistical tests to determine if any one factor is more prominent than the other in relating to students' reading habits and interests and causal relationships could also be established. Factor analysis could be used for an in-depth study of each factor.

The differences between male and female leisure choices and reading call attention to the gender differences in leisure reading deserve further examination. Finding on the demographic traits of readers and nonreaders and information on the preferred kinds of reading materials and their feelings about school library and the time spent on reading identify some related issues to the understanding of leisure reading for students in secondary schools and at the same time identify future directions for doing research.

With the diverse level of general reading of students another interesting area of study would be to examine the reading materials and topics preferred by Sri Lankan students when reading in general and how these relate to their leisure reading habits and interests. Findings on the interests would certainly aid parents, teachers and educational authorities in their plans and programmes to help students develop their leisure reading habits and interests.

Early childhood educational background should be explored further in order to find any constants among students. What are the underlying factors behind students who have more self motivation than the others, in seeking leisure reading pursuits. Results obtained from this
research might help give a clearer view on the existing reading problems in our educational curriculum and thus encourage reading among the youth in Sri Lanka.

Another area for future research that emerges out of the study should involve seeking information about what media or personal influence started students to read and how do the occasional and the regular readers differ in their pursuits and in their reading for pleasure.

5.5 Conclusion

The majority of the secondary school students in the sample (n=30) are readers. Most read books for general knowledge and examination requirements. The majority read their textbooks everyday or to 4 days a week. Few days (1-2 days per week) are spending reading fiction, which are read for leisure. Girls tend read more fiction than boys and the reverse is the case for non-fiction. Both males and females show interests in reading magazines and newspapers. The male prefer books in the category of sports and science.

The main hindrances for reading for leisure are the excessive concern of students with reading text-book for examination purposes. Students regard the pursuit of knowledge as the main purpose of reading, unaware of the importance of reading for pleasure and enjoyment. It is felt that teachers could help in inculcating the habit by given students the experience of reading under guidance, such as helping students to select materials based on students' interests. The school librarians could also help by providing a richer collection of reading materials for students to choose from .in the current study, students indicate not very happy with the library collection especially for leisure reading. There exists a discrepancy between
what is available and what is actually desired. A suggested approach is to periodically borrow thematic book collections from the public library for reaching as well as reading needs. This approach would especially help the financially less able students to obtain a wider selection of reading materials.