

CHAPTER FIVE : SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

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Summary of the Purpose and Design

The purpose of this study was to gather and analyse the relevant information which will provide the necessary data for :

- a) Leisure Readership profiles of students in academic institutions;
- b) Confirmation and extension of current findings on students leisure reading and
- c) Additionally compare the popularity of reading to other leisure activities.

Included in the structured questionnaire were questions intended to elicit three major types of information from the subjects :

- a) Questions aimed at eliciting personal data for classifying the sample into categories which provide a basis for analytic, relational study;
- b) Questions aimed mainly at eliciting information on current behaviour with regard to reading and library utilities that the respondent him / herself is in the position to report and the data obtained would provide a basis for descriptive enumerative study;
- c) Questions aimed at eliciting expressions of opinions and values towards reading in order to gain an insight information towards leisure reading and use of the academic libraries.

Using simple random sampling, 250 students from five higher learning institutions were selected. The academic institutions involved in the study are University Malaya (UM), International Islamic University (UIA), Unitek College (KU), Taylor's College (TC) and Polytechnic Port Dickson (PPD).

The findings of this study, based on the returned questionnaires are summarised on the following pages.

Summary of Findings

"Watching Television" was chosen by the respondents as their first choice activity followed by "Reading". More females pursued leisure reading compared to males as the most preferred activity. Newspapers were the most popular printed leisure materials followed by novels / paperbacks, magazines and comics.

The main source of reading materials were bookshops, followed by friends and neighbours, libraries and "other sources". Below average students were found not to be reading from a wide variety of sources unlike the high performers.

The total monthly expenditure spent by 250 respondents was RM7,409. The monthly mean expenditure was RM34.57 with a standard deviation of RM36.27.

Titles of newspapers read are NST / Star, Utusan Melayu / Berita Harian, Malay Mail / Harian Metro, Harakah, Sin Chew Jit Poh, Nanyang Siang Pau, The Sun, Kuan Meng, Borneo Post and Utusan Zaman and Xing Zou.

Newspapers readership fell along ethnic lines, ie. Malay newspapers were read mostly by Malays and Chinese newspapers almost exclusively by Chinese. The English dailies however were read by all ethnic groups. Chinese respondents were found to be avid readers as they were the highest group in reading newspapers daily. More male respondents were found reading newspapers daily compared to female respondents.

Preference for newspapers sections ranked in decreasing order of frequency were :

Local News, Foreign News, Television, Sports, Cartoon, Letters to Editors, Woman, Advertisement and Recruitment. Majority of ethnic groups seemed to indicate that they spent "Half hour to an hour" reading newspapers each day with Indians at the highest 75%, followed by Sabahan / Sarawakian at 66.7%, Chinese at 64.9%, Malays at 64.5% and others at 53.8%.

Out of 250 respondents, 3% stated that they did not read any leisure books. Among the reasons given included expensive, no time, other work is more important and not interested. Favourite leisure books among the male respondents in rank order were : humour, science and technology, science fiction, mysteries, sports, religion & philosophy, fantasy, adventure, horror and romance.

Favourite leisure books among the female respondents in rank order were : romance, humour, mysteries, religion and philosophy, adventure, science fiction, science and technology, horror, fantasy and sports.

Number of leisure books read per year were higher in the categories of "More than 11 books" and "Between 6 & 11 books" especially among the above average and high achievers. The language of leisure books read were related to ethnic groups as well. Books in Bahasa Malaysia were predominantly read by Malay, Chinese books read by Chinese, Tamil books confined to Indian readers. English leisure books were read by all ethnic groups.

Private colleges respondents raised more issues on their dissatisfaction or what can be further improved than government subsidized institutions in relation to printed leisure materials in the main academic libraries. Among the reasons given for not borrowing leisure books from the academic libraries are : insufficient reading materials, difficult to obtain interesting leisure books, no time and there are only old books in the library. Percentage of respondents who felt the main academic library has adequate leisure books is 59%, 38% were unhappy with it and 3% gave no answers.

Self-motivated is the main motivation behind leisure reading followed by parents, friends, lecturers / teachers, siblings and others. Non-human factors of encouragement was interesting reading materials followed by examinations, bookshops, libraries, reading rooms and clubs.

The section on attitude assessment obtained good response from the respondents. Most of them have positive attitudes towards all the statements.

Discussion

It can be seen from this survey that while in general the situation of leisure reading among students of the higher learning institutions is not an ominous situation, there is surely much cause for concern. Students' level of leisure reading both in terms of quantity and quality need to be considerably improved. While little can be done about the home environment, there is much an academic institution can do to improve the quality of reading among poor readers and to sustain and enhance the standard among the better readers.

As we are approaching towards the new millennium and competition among other media devices, especially the various electronic tools in the existing market, are becoming more rigorous, extensive campaign should be formulated and acted upon concurrently so that a genuine love of reading and the development of taste can be assured among the youth of today.

Promoting Reading among Students

- I. In view of the fact that the most important factor behind leisure reading is dependent on the individual themselves as can be seen from the survey findings where the highest percentage of human factors of encouragement is "Self-motivated", 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 library staff. Students should be drawn to the world of books not solely for information but also as an escapism and a means of inner enrichment. Escapism used in this sense means a door to freedom and consequently a desired and deliberately sought opening of horizons.
- II. From the findings, it was observed that students felt that collections of leisure materials in the academic libraries were not up to their expectation. It should be a shared responsibility among librarians and students to ensure that a library's stock is of interest and relevance to students. Encouraging students to read may seem a futile attempt if the books that appeal to them are not readily available. Books that attract the students should be taken into consideration if they want to be encouraged to take up reading.

- III. The library should be able to play the role as a place where books can engender a good contact with all media that expresses the joys, sufferings and concerns of daily life, be it on sport or politics, technology or love, social or religious problems.
- IV. It was also observed in the survey that there are students who were unaware of the leisure printed materials available in the academic libraries. During long term break, perhaps the university can compile an annual booklet of faculty reviews of novels to promote reading. Criteria include entertainment value, insight and significance of work. The long-term goals of the publication are to encourage students in lifelong reading program, to stimulate students' recreational reading and to promote good public relations between the students and the university.
- V. Instead of having collections of printed materials that emphasize on quality and intellectual value, perhaps the academic library management could consider purchasing books that are enjoyed by the students in order to entice "reluctant readers".
- VI. The fact that a higher learning student spend an average of RM35.00 per month on leisure reading materials should be an indicator of the profits it would bring to the book publishing industry if the books published here are promoted and distributed more intensively.

Future Research

The differences between female and male leisure choices and reading call attention to the gender differences in leisure reading which deserves further examination. Findings on the demographic traits of readers and non-readers and information on the preferred kinds of reading materials and the time spent on reading identify some related issues to the understanding of leisure reading for students of academic institutions and at the same time identify future directions for more research.

Early childhood educational background should also be explored further in order to find any consistencies among the respondents. What are the underlying factors behind a student who has more self-initiative 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 more reading among the youth of our nation.

Another area for future research that emerges out of this study should involve seeking information about what media or personal influences started students reading for fun and how do the occasional and the regular readers differ in their pursuits and in their reading for pleasure. For example, research could explore what times during the day and what amounts of time do the occasional and the avid reader pursue.

Conclusion

This study involves a preliminary outlook at the leisure reading habits of students in Malaysian academic institutions of higher learning. In general, the major findings that emerged from several sets of analyses are that reading books are a relatively popular leisure practice for both female and male respondents from various demographics background.

When the popularity of reading is measured against other popular leisure choices pursued by the students, this 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.