

Undergraduates' Perspectives on Promoting Pleasure Reading Facilities in University Libraries: A Case Study

Perera, K.K.N.L.¹, Somaratna, S.D.²

Abstract

Pleasure reading refers to free, voluntary, and non-goal-oriented reading that provides enjoyment or pleasure to the reader. The promotion of pleasure reading is not typically considered a priority in most university libraries. However, recent studies strongly suggest that pleasure reading can have significant, positive impacts on the overall performance of university library users. This study presents undergraduates' perceptions of pleasure reading facilities at the main library of the University of Colombo, as well as their expectations regarding the promotion of these facilities. The results of this study demonstrate a significant population of pleasure readers with diverse reading habits. Most pleasure readers are frequent readers (74.6%, n=209). Novels are the most popular type of reading material (77.5%), followed by non-fiction and short stories. Realistic fiction (33.3%) is the most popular genre among them, followed by fantasy and mystery. A majority of pleasure reading undergraduates have a very positive perception of the benefits of pleasure reading. The three most accepted benefits of pleasure reading were; pleasure reading helps to relax, gives enjoyment and helps to escape from routine work. Most of the participants believe that the promotion of pleasure reading should be a priority for a university library. Among all the facilities related to pleasure reading at the Main Library of the University of Colombo, most of the readers have rated the suitable library environment and the availability of a supportive staff. Pleasure readers prioritize suggested initiatives such as displaying new arrivals and implementing a Readers' Advisory Service to promote pleasure reading in the library.

Keywords: Pleasure reading, Recreational reading, Leisure reading, University libraries, Undergraduates, Sri Lanka

¹ Medical Library, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Email: nadeesha@lib.cmb.ac.lk  <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9358-6893>

² Science Library, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Email: sajeesh@lib.cmb.ac.lk  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1128-1330>



Introduction

Pleasure reading, commonly known as recreational or leisure reading, refers to the voluntary act of reading for enjoyment rather than for academic or professional purposes. It involves choosing books, articles, or any written material based on personal interests and preferences. Unlike reading for specific information or studying, pleasure reading is a leisurely activity that allows individuals to immerse themselves in the world of storytelling, imagination, and knowledge for pure enjoyment.

The Main Library of the University of Colombo consists of a rich collection of pleasure reading material which includes drama, poetry, short stories, novels, non-fiction such as biographies and books related to religion, health, cookery, music, career development, history, crime, art, business etc. In addition, the pleasure reading collection is upgraded every year using the general allocation and donations received by the library and this collection is very popular among undergraduates.

Reading for pleasure is generally not considered a major activity in a university library which mainly caters to curriculum-related reading material. However, through the literature, it was found that a few studies have been conducted related to pleasure reading habits and preferences of undergraduates and services offered by state university libraries in Sri Lanka, compared to other countries in the world. Therefore this study expects to explore the perception of undergraduates who engage in pleasure reading, at the main library of the University of Colombo. To achieve the aim of the study, the following objectives were set.

- To examine the ‘pleasure reading habits’ of undergraduates who read for pleasure using materials available in the main library, University of Colombo
- To identify undergraduates’ perception of benefits gained through pleasure reading
- To identify the undergraduates’ perception of available pleasure reading facilities and proposed initiatives to improve the pleasure reading facilities in the main library, University of Colombo

Literature Review

‘Reading for pleasure’ and ‘recreational reading’ are defined as “Non-goal oriented transactions with texts to spend time and for entertainment” (The Reading Agency, 2015, p.6). ‘Information Seeking Behaviour’ which can be used to explain the background of ‘pleasure reading’ is specifically known as “Everyday Life Information Seeking” (ELIS) behaviour. (Savolainen, 1995). “ELIS focuses on how people use information sources to meet the needs of daily life, in areas such as health, consumption, and leisure” (Ooi & Liew, 2011, p.750). ELIS model identifies the role of ‘personal agency’, in influencing information behaviour. According to this model, information behaviour is shaped by a person’s wider environment (personal networks such as family and friends), wider personal networks such as social clubs; mass media such as television and radio, and formal institutions such as libraries and government organizations. The extent to which a person makes use of an information source (or not) is mediated by social, cultural, and physical factors (Williamson, 2005).

According to Clark and Rumbold’s (2006), report on *Reading for Pleasure*: refers to “reading that we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction we get from the act of reading” (p.6). Generally, the mission of an academic library is to support the curriculum and research by making relevant educational materials available to the users within its parent organization. The promotion of pleasure reading, despite increased competition for budget, staff, and space in academic libraries, seems difficult to justify (Rathe & Blankenship, 2005). However, Zauha (1993) states that a recreational reading collection in an academic library serves as a general stimulus for the intellectual life of students and faculty. Clark and Rumbold (2006), in their research overview on *Reading for Pleasure*, provide a series of research findings that support the positive outcomes of reading for pleasure, both in terms of educational and personal development, among children and adults.

Reading is a foundation skill and other academic domains are improved in conjunction with reading skills (Pavonetti et al., 2002). Motivation for reading is crucial because motivation is what activates behaviour. A less motivated reader spends less time reading, exerts lower cognitive effort, and is less dedicated to full comprehension than a more highly motivated reader (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). According to Clark and Rumbold

(2006), reading for pleasure occurs more in reaction to intrinsic motivation (i.e. self-directed) than extrinsic motivation (i.e. instructed to read for other goals and rewards). There are a handful of studies done to investigate undergraduates' recreational reading habits, and it has been found that students perceive voluntary reading and assigned reading very differently (Gilbert & Fister, 2010).

According to Sanders (2009), fiction was the most popular genre in three State University Libraries in East Carolina, United States of America when studying pleasure reading preferences. Gilbert and Fister (2010) also observed that 'general fiction' was the most common genre among undergraduate users at the Central Library of the University of Gustavus, located in Minnesota, United States of America. The popularity of mystery and detective stories among pleasure readers is consistent with the results obtained from a study carried out at the Library of the University of Moratuwa. According to Seneviratne (2014), the most popular genre of fiction at the University of Moratuwa is 'Mystery'. The National Readership Survey of Schoolchildren in Sri Lanka also reveals that 'Mystery' is the most popular genre among schoolchildren in Sri Lanka (Ranaweera, 2021).

Goctu (2016), recommended teachers who are teaching English as a foreign language to apply reading for pleasure projects in their classes. According to Goctu (2016) pleasure reading not only develops the language knowledge of learners but also communicative skills.

The study carried out by Parlette and Howard (2010) on personal growth, habits, and understanding: pleasure reading among first-year university students at Dalhousie University and the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, suggests that reading for pleasure is a well-established habit amongst many first-year undergraduate students. First-year undergraduates primarily read for pleasure to relax but also recognize that pleasure reading can play a positive role in their academic performance, enhancing their range of background knowledge as well as their active vocabulary (Parlette & Howard, 2010, p.53).

Based on this research finding Maharsiet al.(2019) identified factors that make people interested in books as the story, the genre, and the popularity.

According to them, libraries should provide an extensive range of both fiction and non-fiction for their users. Due to the limitation of funds, it is not realistic for some countries and therefore it is difficult to provide libraries with pleasure reading book collections. Maharsiet al.(2019) in their study they have discussed reading e-material for pleasure too. Further, they have suggested that even when e-books can be accessed freely, literacy and internet connection should also be available. Hence it is obvious that reading for pleasure can be fun when facilities when infrastructure fully supports it. Most of the studies have widely confirmed that reading brings huge benefits. Getting information, expanding horizons, and feeling the fun of reading are the main benefits that were identified. (Maharsi et al., 2019)

According to Biswas (2023), the students of Dhaka University have the habit of pleasure reading. The undergraduate and graduate students of Dhaka University confess that pleasure reading helps them to get mental peace and sanity while at the same time being positive. They also acknowledge that pleasure reading helps them achieve academic success, acquire new knowledge and develop a vocabulary base.

Collection development in academic libraries always gives priority to support the curriculum and university libraries are not stereotypically associated with any sort of books that fall outside of the research sphere of the topic (Behler, 2006). Based on the surveys conducted in the United States, Behler further states that pleasure reading habits have significantly deteriorated among undergraduates. Therefore, she insists on the necessity and importance of promoting pleasure reading among university undergraduates and emphasizes the key role of academic librarians, to make this effort a success. To promote pleasure reading among undergraduates productively, academic librarians must have a clear idea of up-to-date trends and necessities of the group they are serving. As mentioned above, the literature indicates numerous studies are done around the world in academic libraries, to gather user requirements relevant to pleasure reading and to provide more organized and dynamic pleasure reading facilities for their patrons.

A study done by Seneviratne (2014), at the University of Moratuwalibrary has identified undergraduates' perception of pleasure reading in a state

university. Also, the study done by Somaratna (2021) on student counsellors' perception of initiating bibliotherapy services in the university environment emphasised the importance of establishing a separate pleasure reading corner in a university library. However, there are a few studies done in state universities in Sri Lanka related to undergraduates' perception of pleasure reading. Therefore this study will fill the literature gap on pleasure reading studies in the state universities in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

The Main Library of the University of Colombo mainly caters to the undergraduates of four faculties; Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Law, and Faculty of Management and Finance. Therefore, the target group of this study was the community of undergraduates belonging to the above faculties, who read for pleasure, using pleasure reading material available in the main library, during their leisure time. Reading habits of the population play an important role in deciding the target population. This research is based on the judgmental sampling technique, a main subcategory under the purposive sampling method. Data was collected for one month, during an exam-free period common for all the faculties. Data was collected from pleasure readers belonging to the following groups; undergraduates who borrow pleasure reading material from the counter, undergraduates who search for pleasure reading materials (identified through direct observations) and undergraduates who read for pleasure at the library premises.

Novels, short stories, poetry, drama, magazines and non-fiction were considered as the pleasure reading material available in the library. A five-point Likert scale, ranked from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree was applied to collect data on undergraduates' perceptions of benefits of pleasure reading, available facilities for pleasure reading and proposed initiatives of pleasure reading. Questionnaires were administered simultaneously to all the above groups. Data was analysed through the SPSS software package.

Results and Discussion

A total of 209 duly filled questionnaires were collected and the response rate was 100%. A majority of participants represented the Faculty of Arts and the percentage was 57.9%, followed by the Faculty of Law (23.9%),

Faculty of Management & Finance (12.4%) and Education. The sample consisted of 83.7% of females and the majority (37.8%) of participants belonged to the third academic year followed by the second year and the first year.

‘Pleasure reading habits’ of undergraduates of the University of Colombo

When comparing the reading frequency, the majority (74.6%) of undergraduates revealed that they read for pleasure at least once a week, 8.6% of the undergraduates read for pleasure once a month while 13.9% read once in three months (figure1).

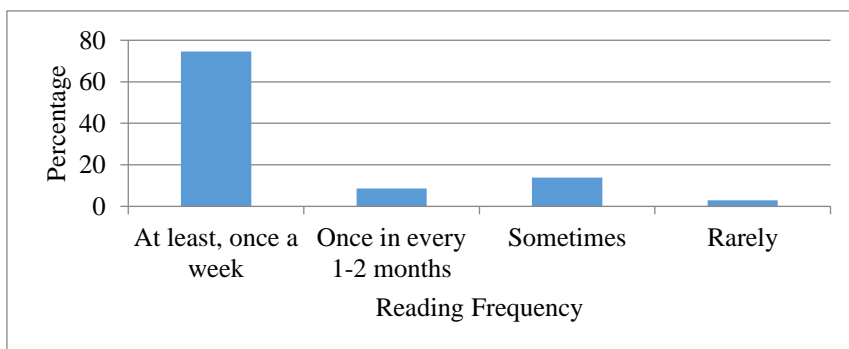


Figure 1: Frequency of reading

Preferred type of library material

Undergraduates tend to read a variety of pleasure reading materials available in the Library. Among the pleasure reading materials they read, novels were preferred by the majority (77.5%) of undergraduates (figure 2), followed by non-fiction (12.4%) and short stories (7.2%).

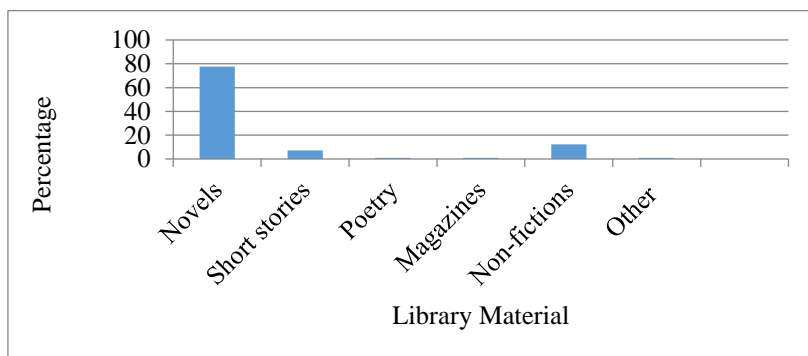


Figure 2: Preferred type of pleasure reading material

Pleasure readers showed a variety of preferences related to genres of literature. As depicted in figure3, their favourite genre of literature was realistic fiction (33.3%), followed by detective stories (24.1%), and fantasy (8.3%).

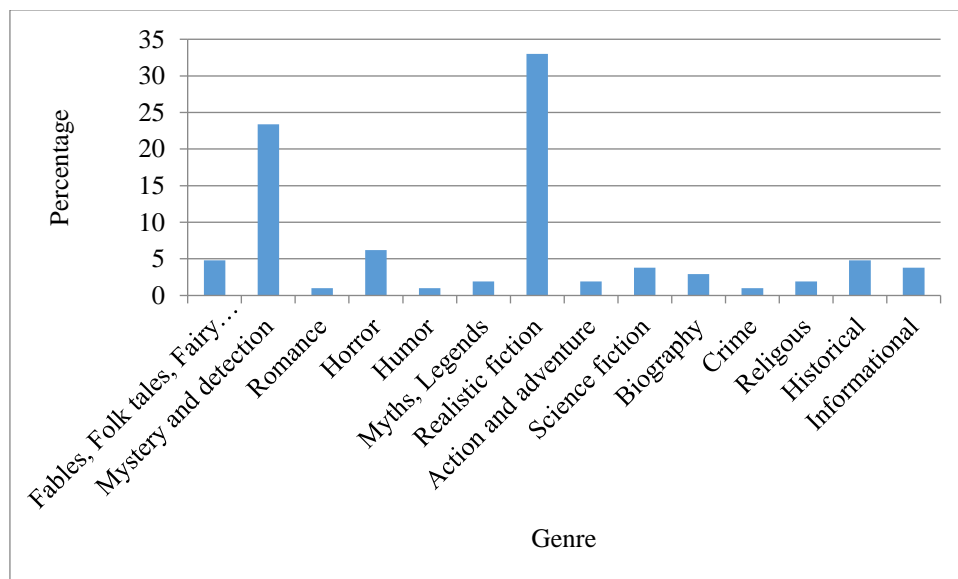


Figure 3: Undergraduates' preferred genre of reading

Undergraduate perception of the benefits gained through pleasure reading

Table 1 depicts undergraduates' perception of benefits gained through pleasure reading. The majority (99%) of the undergraduates agreed with the statement, "Pleasure reading gives me pleasure/ enjoyment". 98% of them also believe that pleasure reading helps to escape from their busy work schedules. 96.2% of the undergraduates agreed with the statement "Pleasure reading helps me to relax while I'm busy with my studies". According to the mean values calculated for each response, the three most accepted benefits by respondents were; pleasure reading helps to relax, pleasure reading gives enjoyment and pleasure reading helps to escape from routine work. Hence the majority of the pleasure readers have a very positive perception of the benefits of pleasure reading.

Table1: Undergraduates’ perception of the benefits gained through pleasure reading

Benefit	Responses (%)					Mean
	SA	A	U	DA	SDA	
Helps to relax	56.5	39.7	2.8	1.0	0	1.48
Gives pleasure/ enjoyment	53.1	45.9	1.0	0	0	1.48
Helps to escape from routine work	50.2	47.8	1.9	0	0	1.52
Improves creativity and imagination	47.8	46.4	5.7	0	0	1.58
Make the reader emotional	24.9	44.5	26.8	3.8	0	1.66
Improves critical thinking ability	40.2	53.6	5.3	1.0	0	1.67
Helps to know about other cultures	34.9	57.4	7.7	0	0	1.7
Positively co-related with overall academic performances	38.8	48.3	7.2	4.8	1.0	1.81
Improves communication skills	30.6	58.4	7.2	3.8	0	1.84
Develops empathy towards others	33.5	55.0	8.6	2.9	0	1.88
Enhances spiritual life	32.9	50.2	11.1	5.8	0.0	1.90
improves second /other language skills	28.7	52.6	12.9	4.8	1.0	1.94
Self-Identity	23.0	53.1	19.1	3.8	1.0	2.07
Reduces stress	44.0	47.3	7.7	1.0	0	2.10

SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Undecided, DA: Disagree,
 SDA: Strongly Disagree

Perceptions of undergraduates on current facilities provided by the Main Library, University of Colombo for pleasure reading

Perceptions of undergraduates on current facilities provided by the Library, University of Colombo related to pleasure reading are shown in Table 2. Mostly rated services by undergraduates were identified as ‘having a suitable physical environment for pleasure reading’ and ‘having a helpful library staff to find pleasure reading materials they need’. ‘Easy access to pleasure reading material’, ‘providing enough pleasure reading material according to my

preference’ and ‘providing enough material with my preferred language’ were the least rated services by the undergraduates. These findings can be identified as a strength to promote pleasure reading at the library. Provided with other requirements, the library of the University of Colombo has a huge potential to be upgraded as a hub for providing recreational facilities for university students.

Table 2: Undergraduates’ perception of the pleasure reading facilities provided by the Library

Pleasure reading facility	Responses (%)					Mean
	SA	A	U	DA	SDA	
The library environment is suitable for pleasure reading	34.9	50.2	10.5	4.3	9.0	1.84
The library staff helps find pleasure in reading materials	23.0	54.5	17.7	3.8	1.0	2.05
I like the way the pleasure reading materials are currently arranged in the library	6.8	60.9	22.7	9.7	0	2.35
The library has provided me opportunities to recommend pleasure reading materials which I love to read	11.0	47.8	29.2	11.0	1.0	2.43
The library has provided me an adequate borrowing period for pleasure reading items	17.2	45.0	15.3	16.7	5.7	2.49
My library has provided enough pleasure reading materials which I enjoy a lot	7.7	54.1	17.7	29.6	0	2.51
My library has provided enough pleasure reading materials from the language that I prefer most	8.6	50.7	23.0	16.7	1.0	2.51
In the library, I can easily find the pleasure reading materials which I like to read	7.8	44.9	28.8	18.5	0	2.58

SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Undecided, DA: Disagree,
 SDA: Strongly Disagree

Undergraduates’ perception of proposed initiatives to promote pleasure reading facilities at the Main Library

The most expected initiatives of undergraduates on promoting pleasure reading were showing displays on newly arrived pleasure reading material’ (92,3%), ‘providing a service which helps to find good pleasure reading material’ (91.4%), and ‘having a separate location for pleasure reading material’ (89.4%) as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Undergraduates’ perceptions of proposed initiatives to promote pleasure reading facilities at the Library

Statement	Responses (%)					Mean
	SA	A	U	DA	SDA	
Separate location within the library, containing pleasure reading material	46.9	42.5	5.7	4.8	0	1.68
Show displays on newly arrived pleasure reading material	43.5	48.8	5.7	1.9	0	1.66
Provides a service that helps me find a rich collection of pleasurable reading materials	44.0	47.4	8.6	0	0	1.65
Join a book club which allows me to share my reading experiences	30.9	55.1	12.1	1.9	0	1.85
Reading materials in e-format	34.4	48.3	12.4	4.8	0	1.88
Share my experiences on pleasure reading with others, through a library website / Facebook	27.8	55.5	15.8	1.0	0	1.90
A separate room with comfortable furniture	30.1	41.1	22.0	6.7	0	2.05
Discussions are allowed with colleagues in the pleasure reading area	14.4	30.1	14.8	28.7	12.0	2.94

SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Undecided, DA: Disagree,
 SDA: Strongly Disagree

Maintaining a rich collection of pleasure reading material, and having more translations and novels of award-winning authors were some constructive suggestions given by undergraduates to improve the pleasure reading collection. Also, they expected to have a more comfortable relaxing area for the pleasure reading collection. Overall, most of the undergraduates (81%)

were satisfied with the pleasure reading facilities provided by the Main Library, University of Colombo. However, a considerable number of users are undecided (12%) about the pleasure reading services provided by the University of Colombo Library. Also, the majority of undergraduates either strongly agreed (43.5%) or agreed (53.6%) that promoting pleasure reading in university libraries should be a priority. It shows that the users have accepted the value of pleasure reading, and the important role of an academic library as a source of pleasure reading material. To add up, users do not perceive the University of Colombo library as a place that only provides reading material related to the curriculum and expects further development of its pleasure reading collection. All these findings serve as a strong justification for any future initiatives taken from the library to make students aware of the benefits of pleasure reading and the collection development of pleasure reading material.

Limitations of the study

Only physical forms of novels, short stories, poetry, drama, magazines, and non-fiction (biographies, religious, health, cookery, music, career development, history, true crime, art, business, etc.) provided by the university library were considered as pleasure reading material. E-versions of pleasure reading material were not taken into consideration. Also, undergraduates who read newspapers and engage in online reading material for pleasure were not included in the study.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The majority of pleasure readers in the study group were frequent readers and they had a variety of interests in pleasure reading material and genres. Novels were the most popular type of reading material among the study sample, while 'realistic fiction' was the most popular genre. The most rated benefits of pleasure reading were 'pleasure reading helps to relax', 'it gives enjoyment', and 'helps to escape from routine work'. The majority of pleasure readers accepted that 'promotion of pleasure reading should be a priority in an academic library'. Having a suitable physical environment for pleasure reading and a helpful library staff to find pleasure reading material were the most rated services provided by the library, relevant to pleasure reading. The key aspects which should be taken into consideration in improving the collection based on responses are; the 'arrangement of pleasure reading

material’, its ‘quantity’, the ‘availability of materials with preferred language’, and the ‘borrowing period’.

Including more pleasure reading material in the collection, implementing an enhanced method of arrangement, including more new books to the collection and more translations to the collection were the main suggestions given by the undergraduates. Although the findings on reading habits focus on the ‘majority’, it is evident that one should not underestimate the needs and preferences of a minority who possess a variety of preferences related to pleasure reading materials and genre. The library administrators can refer to the above findings in upgrading the pleasure reading facilities under the acquisitions policy of the library.

It is recommended further studies to investigate the pleasure reading habits of all user groups of the University of Colombo which will provide a more comprehensive picture of the needs and preferences of undergraduate users with different academic streams. It is recommended to have an islandwide survey on user perceptions of pleasure reading covering all state universities in Sri Lanka. Future studies are suggested for those reading for pleasure on online platforms as well to get a comprehensive insight into the pleasure reading preferences of undergraduates.

References

- Behler, A. (2006). Getting started with graphic novels: A guide for the beginner. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 46(2), 16-21. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20864642>
- Biswas, M. S. (2023). Attitude, Perception and Practice towards Pleasure Reading among University Students: A Case Study. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 1-24. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/90530c6611ccca1df4e16b4dd59a90b/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=54903>
- Clark, C., & Rumbold, K. (2006). Reading for Pleasure: A Research Overview. *National Literacy Trust*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496343.pdf>

- Gilbert, J., & Fister, B. (2015). The perceived impact of e-books on student reading practices: A local study. *College & Research Libraries*, 76(4), 469-489. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.76.4.469>
- Goctu, R. (2016). The Impact of Reading for Pleasure on Georgian University EFL Students' Reading Comprehension (IBSU Case). *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region*, 1(2), 73-81. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED569123.pdf>
- Maharsi, I., Ghali, M.I., & Maulani, S. (2019). High school students' reading habit and perception on reading for pleasure. *International Journal of Indonesian Education and Teaching*, 3(1), 80-89. doi.org/10.24071/ijiet.2019.030108
- Ooi, K., & Liew, C. (2011). Selecting fiction as part of everyday life information seeking. *Journal of Documentation*, 67(5), 748-772. <https://doi.org/10.1108/002204111111164655>
- Parlette, M. & Howard, V. (2010). Personal growth, habits, and understanding: pleasure reading among first-year university students. *Evidence-Based Library and Information Practice* 2010, 5(4) 53-69. <https://doi.org/10.18438/B8C61M>
- Pavonetti, L. M., Brimmer, K. M., & Cipielewski, J. F. (2002). Accelerated Reader: What are the lasting effects on the reading habits of middle school students exposed to Accelerated Reader in elementary grades?. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 46(4), 300-311. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40013588>
- Ranaweera, P. (2021). Reading Promotion Programme on Literature Appreciation among the young adults in Sri Lankan Schools Conducted by the Ministry of Education. *The 49th Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) Conference Proceedings (Denton, Texas): A Rich Tapestry of Practice and Research Around the World*. July 12 - 16, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.29173/iasl8310>
- Rathe, B., & Blankenship, L. (2005). Recreational Reading Collections in Academic Libraries, *Collection Management*, 30 (2), 73-85. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1300/J105v30n02_06?nedAccess=true

- Sanders, M. (2009). Popular reading collections in public university libraries: A survey of three South Eastern states. *Public Services Quarterly*, 5(3), 174-183, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228950902976083>
- Savolainen, R. (1995), Everyday life information seeking: approaching information seeking in the context of way of life. *Library & Information Science Research*, 17(3), 259-94. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-8188\(95\)90048-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-8188(95)90048-9)
- Seneviratne, T.M. (2014). Fiction Reading: readers' choices of fiction books in the library. *National Conference on Library and Information Science (NACLIS2014)*, 18-23. 19 June 2014, Colombo. http://dl.lib.uom.lk/bitstream/handle/123/10157/Library%20%20Information%20Science%20NACLIS%202014_p%2018-23.pdf;sequence=1
- Somaratna, S. D. (2021). Student counsellors' perception on initiating bibliotherapy service in the University environment. *Journal of the University Librarians Association of Sri Lanka*, 24(2), 27-56. <https://jula.sljol.info/articles/abstract/10.4038/jula.v24i2.8046/> DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4038/jula.v24i2.8046>
- Wilkinson, S. (2015). Literature review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment. *The Reading Agency*, 1-39.
- Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J. T. (1997). Relations of children's motivation for reading to the amount and breadth of their reading. *Journal of educational psychology*, 89(3), 420. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-0663.89.3.420>
- Williamson, C. (2005). Ecological theory of human information behavior. In *Theories of information behavior: A researcher's guide*, 128-132. <https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/en/publications/ecological-theory-of-human-information-behavior>
- Zauha, J. M. (1993). Recreational reading in academic browsing rooms: Resources for readers' advisory. *Collection Building*, 12(3/4), 57-62. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb023344>