

Leisure Reading habits and user-centered recommendations from medical undergraduates: Insights from a Sri Lankan medical library

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This study aimed to explore medical undergraduates' Leisure Reading (LR) habits and suggestions to improve the LR collection, and it is the first such documented investigation in a medical library of a Sri Lankan state university. The study used a descriptive cross-sectional design. Stratified random sampling gathered 274 students across 04 academic years. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed. SPSS (v.28) and thematic analysis method were used for quantitative and qualitative analysis, respectively. The response rate was 91% (n=249). LR frequencies were daily 21 (8.4%), monthly 29 (11.7%), weekly 37 (15.0%), rarely 127 (51.0%), never 35 (13.9%). A significant association was observed between academic year and reading frequency (χ^2 , $p < 0.05$). Academic years 1 and 3 were more strongly associated with 'rarely' reading, whereas years 2 and 4, with 'never' reading. Popular genres were mystery 124 (49.6%), fantasy 115 (46.0%), and adventure 101 (40.5%). Highly preferred language was English 124 (49.6%). Many students, 146 (58.4%) accepted that LR practice declined after university entrance. Increased mobile phone usage 45 (18.2%), lack of interest 43 (17.2%), and time constraints 42 (16.8%) were common reasons associated. A majority 199 (80.0%) mentioned that social media usage reduced their reading interests. Genre preferences were influenced by gender. Males favored science and historical fiction, whereas females favored fantasy and mystery (χ^2 , $p < 0.05$). Three genre-based reader profiles were revealed via cluster analysis (*preferring science fiction, fantasy and thrillers/biographies, professional development stories, and poetry/different genres with less intensity*). Considerable number of (n=107; 43.0%) students read e-formats. Popular e-formats were PDFs 25 (23.2%), YouTube 21 (19.6%), and Apple Books 17 (16.1%). Many 212 (85.0%) believe '*LR inculcates humanistic qualities in health professionals*'. Frequent readers and those who used e-books were more likely to view LR as a means of supporting humanistic qualities ($p < 0.05$). User suggestions were categorized into 15 themes from the thematic analysis. This study provides evidence-based patterns in LR habits of medical students, highlighting empirically grounded enrichments of LR collections.

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