

**Fiction Reading:
readers' choices of fiction books in the library, University of Moratuwa**

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Introduction

“Everyday life information seeking” (ELIS) are the ways and methods persons use information sources to meet the needs of daily life, in areas such as health, consumption and leisure (Ooi, and Liew, 2011). In context of academic environment, high proportion of ELIS is taken up by fiction reading.

The word “Fiction” can be described as an imaginative work. This could be further categorised as novels, short stories, or novella. According to the sociological model of reading proposed by Mann and Burgoyne, there are two types of fiction namely; serious fiction and light fiction or literary fiction and recreational fiction. Serious fiction or literary fiction can be defined as "works of imagination which aspire to being genuine contributions to thought and culture." However, light fiction or recreational fiction can be defined as "works written for entertainment and escapism"(p.42, Yu and O'Brien, 1999). However, Yu and O'Brien questioned the distinction between these two types and developed typologies of fiction readers. Various types of studies have been carried out to explain the information seeking (Yu and O'Brien, 1999). Gender studies, psychological studies, sociological studies etc. have identified different types of fiction readers as in Table 1.

Table 1 – Types of Fiction Readers

Type of Study	Type of Readers
Gender Studies	Female readers, Male readers
Psychological Studies	Pessimistic readers, Optimistic readers, Aggressive readers A readers, B readers (Nell's typology) Sensor-type readers vs. Intuitor-type readers Thinker-type readers vs. Feeler-type readers Extroverts readers vs. Introvert readers Judger-type readers vs. Perceiver-type readers
Sociological Studies	Professional readers, Managerial readers, Clerical readers, Manual worker readers, Housewife readers, Student readers

Library users of the University of Moratuwa are prolific readers of fiction. Reading fiction materials has been steadily increased over last six years (2008-2013) among library users of University of Moratuwa. Hence, research was conducted to fulfill the following objectives.

Objectives

- To find out the usage of fiction books in the university library
- To find out fiction readers' personal characteristics and circumstances
- To find out the types of fiction they read
- To find out fiction readers' perspectives in selecting fiction books from the library
- To find out the elements influencing fiction book choices.

Methodology

To fulfill the objectives, an extensive literature survey was carried out to find out the theories and principles based on fiction reading since research of this kind has not been widely carried out in the Sri Lankan context especially in relation to academic libraries. Usage statistics of fiction materials were obtained for the period of 2008-2013 through Integrated Library System of University of Moratuwa. Incidental sampling was used to select the fiction readers. Based on the theories and principles, a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of 30 questions was designed as the research instrument. Interviews were used as the research method. Interviews were held between, 12.15 p.m. and 1.15 p.m. inclusive of the lunch break. Out of 100 fiction readers the researcher met in the fiction collection during the survey period (January 2014 - April 2014), 87 readers gave their consent to participate in the interview. Each participant was interviewed for about 15 - 20 minutes.

Findings and Discussion

Usage of Fiction Books in the University Library

Usage statistics of fiction materials were obtained for the period of 2008-2013 through Integrated Library System of University of Moratuwa and percentage of fiction materials issued (Table 2).

Table 2 – Usage Statistics of Fiction Materials

Year	% Fiction Materials Issued
2013	33.8%
2012	28.6%
2011	27.8%
2010	24.7%
2009	20.8%
2008	18.3%

Reading fiction materials has been steadily increasing over the last five years (2008-2013) among library users of University of Moratuwa. Last year (2013) recorded the highest percentage of fiction borrowing.

Fiction Readers' Personal Characteristics and Circumstances

Out of 87 participants, 21 were males and 66 were females; 86 with Sinhala language as the mother tongue and one with Tamil as the mother tongue. Nearly 76% of the participants were in the age group 20-25 years. Other demographic details of the fiction readers can be described as follows.

Sixty-four students (73.6%) and twenty-three (26.4%) staff members participated in the survey. Out of 64 students, 19 students were following the National Diploma in Technology while 45 were undergraduates. Majority of the student participants have followed G.C.E. Advanced Level - Mathematics stream. It has to be noted that none of the postgraduate students participated in the survey.

Majority of staff members who participated belonged to the non-academic category, which amounted to 18. Further, two academic staff members and three members belonging to academic-support category were included in the survey but none of the executive staff members were interviewed. Highest academic qualification of the staff participants was M.S.S.C and least was G.C.E. Advanced Level. Out of 18 staff members, 10 members were married.

Readers who come to borrow fiction at least once a month were categorized as frequent reader and those who come occasionally were called infrequent readers (Yu and O'Brien, 1999). It was reported 55.2 % of the participants are frequent fiction readers while 44.2 % are occasional readers. Table 3 presents the number of fiction materials borrowed at a time by staff and students respectively. It is interesting to note that two student participants* read fiction only inside the Lending Library.

Table 3 - Number of Fiction Materials Borrowed at a Time

Category	No. of Books Borrowed at a Time						Total
	0	1	2	3	4	6	
Student	2*	7	29	5	21	0	64
Staff	0	6	2	1	11	3	23
Total	2	13	31	6	32	3	87

4.3 Types of Fiction

According to the present study 48.3% of the participants like literary fiction while 47.1% like recreational fiction but 4.6% did not had a choice. Following tables present the cross tabulation between types of fiction and gender as well as member category. According to the Tables 4 and 5, majority of students prefer literary fiction but majority of staff prefer recreational fiction, Most of the male participants favour recreational fiction while female participants favour literary fiction.

Table 4 - Types of Fiction Preferred by Member Category

Member Category	Preference for Books			Total
	Literary Fiction	Recreational Fiction	Both	
Student	56.3%	40.6%	3.1%	100%
Staff	26.1%	65.2%	8.7%	100%

Table 5 - Types of Fiction Preferred by Gender

Gender	Preference for Books			Total
	Literary Fiction	Recreational Fiction	Both	
Male	23.8%	61.9%	14.3%	100%
Female	56.1%	42.4%	1.5%	100%

Further, fiction can be categorised according to specific audience and named as a genre. Out of 87 participants, 56 (64.4%) mentioned about the genre(s) of interest. The highest percentage was taken up by Mystery genre. Mysteries may attract the students since they are mainly focused on crime and detection Sub-genres such as spy, detective, crime come under the Mystery genre (Zackheim and Zackheim, 2013). Table 6 presents the popular genres among the participants.

Table 6 - Popular Genres

Fiction Genre	Preference
Mystery	31.0%
Adventure	20.7%
Inspirational	18.4%
Romance	18.4%
Science/Fantasy	11.5%

Participants were asked whether they prefer single genre or multi genres. Majority of participants (63.2%) preferred to read multi genres and 78.2% were confident of their selection and potential pleasure they could obtain through reading.

Out of 87 fiction readers, 65 (74.7%) prefer to read in Sinhala language and eight (9.2%) read in English. Reading fiction in both these languages is preferred by the rest. However, it was not possible to obtain information about Tamil fiction readers by the researcher.

As pointed out by Yu and O'Brien (1999) many readers concentrated on few authors. Reader who show great loyalty and strong preference for their chosen authors are called author-specific readers. Author-moderately-specific readers do not have extreme preference for few authors but have wide range of choices. If readers do not prefer authors, they are author-unspecific readers; 31.1% of the participants were author-specific readers; 33.3% were author-moderately-specific readers and 35.6 were author-unspecific readers.

However, 77 participants could name author(s) they currently read. Table 7 presents the highest percentages of preference recorded for Sri Lankan authors as well as non-Sri Lankan authors.

Table 7- Preference for Authors

Sri Lankan Authors		Non-Sri Lankan Authors	
Author Name	Preference	Author Name	Preference
Martin Wickramasinghe	15.6%	Arthur Conan Doyle	27.3%
Edward Mallawarachchi	10.4%	Maxim Gorky	10.4%
Karunasena Jayalath	6.5%	Enid Blyton	10.4%
Chandi Kodikara	6.5%	Nicholas Sparks	6.5%
Mahagama Sekara	5.2%	Leo Tolstoy	3.4%
Sujeewa Prasannaarachchi	5.2%		
Sumithra Rahubadda	5.2%		
Sunethra Rajakarunanayake	5.2%		
Tharaka Wasalamudali	5.2%		
Upali Wanigasuriya	5.2%		

It is interesting to note that most of fiction readers of University of Moratuwa have strong preference for the mystery fiction "Sherlock Holmes" authored by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and translated by Chandana Mendis.

Since there is some or other similar percentages received for author specificity, it is vital to ascertain the approaches readers follow to find the fiction and presented in Table 8.

Table 8- Approaches Applied to Searching Types of Fiction

Approach	Preference
By authors only	16.7%
Authors browsing	24.4%
Browsing/ some authors	22.2%
Random browsing	31.1%
Looking for a category	5.6%

Most of the fiction readers were following author-oriented approach than random browsing to select the fiction. Hence, it is advisable maintain the fiction collection according to the author.

Fiction Readers' Perspective in Selecting Fiction Books

Following (Table 9) are the recorded perspectives of fiction readers of the present study with percentages.

Table 9 - Fiction Readers' Perspective

As a hobby	43.7%
To get life/social experience	31.0%
To get knowledge	8.0%
As a habit since childhood	5.7%
To release stress	3.4%
To increase imagination	3.4%
To relax	1.1%
For Family Members	1.1%
To get pleasure	1.1%

Nagel and Verboord (2012) explained how fiction reading from adolescence to early adulthood helps the formation of tastes and lifestyle patterns that will lead to socialisation as well as independent life.

Elements Influencing Fiction Book Choices

Personal values and reading tastes, lifestyle, family, friends and mass media are some of the elements influencing in the selection of fiction. Personal values and reading tastes have influenced 72.2% of the participants in selecting fiction. Majority of personal values and taste lay with reading translations. In addition, friends influenced 15.6% of the participants.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, it could be said every life information seeking is carried out satisfactorily in the Library, University of Moratuwa, as readers are satisfied with the current fiction collection. Further, promoting fiction reading can be used to enhance the ability of reading. As highlighted by Nagel and Verboord (2012), fiction reading can be used to increase the ability of reading among students as well as staff members.

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Keywords: Fiction Readers, Reading Habits, Information Seeking Behaviour, Everyday Life Information Seeking, University Libraries