

**SURVEY ON READING HABITS OF STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF  
COGNITIVE SCIENCES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (FCSHD) IN  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK (UNIMAS)**

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**April 2005**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First of all, glory to God Almighty for He has given me the strength, passion and determination to complete this project.

My heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Miss Diana Carol for her guidance, comments and invaluable advice in writing this project.

My highest appreciation and thanks to my beloved parents and my dear siblings for their prayers, love, support and encouragement throughout my years of education in UNIMAS.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my friends for their support and encouragement to complete the project.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ELLS	:	English Language and Literature Studies
ELT	:	English Language Teaching
ESL	:	English as a Second Language
FCSHD	:	Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
PKPG	:	Program Khas Pensiswazahan Guru
TESL	:	Teaching English as a Second Language
UNIMAS	:	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
USM	:	Universiti Sains Malaysia

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Survey on reading habits of students in the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)**

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This study is a survey that intends to investigate the existing reading habits among students in the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). In order to find out the students' reading frequency, the survey elicited information on the amount of time spent for reading or how frequent do they read. Besides that, this study identified the types of reading materials that the students usually read as well as their preferred reading materials. Finally, the study also discovered the factors that influence the students' reading habits, in which the factors encouraging reading and factors that discourage the students from reading. The sample for this study was 300 students of various programs in the faculty. The findings of this study revealed that generally FCSHD students spent 5-10 hours reading in a week. As for the amount of time spent for academic reading and non-academic reading, it is found that FCSHD students spent 1-4 hours. In identifying the types of reading materials read and preferred by the students, it was found that newspapers and magazines were the two most common and popular materials among FCSHD students. As for language usually read and preferred, there was not much difference between those reading in Malay Language and English, but more students chose to read in Malay Language. The findings of this study also revealed that the most influential factor that affects the students' reading habits is reading for assignments and exams purposes. On the other hand, it is found that the most important factor that discourages the students from reading is because they lack of time due to studies. Generally, the students have positive attitudes towards reading as most of the students usually read during their free time.



## **ABSTRAK**

### ***Kajian tabiat membaca di kalangan para pelajar Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pembangunan Manusia (FSKPM) di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)***

***Edina Anak Lanying  
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*Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji tabiat membaca di kalangan para pelajar Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pembangunan Manusia (FSKPM) di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Sehubungan dengan itu, kajian ini mengenalpasti kekerapan membaca para pelajar iaitu jumlah masa yang diperuntukkan untuk membaca. Selain itu, kajian ini juga turut mengenalpasti jenis bahan bacaan yang biasa dibaca serta jenis bahan bacaan yang cenderung dibaca oleh para pelajar. Kajian ini juga mengkaji faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi tabiat membaca para pelajar, iaitu faktor-faktor yang menggalakkan pembacaan serta faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi para pelajar untuk tidak membaca. Kajian ini melibatkan 300 pelajar dari pelbagai program dalam Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pembangunan Manusia di UNIMAS. Hasil kajian ini memperlihatkan para pelajar meluangkan 5-10 jam untuk membaca dalam seminggu. Hasil kajian turut mendapati untuk pembacaan akademik dan pembacaan bukan akademik para pelajar meluangkan 1-4 jam untuk membaca. Dalam mengenalpasti jenis bahan bacaan yang biasa dan cenderung dibaca oleh para pelajar, didapati suratkhbar dan majalah merupakan dua jenis bahan bacaan yang popular di kalangan pelajar FSKPM. Hasil kajian memperlihatkan perbezaan yang tidak begitu ketara antara pelajar yang memilih untuk membaca dalam Bahasa Melayu dan Bahasa Inggeris. Walau bagaimanapun, lebih banyak pelajar yang memilih untuk cenderung membaca dalam Bahasa Melayu. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan faktor utama yang menggalakkan para pelajar untuk membaca adalah untuk menyiapkan tugas serta peperiksaan. Manakala faktor utama yang menyebabkan para pelajar untuk tidak membaca adalah kekurangan masa kerana sibuk dengan pengajian mereka. Secara umumnya, para pelajar mempunyai atitud yang positif terhadap amalan membaca memandangkan kebanyakan para pelajar membaca pada masa lapang.*

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of study**

Reading is one of the most important activities that students have to engage in. Their roles as students require them to read a variety of reading materials and types of texts to deal with the demands of academic tasks. Students must read in order to become and remain aware of their subject, to keep their knowledge and understanding up to date and to check their works and ideas and research against those of their peers (Fairbain & Fairbain, 2001). Besides that, as mentioned in Zainal et al. (1990) reading is not the only way to fill in free time or merely as hobby but reading habit helps to develop more creative thinking, which can leads to mental and spiritual development.

It is known that reading is a way to search for information and knowledge. Reading benefits the reader in which one would have the time to scrutinize the details, think and recheck facts that have been read (Zainal et al., 1990). In addition, according to Ahuja and Ahuja (1991), reading provides information about and an understanding of facts, relationships and appreciation of the present world as well as the past.

The non-reading problem of Malaysians, specifically Malaysian students has been a major issue in society. Indeed this has drawn the attention of academicians and government in Malaysia prior to the growing problem of non-reading and the issue of readership behaviour among school students and university adults (Pandian, 2000). The focus on reading among the young generations is crucial as for the reading to be meaningful; it is essential for the students to learn not only to read but also to cultivate reading habits for enjoyment and lifelong learning (Pandian, 2000). Even previous studies on the reading habits in Malaysia show many students are found to be reluctant to read for information and for pleasure. A survey on the reading behaviour of 22,400 individuals and 6050 households by the Ministry of Education revealed that only 20 percent of Malaysian read regularly. This survey further stressed that the small figure includes students who read just to pass the exams (as cited in Pandian 2000).

It is believed that reluctance to read which emerged among university students tends to lead to the problem of poor reading habits among the students. Pandian (1997) cites a study by Leong (1988), in a survey conducted on law, science and arts students at University Malaya reported that students read little apart from their lecture notes. The findings suggest that university students are developing a non-reading habits and joining the crowd of poor readers.

In general, most of the time, Malaysian students have often associated reading with academic tasks and not for knowledge or pleasure (Kaur & Thiyagarajah, 1999). Perhaps academic reading is one of the main factors that influence the students' reading habits. This is due to the students' concern towards reading itself, in which students read for exam purposes. According to Chitravellu and Osman, studies in the past have shown that the "exam oriented educational system in Malaysia

promotes rote learning and that there needs to be a paradigm shift in how education is viewed” (as cited in Kaur & Thiyagarajah 1999).

Previous studies in Malaysia show that university students do read but their reading is limited to the reading of academic materials. Students who have positive attitudes towards reading tend to read a variety of reading materials and influence from family and peers eventually leads to high frequency for reading (Pandian, 2000). Thus students may not merely associated reading with academic tasks, but they are encouraged by others to read and have a sense of likeness towards reading as pleasurable experiences too.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The presence of reluctant readers at universities in Malaysia is an increasing concern and demands serious analytic attention (Pandian, 1997). Previous studies regarding reading in Malaysia have focused on “eradicating illiteracy and improving reading ability” (Pandian, 1997, p.15). There was no attention given in relations to the encouragement of the development of reading habits. Thus, this tends to lead to reading reluctancy among universities students (Pandian, 1997).

It seems that from the time the students literally enter the university to read, the institution is the only place in which books and other types of reading materials are found in large quantity. It is a concern that most students spend a relatively small amount of time devoted to read the mountains of materials that they either told they must read or decide they need to read (Fairbain & Fairbain, 2001). Prior to the studies that investigate the reading habits of university students, results show that

Malaysian students do read but because the focus is more on academic reading, the students rarely read for pleasure (Pandian, 2000).

Hence, this present study is another survey which involves students in higher learning institution, intending to find out reading habits among university students, which in this case referring to FCSHD students in UNIMAS.

### 1.3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the FCSHD students' reading frequency, i.e.:

- a. How frequently do the students read?
- b. How much time do students spend for reading?

2. To find out the types of reading material that the students usually read, i.e.:

What types of reading materials do the students read?

3. To find out the types of reading materials that the students prefer to read, i.e.:

What types of reading materials do the students prefer to read?

4. To find out the factors that influence the students' reading habits, i.e.:

- a. What encourage the students to read?
- b. What discourage the students from reading?

## **1.4 Significance of the study**

It is hoped that the results of this study will provide knowledge on the reading habits of university students, specifically for those in UNIMAS. The knowledge gathered would help the institution or the faculty to be aware of the factors that may deter the students from reading. It is also a concern that the results of the study will enable the faculty to be aware of the environment that perhaps motivates the students to read.

This study may also help to overcome the weaknesses of the reading campaign and programs so that more effective activities will be conducted specifically to attract and promote reading among university students. Besides that, the lecturers and teachers will use the knowledge to select appropriate materials, which are suitable for the students' interest and level of comprehension.

## **1.5 Definition of Terms**

In this section, some of the frequently used terms in the project are defined.

### **1.5.1 Reading**

Reading in this study refers to reading printed media and it does not refer to reading on the Internet. The definition of reading is stated below:

“Reading is the construction of meaning from a printed or written message. The construction of meaning involves the reader connecting the information from the written message with previous knowledge to arrive at meaning at an understanding” (Day & Bamford, 1998,p.12).

### **1.5.2 Reading habits**

“Reading habits refer to regular tendencies in reading behaviour” (Kaur &Thiyagarajah, 1999,p.3).

### **1.5.3 Reading reluctancy**

“The term used to describe the phenomenon of students who can read but choose not to read” (Pandian, 1997, p. 10).

### **1.5.4 Academic reading**

“Academic reading is operationally defined as reading textbooks and other materials typically required for study. This type of reading was meaningfully classified into textbooks, research papers, journal articles, library books and any other materials assigned for coursework” (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 1994,p.52).

### **1.5.5 Non Academic reading**

“This type of reading is classified into materials such as books, newspapers, magazines and any other materials unrelated to academic study” (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 1994,p.52).

The following chapters in this report include Chapter 2, which presents the literature review or related findings for the study and Chapter 3 presents the research methodology. Then the findings and discussion of the study are presented in Chapter 4. Finally Chapter 5 presents the summary of the study, conclusion, implications and recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses reading habits among Malaysians. It presents information on the poor reading habits among Malaysians, the types of reading materials read and the amount of time spent for reading.

This chapter also presents some related findings on reading habits. Finally the last section in this chapter discusses the factors that may influence reading habits. This includes factors that encourage and discourage reading.

#### **2.2 Reading habits among Malaysians**

Safiah (1990) states that Malaysia aims to create a society who not only can read but also a society who likes and loves reading. Efficient and mature readers are usually interested to books, magazines and other printed materials compared to those who are not interested in reading. In an early research on Malaysians reading rates in 1988, announced by Tuan Haji Omar Bin Mohd Hashim, the Deputy Minister of Education claimed that a Malaysian reads only an edition of



newspaper, followed by magazines and light reading materials (Yusop, 1990). Based on another study, 75% Malaysians are able to read, but only 15% of them practice reading. This means one would only read one book a year. Even worse, 20% of them do not have any reading materials at home (Johnny, 1990). Still, in a survey conducted by the National Library in 1996 found out that the average Malaysians read only two books a year (cited in Kaur & Thiyagarajah, 1999).

In contrast to the reading of two books a year mentioned in Kaur and Thiyagarajah (1999) above, another study reported that the average Malaysian reads only half a page in a year. This falls below the UNESCO leisure reading recommendation of 80 pages per person per year. Nevertheless to say, many Malaysians do not even read a single newspaper every day. Even though it is stated that Malaysia's literacy rate has increased, but the incidence of habitual readers among public does not show a corresponding increase (Pandian, 1997).

It has been a concern shared by many academicians, government officials and pressure groups that emphasized the need to investigate the poor reading behaviour of Malaysians (Pandian, 1997). The poor reading habits among educated Malaysians are believed to be associated with their reluctance to read and their disinterest ever since they were in school. This is mainly because they are so much influenced by the education system in Malaysia that places great emphasis on examinations as measures of academic achievements (Pandian, 1997). This has led the students to perceive that the teacher's notes and handouts are very important and thus discourages them reading for pleasure (Pandian, 1997). The former Malaysian Education Minister, "Datuk Najib Tun Razak has frequently commented in the local media that most students read only to pass exams, and do not read for pleasure"(as cited in Kaur &Thiyagarajah, 1999).

### **2.3 The amount of time spent for reading**

Frank and Associates (1998), in the reading profile of Malaysian people, found out that Malaysians normally spent between half to an hour reading newspapers each day. On the other hand, the subjects in the same study indicated that they spend between two to four hours per week to read magazines. Of the subjects who indicated that they read books, 38% of them spent less than two hours a week, 21% spent between four to six hours a week and another 20% spent more than six hours a week reading books.

As for university students, Sheorey and Mokhtari (1994), who investigated the reading habits of university ESL students at different levels of English proficiency in Oklahoma State University, reported students read an average of 4.74 hours per week. It is known that students who scored higher on a test of reading comprehension reported spending more time on non - academic reading that is 5.85 hours per week, than those with lower reading ability who reported spending an average of 3.65 hours per week. In this study, it is indicated that most of the students, both of high and low proficiency of English spend more time on academic reading than any other types of reading in college.

However, in a study by Gallik (1997), which investigated the recreational reading habits of college students shows that the students spend more time to read when they are on vacation compared to during the class session. The results show that while classes are in session, 63% of the students reported spending 2 hours or less each week for recreational reading. It is also found that students tend to spend less time doing recreational reading when classes are in session.

## **2.4 The types of reading materials read and preferred**

Atan, Ghazali, Mohd. Yunus, Zainal Abidin, Mohd. Noor and Yoong (1984) in a survey on the reading habits and interests of Malaysian people found that most Malaysians, that is 97% of them read newspapers. This is then further strengthened by Frank and Associates (1996), in investigating the reading habits of Malaysian people found that newspapers are the most preferred reading materials, followed by magazines and books. It seems that newspapers remain as the most common and preferred reading materials.

In Mokhtari and Sheorey (1994), a study on the reading habits of English Secondary Language (ESL) students at different levels of English and education in University of Oklahoma indicated more undergraduates prefer to read magazines and newspapers instead of reading materials related to their studies as the students are aware of reading these materials, can help in their language proficiency, and Gallik (1999), also reported magazines are the most popular reading materials among the students. It seems that magazines and newspapers are very much popular and preferred among students.

## **2.5 Factors that influence reading habits**

### **2.5.1 Factors encourage reading**

There are various factors that influence the students' reading habits. The first factor is the education system. It seems that the reading habits of Malaysians are very much affected by its education system, in which for Malaysian students, reading is perceived associated with academic tasks and for exam purposes (Pandian, 1997). The exam- oriented system is seen so significant in

students' life that it influences them to regard reading as vital resources to help them to achieve their learning goals and succeed in their studies (Pandian, 1997). It is also indicated in other studies by Kaur and Che Lah, and in Kaur and Mahadi, on mature learners at Malaysian universities, which found that the learning traits truly reflect their Asian characteristics of being goal oriented and wishing to succeed at the university (Pandian, 2000).

The second factor that may affect reading habit would be the encouragement and presence of other people around an individual in which it is called social psychology. "Allport (1968) defines social psychology as how the thought, feeling and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others" (Pandian, 1997,p.21). Those who are exposed to people who regularly read, for instance parents, siblings and peers will eventually lead the individual to develop a positive reading attitude. Even people around individuals can provide positive reading environment like the availability of reading facilities at home and the encouragement given by parents and siblings can affect the reading habits of the students (Pandian, 1997). Home environment is not only a factor that can influence students' attitudes and interests toward reading, but it also influences their mental development and academic achievement (Safiah, 1990).

The third factor is the purpose of reading, in which for students, reading for academic purposes is their main reason to read. This is because they need to read for knowledge on their subjects, to accomplish their academic tasks and for their academic excellence (Fairbain & Fairbain, 2001). This reflects Pandian's findings that reported students' reading habits and interests who are in school and university are affected by their attitudes towards reading. Most of the time, students

aim reading in order to get excellent academic achievements (Pandian, 1997). As students, they would actually reading specifically to seek and gain information in order to do their academic tasks and as preparation for them to excel in the exams. Students are motivated to read by the desire to find, understand and absorb information, ideas and arguments (Fairbain & Fairbain, 2001).

The type of reading material that student usually engaged in is another factor that influence students' reading habits. Commonly, most students often read academic materials. Kaur and Thiyagarajah (1999), in their study on the reading habits and interests of the English Language and Literature Studies (ELLS) students of Universiti Sains Malaysia, reveals that the students are not interested to spend their time reading materials which are not related to their studies. They spend much time reading course materials to help them complete their course works and for exam purposes. Frank and Associates (1998) specifically stated the two main reasons for Malaysian people for reading newspapers, magazines and books. The reasons for reading these materials are because reading the materials enable them to gain more knowledge and as a source for them to fill in their free time. The reason for reading newspapers and magazines are more to keep them updated. In addition, the respondents in Frank and Associates (1998) also stated comics as a source of entertainment during their leisure time.

The student's attitude towards reading is another factor that determines the reading habits of the students. Davies, in his book *Introducing reading* writes "Attitude is seen to represent values, beliefs and interest and this includes readers' attitudes to the features of the text such as the content and the format of the reading materials" (1995, p.72). Professor Syed Hussein Alatas, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia claimed that the academic achievement problems faced by the Malay

students is primarily because of their poor reading practice and attitudes towards reading. In addition it is reported that more than 95% of Bumiputera students that enter local universities do not know how to use the information related to their studies (cited in Halim, 2003). It has been stated that “the phenomenon occurs due to students’ reading reluctance and lack of exploitation on the use of library to its fullest” (Zulkifli cited in Halim, 2003).

In a finding by Camiciottoli (2001), in examining the extensive English reading habits and attitudes of a group of Italian university EFL students, reported that 41.8% of the low frequency with positive attitudes students have the tendency to do extensive reading in English. This is also reflected in a finding in Kaur and Thiyagarajah (1999) that investigated English reading habits of English Language and Literature Studies (ELLS) students in Universiti Sains Malaysia. The study revealed that students with high motivation to read in English showed very positive attitude towards reading and have awareness on their roles as mature students. Therefore, the frequency for academic materials and non-academic materials would be different as it depends on the students’ attitude, interests and regularity to the reading done.

Finally, the types of language used in the reading materials also influence the interest and the attitudes of students toward reading. A finding by Pandian (2000) reveals that 80.1 percent of university students are reluctant readers of English language materials, while as many 76.9 percent are reluctant readers in Malay language materials. As in Kaur and Thiyagarajah (1999), 85.7% of the students read in English as they feel that reading in that language will help to improve their English language proficiency. It is assumed that the language preferences influence the students to read. Those who might have language difficulty would be discouraged from reading. John (2003)

mentioned that few studies reported language difficulty does play a part in inculcating interest towards reading.

### **2.5.2 Factors that discourage reading**

Mokhtari and Sheorey (1994) found out that the difficulty in reading might discourage individual to engage in reading. Students who have low proficiency in language may be unmotivated to read as they find they are slow readers and they would not enjoy reading compared to those who are of high reading proficiency. One of the main difficulties faced by the low English proficiency is their lack of adequate vocabulary to understand the texts and this distracts their focus on the texts which leads to their disinterest to keep on reading the materials. Kaur and Thiyagarajah (1999) found out that similar situation in ELLS students in University Science Malaysia, in which they reported encountered difficulties of the inability to recall information, new terminology, inability to concentrate and regressive reading habits.

Finally, the time factor also affects individuals to read. Frank and Associates (1998) indicates that those of age 25 years and above do not read because of they are busy working, in which having lack of time in general. This group lack interests in reading and did not have free time to spend for reading. In addition, this group of 25 years and above also face reading difficulty; the inability to understand the language and the terms read.

Another similar finding reported by Camiciottoli (2001) in determining which reason that may limit the frequency of reading of a group of Italian university EFL students, reveals that lack of time due to studies is in the first rank and perceived as the most important reason for the limited

reading in English. However, although students cited lack of time due to their studies limit their reading, the influence of other interesting activities cause them to disregard reading during their free time. It seems that there is a time compete to reading with leisure activities. The availability of alternative leisure outlets, such as television, may compete with reading outside of school and may in fact reduce the time spent for reading (Mckenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995).

Based on literature review mentioned above, previous studies on reading habits have been identifying students' reading frequency, the types of reading materials as well as the factors that affects reading. Perhaps in this present study, the same patterns and findings may appear similarly as in those past studies. The preceding chapter presents the research methodology for the survey.