

## READING HABITS AND ATTITUDE IN MALAYSIA: ANALYSIS OF GENDER AND ACADEMIC PROGRAMME DIFFERENCES

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### Abstract

This study is conducted as an attempt to understand the reading habits and attitudes of the Bachelor of IT students and the Bachelor of Art students from the International Islamic University Malaysia. Based on the sample of 127 students, it was found that significant differences exist between the two groups of students in terms of types of reading material and reading resources used. Differences in reading habits and attitudes were also observed between male and female participants. The results of the study are expected to guide professionals in the library and information services to be better equipped to provide more efficient and effective services. The study is also intended to interest researchers from other areas of study who are interested in the realm of reading and literacy.

### Abstrak

*Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti tingkahlaku dan tabiat membaca di antara pelajar Ijazah Dasar Teknologi Maklumat dan pelajar Ijazah Dasar Sastera dari Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia. Berdasarkan 127 sampel yang dikumpul, kajian menunjukkan perbezaan tabiat membaca yang ketara di antara dua kumpulan tersebut dari segi jenis bahan yang dibaca dan sumber bacaan yang digunakan. Beberapa perbezaan tingkahlaku dan tabiat membaca telah dikenalpasti di antara peserta perempuan dan lelaki. Hasil daripada kajian menunjukkan bahawa pustakawan dan pakar maklumat pada masa kini perlu melengkapkan diri untuk memberi perkhidmatan yang lebih cekap dan berkesan. Kajian juga berharap untuk mendapatkan penyertaan penyelidik daripada bidang lain yang berminat dalam kajian membaca dan literasi maklumat.*

### INTRODUCTION

For the last few decades, we have been experiencing the exponential growth of information and entertainment being created in digital format. These resources are gaining importance particularly among the younger generation in Malaysia. This phenomenon may change the way people perceive reading and how printed materials are being utilized to facilitate reading. In addition to what has been studied in the past, this study attempts to explore the reading habits and attitudes among the undergraduate IT-based and Art-based students at a public university in Malaysia. It is also expected to update and provide a baseline information about reading habits and attitudes of the Malaysian undergraduate students, while at the same time compare these differences in terms of academic programmes and some other background information such as gender and performance.

### BACKGROUND

In this study, the intention is to explore the reading attitudes and habits among the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) students by using a survey research method. Data were gathered from the Bachelor of IT students from the Kulliyah Information and Communication Technology (KICT) and the Bachelor of Art students from the Kulliyah Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science (IRKHS). This study can be seen as significant in providing useful information which can assist the university authority and library to provide more effective services and a better understanding on the concept of reading for these groups of students. In addition, this study is also significant, through its methodology, in extending future research such as exploring into a wider scope of the Malaysian university environments.

This study attempts to answer several research questions such as the following :

RQ1 : What is the reading habit of the two groups of undergraduate students in terms of the following :

1a. What type of reading material do they read?

1b How much time do undergraduate students spend on reading?

1c Where do they get the reading material?

1d. When do they read?

1e. What do they read during leisure time?

RQ2: What are the students' attitudes toward reading?

RQ3: Is there any relationship between gender and reading habit and attitude?

RQ4: Is there any relationship between academic programme and reading habit and attitude?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Population and Sample***

This study is considered a single case study approach due to the use of only one organization in defining the population. A survey was used as a method in collecting the data. The population of the study were the undergraduate students from two academic faculties at the university. The faculties were Kulliyah of Information & Communication Technology (KICT), the IT-based and Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science (KIRKH), the Art-based. The total number of students from each faculty respectively were 2019 (only those from Islamic Revealed Knowledge) and 454 students (from a total population of 1473). 400 questionnaires were distributed in classrooms. 127 responses (32% response rate) were received from the survey. 73 responses (about 57%) were from KIRKH (Art based) and 54 responses (about 43%) were from KICT (Science based). This number maybe slightly imbalance but considered adequate to represent both programme of studies.

### ***Data Collection and Measurement***

For the measure of reading attitude, the study adopted the Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA) from the work of Smith (1991). Subjects respond to the statements on a five-point Likert-type scale (where 5 = Strongly Agree and 1 = Strongly Disagree). Two dimensions of reading attitude were studied. These were recorded as follows:

- Reading activity and enjoyment ( 6 items) — measured the extent to which the person reads for pleasure.
- Anxiety and Difficulty ( 5 items) - measured the extent to which the person experiences problems or becomes upset when reading.

As for reading habits, 6 questions (4 close ended questions and 2 open ended questions) were asked for responses. Subjects answer close-ended questions using frequency scale (i.e. 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often and 5 = Always). The questions were related to: How often do they read in a week? What types of reading material do they read, and how frequent do they read these reading materials? What resources do they use to get the reading materials? What time of the day do they read? Respondents were also asked to respond qualitatively on the types of reading material they like to read and the activities that they like to do during their leisure time.

### ***Data analysis***

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and statistics that measure the relationship between variables such as t-test. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used for data analysis purposes.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### ***Demographic***

Out of 127 respondents, about 57% were from IRKHS (Art-based students) and the remaining 43% were from KICT (IT-based students). Majority of the participants were female (66%). This is perhaps due to the imbalance gender distribution of the university undergraduate population (60 % female) which also formed the majority of the respondents

A big majority (respondents) were aged between 19-25 years old (about 90%). This is considered a normal age range for undergraduate studies. Majority of the respondents were in year one (64%) in their programme of study, followed by year two (18%), year three (12%) and year four (6%).

**Reading Habit**

Findings on reading habits were analyzed through the types of reading materials read, amount of time spent on reading per week, sources used to get the reading materials and the time of day spent on reading.

**Types of reading material**

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of eight types of reading material i.e. newspaper, magazine, journal article, literature, academic book, text book, fiction/novel and website that the respondents read. Majority of the students read the newspaper everyday to at least a few times a week (74%). This is followed by academic books or text books (72%), website (70%), Magazine (39%) followed by fiction, journal article and literature (eg. poem).

The results pinpointed the high rate of website use, in addition to academic books and newspapers among university students. This may explain why Malaysian students were said to be reading for academic purposes only and not for general knowledge or pleasure as indicated by some studies in the past. The trend may have shifted to a digital reading habit which is totally different from the conventional

**Figure 1 :**

Type of reading material that respondents read everyday to at least a few times a week (N=

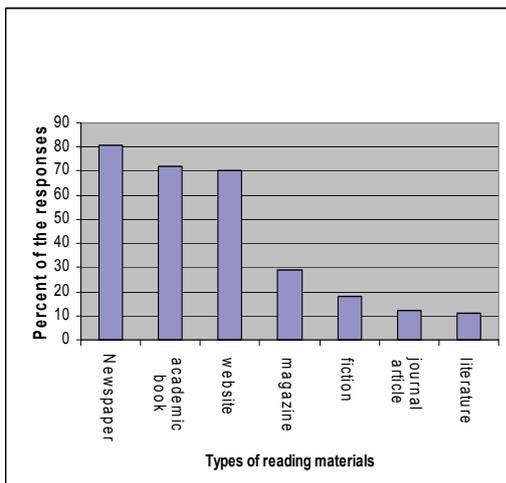


Table 1 shows the distribution of amount of time spent on reading per week by the respondents. The result indicates that university students spent a considerable amount of time on reading. 80% of the students read between 3 to above 10 hours per week. On average, the students spent about 7 to 9 hours per week on reading. This result is somewhat expected due to the academic activities that require a significant amount of reading time in order to perform academically. However the amount of time spent on reading should be attributed to reading academic books rather than other materials such as newspapers or fiction. The result is slightly higher than the study conducted by Sheorey and Muktari (1994) on university students in the US, where the average reading time per week was 4.75 hours. The high amount of time spent on reading may have also conformed to the findings by Liu (2005) who indicated that people read more in the digital age. This is because information can be obtained faster, cheaper and more conveniently via the Internet.

**Table 1**

Time spent on reading

Hour	Respondent	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	2	2
1.-3 hours	23	18
4 -6 hours	36	29
7 -9 hours	37	29
10 hours and above	28	22

**Sources of reading material**

Several sources were identified that were used by the respondents to get their reading materials. These were libraries, book shops, friends, internet and others. The internet was found to be the most frequently used source to get the reading materias (46%). This is followed by the library (28%), friends (23%) and the bookstore (16%).

**Time for reading**

The respondents were also asked about the time of day they would normally spend to read. The result of the survey indicates that most of the respondents read at night (90%). Others indicate that they read whenever they have the chance or whenever there is a free time (63%).

A small number indicate that they read in the morning (36%) and in the afternoon (19%). The classes that the students need to attend during the day may influence the reading time, which naturally take place more at night.

**Reading Material during Leisure time**

Respondents were asked to state three types of reading material that they like or usually read during leisure time. As shown in Table 2, ten types of reading materials were identified. Magazine, newspapers and fiction are among the most popular reading materials read during the respondents' leisure time. The fact that magazine obtained the highest score is consistent with the result from research conducted by Gallik (1999). University students tend to read magazines during their leisure time.

**Table 2**

Distribution of respondents on Reading Material during Leisure time

Reading Material	% (Respondent)
	Yes
Magazine	72 (92)
Newspaper	63 (80)
Fiction / Novel	57 (72)
Academic Book	19 (24)
Website	16 (20)
Comic	13 (16)
Al-Quran / Islamic Book	7 (8)
Article	6 (7)
Textbook	6 (8)
Literature	4 (5)

**Activities during Leisure time**

Respondents were also asked, using open ended question, about the types of activities that they like to do during leisure time. Table 3 provides the list of activities in descending order. Majority of the respondents were found to choose reading as their main activity during leisure time (61%). This is followed by surfing the Internet, listening to music, engaging in sports, watching tv/movies, etc.

**Table 3**

Distribution of respondents on Activities during Leisure time

Activities	% (Respondent)
Reading	61 (76)
Surf Internet	37 (47)
Listening to the Music / Radio	32 (40)
Games / Sport	30 (37)
Watching TV / Movie / VCD	30 (37)
Sleeping	20 (27)
Shopping	9 (11)
Hanging out with friends	8 (10)
Eating	7 (9)
SMS	3 (4)
Cooking	3 (4)
No Activities / Relax	3 (4)
Traveling	2 (3)
Writing	2 (3)
Drawing	2 (2)
Studying	1 (1)
Gardening	1 (1)

**Reading Attitude**

Reading attitude is a construct comprising 11 items adopted from the Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA) (Smith, 1991). The construct was broken into two variables namely enjoyment and anxiety. Prior to the descriptive analysis of the construct, a factor analysis (Table 4) was conducted to ensure the reliability of the variables used in the study. The procedure has resulted in the reduction of items for reading activity and enjoyment from six items to five items with Cronbach alpha value of 0.8, and the anxiety and difficulty from five to four items with Cronbach alpha value of 0.7. Measures for both variables are considered acceptable based on the suggestion made by Brman and Craemer (2001)

**Table 4**  
Factor Analysis on Reading Attitude (Enjoyment and Anxiety)

Item	Factor		Reliability a
	1	2	
a. You love to read	.786		0.8
b. You have a lot of books in your room.	.584		
c. You like to read a book whenever you have free time.	.671		
d. Reading is one of your favorite activities.	.854		
e. You get a lot of enjoyment from reading.	.746		
f. You think reading is boring.		.644	0.7
g. You think reading is a waste of time.		.590	
h. It takes you a long time to read a book.		.653	
i. You try very hard, but you just can't read very well.		.812	

The description of both variables are provided in Table 5 below. The result indicates that the average score for enjoyment is quite high, sending a message that majority of the respondents agree that reading is an enjoyable activity. This high value on enjoyment is subsequently compatible with the low value on anxiety towards reading (mean value 2.3). After the items were reversed, the analysis of overall attitude points towards a conclusion that the respondents' attitude towards reading is rather positive.

**Table 5**  
Descriptive Statistics of Reading Attitude

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Enjoyment	127	2	5	3.9	.57282
Anxiety	126	1	4	2.3	.68097
Attitude Overall	124	2.33	5.00	3.8	.57886

**Analysis of relationship - Gender Differences**

The data were analyzed using t-test to determine whether any significant differences exist between gender and reading habit, and between gender and reading attitude.

**Gender and Reading Habits**

The result indicates that gender is significantly associated with reading certain types of reading materials. These materials are newspaper, literature and website. The t-test result shows that male students read significantly more on

newspapers ( $t = 13.75, p = 0.017$ ), more on website ( $t = 11.0, p = 0.027$ ), and more on literature ( $t = 12.4, p = 0.03$ ) compared to the female students. No significant difference was found for other types of reading material. On the other hand, there is no significant difference between males and females in terms of the time of day they read as well as the amount of time spent on reading per week. This is somewhat contradictory to past studies, which indicated that females read more than males (Ross, 2002). The result also suggests that there is no relationship between gender and the sources from which they get their reading materials.

### **Gender and reading attitude**

Data were analyzed using t-test to find out the relationship between gender and attitude towards reading. No statistical significant difference was found between males and females in terms of their reading attitude.

### **Analysis of Relationship – Field of Study differences**

The data were analyzed using chi-square and t-test to determine whether any significant differences exist between field of study and reading habit, and field of study and reading attitude.

### **Field of study and type of reading material**

The result of the t-test indicates that students from faculty of ICT tend to read more on websites ( $t = 38.37$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) than those from IRKHS. The significant result may be due to the unique nature of the ICT students who are required to use computers more than any other students from any other field of study. Therefore, their exposure to the web environment is expected to be more.

### **Field of study and source of reading material**

Based on the t-test, the use of libraries and Internet was found to be significantly different between students from the two academic faculties studied. Students from IRKHS used the library significantly more frequently ( $t = 3.1$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ) than their ICT counterparts. On the other hand, the ICT students tend to use the Internet significantly more often ( $t = 3.9$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) than the IRKHS students, as their source of getting reading materials.

### **Field of study and time for reading**

The t-test result indicates a statistically significant difference between field of study and time taken for reading. The test showed that KIRKHS students read more in the morning compared to KICT students ( $t = 4.5$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ).

### **Field of study and reading attitude**

The analysis on reading attitude and the differences in the students' field of study indicates that there is a relationship between the two variables. A statistical significant difference ( $t = 2.75$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ) was found between ICT and IRKHS students in terms of their enjoyment towards reading.

The result indicates that the IRKHS students enjoy more reading compared to the ICT students. Overall result also indicates that the IRKHS have more positive attitudes towards reading than their ICT counterparts ( $t = 2.55$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ). No statistically significant difference is found between the IRKHS and ICT students in terms of reading anxiety.

The evidences provided above indicate that field of study is an important factor of reading habits and attitudes among college or university students. This factor can be explained from the reading exposure and reading requirement of each field. Studies among high schools students indicate that language subjects expose more students to reading than any other subjects (Pandian, 1997). This has become the factor that promote students to have more positive attitudes towards reading. Since students are required to read more in the IRKHS programme, they are found to have more positive attitude towards reading and use the library more for reading purposes. As for the ICT students, they may not be regarded as engaging less in reading because they may be engaged in a different kind of reading which is unique to the digital environment. Their reading habits can be considered as different from those of their Art-based counterpart. This is implied through their significantly high interaction with websites.

### **Analysis of other Relationships**

#### **Performance and reading habits**

Performance or the respondents' CGPA was found to be not significantly related with types of reading materials, sources of reading materials and the amount of time spent reading per week. However, a small correlation was found significant between performance and the extent to which they read in the evening. No logical explanation can be given on this phenomena.

#### **Reading attitude and reading habits**

Analysis of relationship (using Pearson correlation) between overall attitudes and reading habits indicates that there are significant correlations between attitude and the amount of time spent on reading (pearson:  $r = 0.356$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ), attitude and the frequency of reading academic book (pearson:  $r = .306$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .001$ ), attitude and reading

literature (pearson :  $r=0.202$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.04$ ), attitude and reading fiction or novel (pearson:  $r=0.202$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.024$ ), and attitude and the use of library to find the reading materials (pearson:  $r=.280$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.002$ ). These results are found consistent with past research reviewed earlier on reading attitude.

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted as an attempt to enhance our understanding about reading habits and attitudes of the university students in Malaysia, focusing a case of a public university. In this effort, students from two faculties (IT-based versus Art-based) were chosen as the respondents. In the overall analysis that include both groups, results indicate that university students spend quite a significant amount of time reading newspapers, academic books and websites. Reading has also become a major activity during their leisure time.

The amount of time spent on reading by the university students is seen as higher than the average individual adult surveyed in the past . This group is expected to read more due to their engagement in the academic process that requires them to read. This engagement may have resulted in their selection of reading materials that are less fictional and more academic in nature. On the other hand, the website is seen as an increasingly important reading source.

Analysis on the differences in gender reveals that male students read significantly more for resources other than the academic books. These resources are the newspaper, website and literature. This finding may come as a surprise since several researches in the past have found that females read more than males (Carter 1986; Kirch & Guthrie, 1984; Gallik, 1999).

In addition, differences between IT-based and Art-based students are quite significant in terms of reading resources and materials. The fact that IT students rely more on websites as their reading materials and resources may come as

no surprise. Findings on a recent research on the use of electronic resources (ER) by both groups of students indicate that the IT based students use ER significantly more than the Art based students (Harianto, 2006). This may call for more effort at the university level to introduce a skill-based course in electronic information system usage and searching.

The knowledge acquired from this study should contribute to better understanding on the phenomena of reading habits and attitudes in Malaysia specifically and in contributing to future research in similar areas generally. Since this study is a case study, the results should contribute significantly in terms of methodology for studies to be conducted for a different category of population or with a broader population base. In addition, the findings of the study should assist the university authority, especially the library and the computer department to look into service matters to accommodate the reading as well as the studying habits of students. For instance, the high percentage of reading time that take place at night may call for the respective authorities to consider opening more reading facilities with longer opening hours. A 24-hour computer service may also allow students to use the internet at any time which is convenient to them, not limiting to daylight hours. This has been done in many academic institutions in the west.

Several limitations are obvious in conducting this study. Among them are the small sample size, the inclusion of only two academic faculties and the limited amount of variables studied. A study on a bigger scale needs to be done for more comprehensive results; with the inclusion of more variables such as family background, reading exposure and availability of reading materials plus variables that are related specifically with reading in the digital age. Future studies should focus more on how reading can actually take place using computers and wireless communication devices, how information and knowledge are extracted through non-linear reading and factors that contribute to the online reading pattern.

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