

## An Evaluative Study of Reading Habits and Information-Seeking Behaviour Among Library Users at USTM, Meghalaya, India

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### *Abstract*

**Purpose:** *This study aims to examine the reading habits and attitudes of students at University of Science & Technology Meghalaya (USTM), India.*

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** *The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. A survey method was primarily used to collect primary data from the respondents. In addition, the researcher employed the observational method during the data collection process to gain further insights into student's reading habit.*

**Findings:** *The study found that USTM students spend their leisure time reading novels, newspapers, magazines, and literary works. The library is mainly used for accessing course-related materials. The findings also reveal that students recognize the importance of reading, particularly newspaper reading, and believe that reading helps improve their knowledge and awareness.*

**Research Limitations:** *The study is limited to the reading habits of library users at USTM and does not include non-library users or students from other institutions. Further, this is a pilot study meant to provide a preliminary snapshot only.*

**Practical Implications:** *The study provides a roadmap for USTM library authorities to reallocate budgets from underutilized physical maps/CD-ROMs toward high-demand digital periodicals and Current Awareness Services (CAS).*

**Originality/Value:** *Studies on reading habits among university students, particularly at USTM, provide important insights into the role of reading in academic achievement and personal development. The study contributes to identifying practical measures for enhancing educational support and promoting a reading culture among students.*

**Keywords:** *Reading Habits; University Students; Information-Seeking Behaviour; User Attitude; Developing Reading Habits, USTM.*

**1. Introduction:** Reading plays an important role in improving the academic success and personal growth by enhancing, critical thinking, and knowledge retention. Reading can be defined as the art of interpreting printed texts and written words, which enables individuals to derive meaning and understanding. It serves as a stepping stone to success not only in education but throughout an individual's life. Libraries, which exist across countries worldwide, are considered essential institutions for promoting education and literacy within society.

Reading is important because it stimulates the mind, expands knowledge, and imparts valuable life lessons. It keeps the mind active, enhances creativity, enhance learning, improves vocabulary, and strengthens communication skills. Indeed, reading is one of the most valuable qualities a person can develop, and books are often regarded as a person's best companion for this reason. Furthermore, strong reading habits are positively correlated with higher academic

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achievement and better comprehension across subjects. To foster such habits, libraries should provide adequate reading spaces and related facilities.

Some of the benefits of good reading habits are as follows:

- a) It is vital ingredient to the child's future.
- b) It allows for exposure to words that one might not use as part of normal speech.
- c) It increases attention span and allows one to focus better and for long period of time.
- d) It leads to a lifelong love for books.
- e) It leads to asking questions, and seeking answers, which means people learn more every day.
- f) It develops speed, fluency, vocabulary, general knowledge and academic achievement.
- g) It widens students experience and knowledge.

The University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya or simply called as USTM is an autonomous university in India located at Ri-Bhoi, in the state of Meghalaya. It is the first private university on science and technology in the entire North East India. The university is established through the University of Science and technology, Meghalaya Act, 2008 of the government Meghalaya.

**2. Literature Review:** Liu (2005) finds that a screen-based reading behaviour is emerging in recent years. It is characterized by more time spent on browsing and scanning, keyword spotting (72%) as a strategy to locate needed information as a way to cope with the overloaded information environment. Kumar, Singh and Siddiqui (2011) on their research paper on "Newspaper Reading Habits of University Students: A Case Study of Chaudhary Charan Singh University, India" deals with the factors limiting reading habits and how libraries can help in overcoming it. The newspaper reading can be part of good study habits for students in any area of specialization and reading and library use habits have an important role in building the multicultural structure in a country.

Dunstan (2014) on the paper on "Professionals, their Private Libraries, and Wider Reading Habits in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland" uses a variety of case studies for drawing on evidence such as library borrowing records, evidence of book ownership, and readers' diaries and lists of books read. Issues explored include the private libraries that professionals built, the balance between work-related reading and their wider recreational reading interests, how professionals compared to other readers in Scotland and further afield, and change over time.

Ahmed (2016) on the paper on "Reading habits and attitudes of UMSKAL undergraduates" deals with the study to find out the prevailing reading habits and attitudes of the students at the tertiary level at a public university in Malaysia. The findings of this study were limited to one particular public university in Labuan, Malaysia only. He opined that effective reading is essential for success in acquiring a foreign language. Students have to read a wide range of textbooks and related materials at tertiary level. This study investigated reading habits and attitudes on reading of the undergraduate student attending ESL courses at a public university in Malaysia.

Swarnamugi (2019) in the paper on "Newspaper reading habits among the students of Thiagarajar College of preceptors, Madurai" discusses about the newspaper reading habits among the Thiagarajar College of Preceptors student teachers in Madurai. The study discovered that 46.43% of the respondents recognized the importance of reading and indicated that reading helps them to improve their knowledge. The majority of the respondents 42 (50%) are using daily visit to library. The study also reported that majority of the respondents indicate that reading habits have an effect on them and stressed out that reading has supported their studies.

**3. Objectives of the Study:** The objectives of this study are as follows-

- a) To identify the use pattern and type of reading material required by the users.
- b) To identify the basic information needs of users.

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- c) To learn about the preferred library service utilised by the students.  
d) To suggest to the library authority how the users need can be fulfilled.

**4. Methodology:** This study adopts a descriptive research design using a mixed-methods approach. Primary data was collected via a structured Google Forms questionnaire (N=52), supplemented by non-participant observation within the USTM central library. A convenience sampling technique was used. Secondary data was retrieved from existing literature, library records, and academic journals to provide context.

This research seeks to explore the fundamental nature of reading, with a specific emphasis on evaluating user attitudes toward established reading habits. By examining current reading trends, the study aims to analyse the underlying behavioural patterns and perceptions that shape how individuals engage with written material.

**5. Data Analysis and Interpretation:** A total of 52 responses were received. However, due to incomplete submissions or skipped questions in certain sections, the data analysis for specific variables reflects the total number of valid responses as 51 for that particular item. The following section provides a thematic breakdown of these findings, with user perspectives and trends illustrated in the figures below.

**a) Purpose of Visiting the Library:** As illustrated in Figure 1, the primary motivation for library attendance is the consultation of course-specific materials. This trend underscores the library's critical function as an extension of the classroom and a hub for academic reinforcement. The data indicates a clear preference for the facility as a dedicated study environment, whereas specialized services - such as circulation, reference inquiries, and research assistance - experience significantly lower engagement levels.

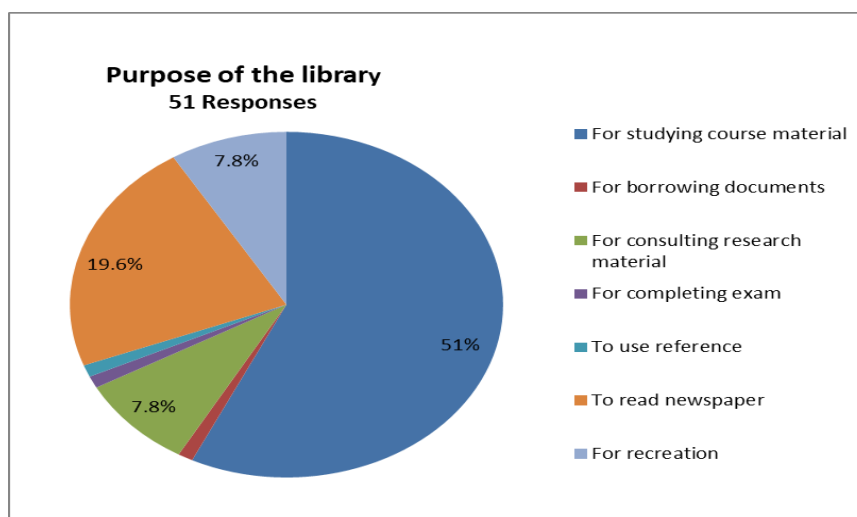


Figure 1: Purpose of Visiting the Library

**b) Frequency of Visiting the Library:** The distribution of library attendance, as depicted in figure 2, reveals a diverse range of visitation patterns. The most significant segment of the cohort (30%) visits the facility once a week, followed by those who attend only rarely (23.1%). Interestingly, 'need-based' visits account for 19.2% of the total, suggesting that for nearly one-fifth of the users, the library is a secondary resource rather than a habitual study destination. High-frequency usage remains low, with only 5.8% of respondents visiting daily.

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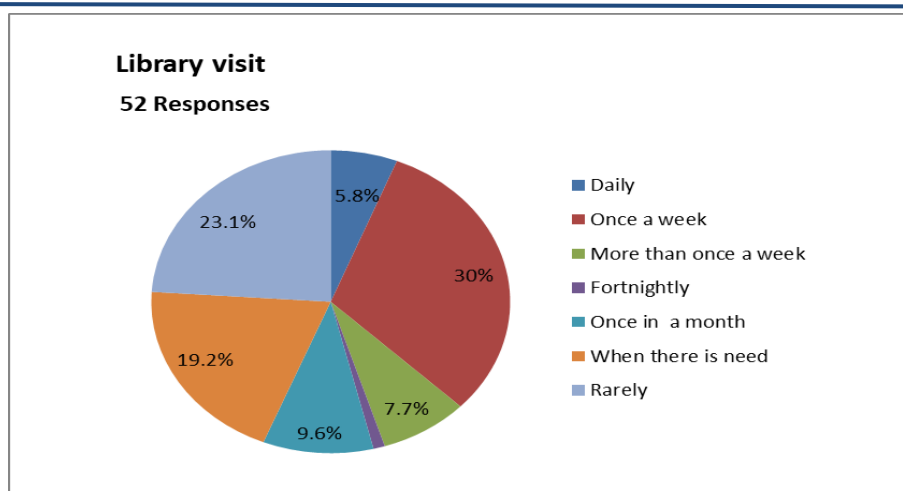


Figure 2: Frequency of Library Visit

**c) Reading Habits:** The following pie chart illustrates how respondents distribute their primary reading time across three categories. General Reading is the most prevalent habit, with 55.8% of respondents spending the majority of their weekly hours on this category. Textbook Reading accounts for the second-largest share, representing 30.8% of the group. Specialized Reading is the least common priority, cited by only 13.5% of respondents. The data clearly indicates that a majority of the individuals surveyed prioritize general reading over academic or specialized materials in their weekly schedules.

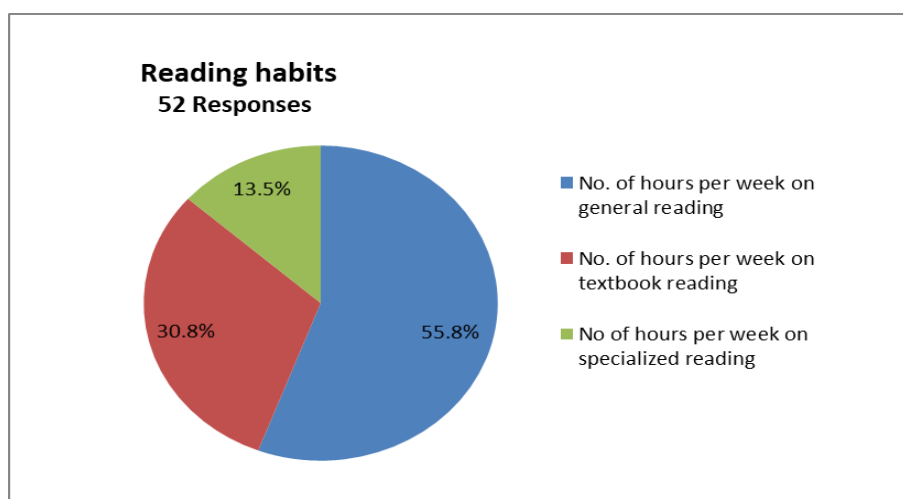


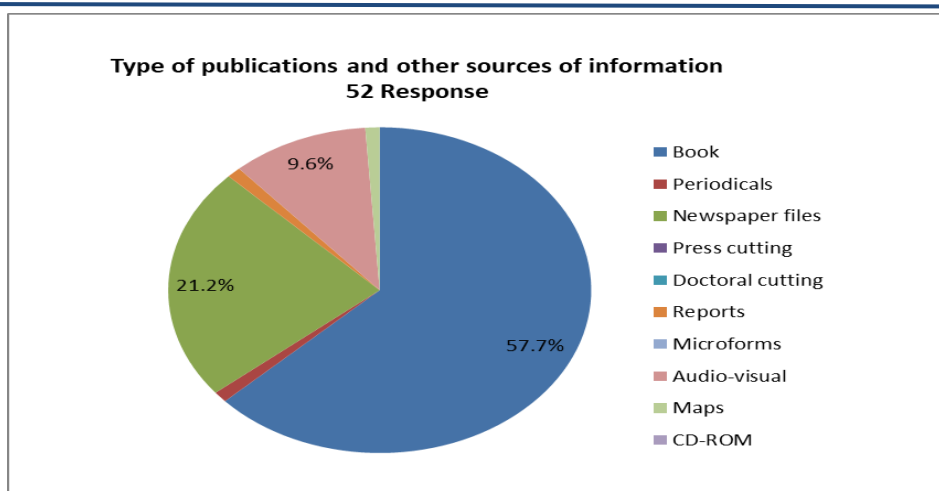
Figure 3: Weekly Reading Habits

**d) Keeping Up with the Latest Literature in the Specific Field of Area:** A significant majority, 68.6% of respondents, indicated "Yes," confirming they are able to keep up with the latest literature in their field. The remaining 31.4% of respondents answered "No," indicating they are not currently keeping up with the latest literature. This data supports the statement that more than two-thirds of the surveyed group successfully remains up to date with professional or academic literature.

**e) Type of Publications Used:** Regarding the types of media used to stay informed, there is a clear preference for traditional formats, as 57.7% of respondents rely on books and 21.2% utilize newspaper files. While textbook reading (30.8%) and audio-visual materials (9.6%) serve as secondary priorities, specialized reading habits and niche sources like maps or reports remain significantly less common among the participants.

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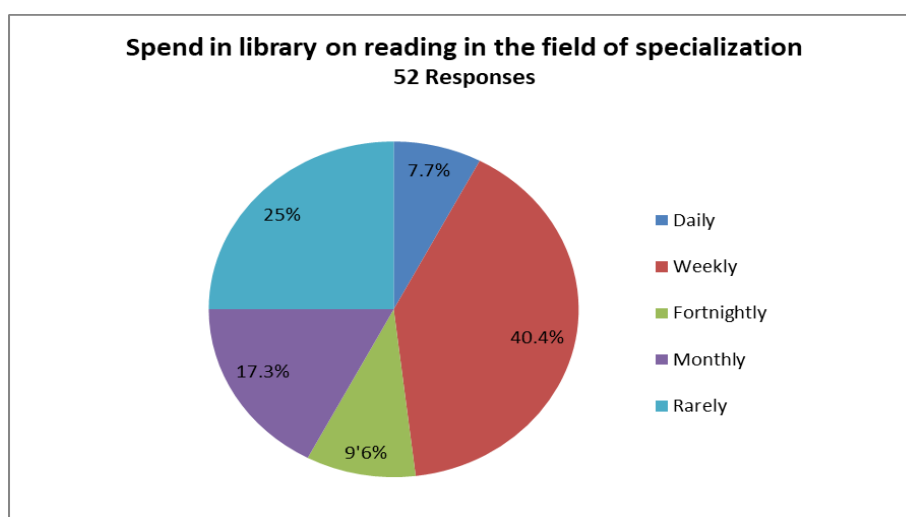
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**Figure 4: Type of Publication Used**

**f) Strategic Consultation:** The majority of researchers seek professional library advice during the earliest phases of their work, with 48% consulting staff during the selection of the research project and 34% seeking help when initiating work on it. The remaining 18% of respondents consult library staff specifically for help with preparing their bibliographies.

**g) Time Spent on Reading in Field of Specialization:** The largest group of respondents (40.4%) reads in their field of specialization on a weekly basis. A significant portion of the participants (25%) reported that they rarely spend time in the library reading specialized materials. 17.3% of respondents read monthly, while 9.6% do so fortnightly. Only a small minority (7.7%) engage in specialized reading in the library every day.



**Figure 5: Time Spent on Reading in Field of Specialization**

**h) Distribution of Library Service Usage:** Current Awareness Service is the most frequently used service, utilized by 35.3% of respondents. Circulation Service represents the second highest usage rate at 29.4%. Over a quarter of respondents (25.5%) make use of reference services. Abstracting Service is utilised by a smaller segment of the group, accounting for 7.8%. Indexing and Reprographic Services represent the lowest usage among the respondents, appearing as negligible slivers on the chart. The data shows a strong preference for Current Awareness and Circulation services, which together account for nearly 65% of the total library service usage.

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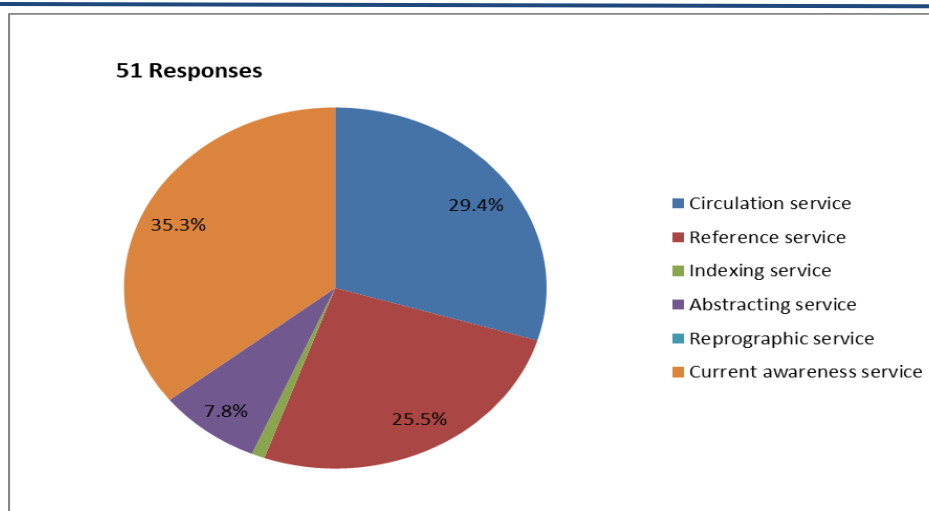


Figure 6: Distribution of Library Service Usage

**i) Purposes for Using Periodicals:** Updating Knowledge is the most common reason cited, with 46.2% of respondents using periodicals for this purpose. Over a third of respondents (34.6%) use periodicals to maintain general awareness. Periodicals are used for research by 15.4% of the participants. A very small minority of respondents (3.8%) indicate that they use periodicals for teaching work. The vast majority of users - roughly 80% - rely on periodicals primarily for updating knowledge and general awareness.

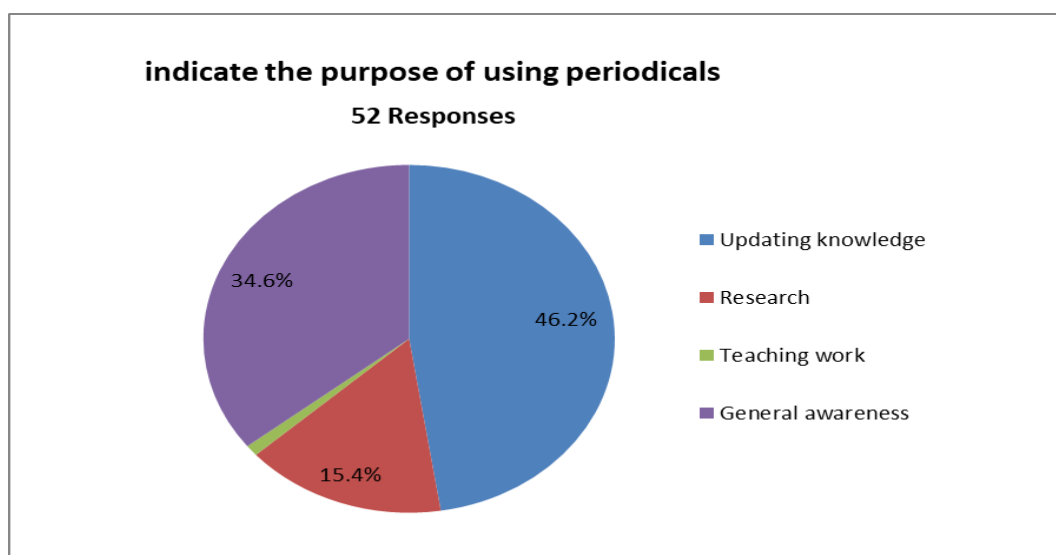


Figure 7: Purposes for Using Periodicals

**6. Findings:** The analysis of the survey data reveals several key insights into the reading behaviour and library engagement of students at USTM.

**a) Academic Dominance in Library Usage:** The primary driver for library visits is the consultation of course-specific materials. This suggests that the library is perceived more as a functional academic hub for curriculum-based study rather than a space for broad intellectual exploration.

**b) Preference for Traditional Media:** Despite the digital revolution, books remain the most preferred information source (57.7%), followed by newspapers. This indicates a strong continued reliance on print culture for both academic and general knowledge.

**c) Limited Engagement with Specialized Resources:** There is a notable underutilization of non-book resources, such as theses, maps, and CD-ROMs. Furthermore, high-frequency usage

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(daily attendance) is remarkably low at 5.8%, with the majority visiting only weekly or on a "need-only" basis.

**d) Information Awareness Gap:** While 68.6% of students feel they are keeping up with literature in their fields, a significant minority (31.4%) struggles to stay updated. This points to a potential gap in information literacy or the accessibility of latest arrivals.

**e) Functional Use of Periodicals:** Periodicals are predominantly used for "updating knowledge" (46.2%) and "general awareness," while their utility for rigorous research or teaching support remains marginal.

**f) Strategic Staff Consultation:** Students tend to seek professional guidance primarily at the inception of their research projects, suggesting that library staff are viewed as "gatekeepers" to information during the planning phase.

Direct observation by the researchers confirmed that the majority of students occupying library carrels were utilizing personal laptops and textbooks rather than library-issued journals.

**7. Suggestions and Recommendations:** Based on the aforementioned findings, the following measures are proposed to enhance the reading culture and library efficacy at USTM:

**a) Diversification of Digital Resources:** Given that specialized reading is low, the library should integrate more user-friendly e-resources, databases, and digital archives. Transitioning from a print-heavy model to a hybrid model may attract the 31.4% of students who currently feel out of touch with modern literature.

**b) Targeted Information Literacy Programs (ILP):** The library should move beyond basic orientation and implement advanced workshops on how to utilize underused resources like indexing services, abstracting services, and specialized reports.

**c) Nurturing Research-Centric Reading:** To shift the library's image from a "textbook study hall" to a "research hub," the university should incentivize the use of journals and theses through credit-based library assignments or research seminars.

**d) Enhancing the Reading Ambience:** To increase the frequency of daily visits, the library could introduce "Leisure Reading Zones" or "Current Affairs Corners" that provide a more relaxed environment for engaging with novels and magazines.

**e) Proactive CAS and SDI Services:** While Current Awareness Services (CAS) are popular, the library should implement Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) to push relevant, field-specific updates directly to students' emails, ensuring no student falls behind in their area of specialization.

**8. Conclusion:** This study underscores the integral role of the library in the academic life of USTM students, while simultaneously highlighting areas for institutional growth. The findings suggest that while students possess a foundational respect for reading - particularly for academic success and general awareness - their habits remain largely curriculum-bound and traditional. The transition from functional reading (reading for exams) to extensive reading (reading for intellectual growth) is essential for developing critical thinking. By addressing the underutilization of specialized resources and strengthening ICT infrastructure, USTM can transform its library from a repository of books into a dynamic center for lifelong learning. Ultimately, fostering a robust reading habit is not merely about academic scores; it is about equipping students with the information-seeking fluency required in an increasingly complex global information landscape.

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