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USE OF ELECTRONIC TEXT BOOKS (E-BOOKS) BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA: THE CHALLENGE FOR ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES IN SRI LANKA

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ARTICLE INFOABSTRACT

Article History:

Received 16th November, 2015
Received in revised form
26th December, 2015
Accepted 11th January, 2016
Published online 29th February, 2016

Keywords:

E-Books (Electronic books)
Undergraduate students
Textbooks
Internet users
Libraries
Research institutions
Universities
Sri Lanka

Electronic books have become very popular among readers recently with the latest advancement of science and equipments and as a result of this, many universities across the globe have adopted and introduced the concept of E-Books (Electronic books) in to their academic and research libraries. However the E-Books (Electronic books) concept is still at its infancy in Sri Lanka and so far very little research work had been conducted in Sri Lanka to investigate its impact on country's academic environment. Therefore this study was designed in order to understand Student's perception of E-Books (Electronic books) in an academic environment. An anonymous questionnaire based on voluntary participation of the students, was distributed among the first year undergraduate students from the faculty of Allied Health Sciences at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University Sri Lanka and descriptive statistics were used for reporting purposes. The sample was made of 174 students (67 males, 107 females) and 91 (52.29%) of them had used E-Books (Electronic books) previously for their studies as a standard reading material. Based on the responses received, 39% of the students preferred to read E-books over hard copy version books and the factors which may have affected their current preference to use hard copy books over E-books were also identified. 156 students (89.65%), suggested that they would use E-books more frequently for their academic studies, if the recommended text books were available electronically in the university library and most astonishing finding of this study was that 97.12% (169 students) of them believed that the E-book concept will have a stronger impact on Sri Lanka academic environment in future. Therefore future financial investments for E-books need to be implemented as these have a great potential to offer great benefits and endless opportunities to academics, students and research institutions & libraries in Sri Lanka.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, printed books have been preferred as the best reading material by many of us. But with the recent advancement of the modern technology such as Internet, Nowadays many of us tend to do our studies online, do reading online and now it has come to a situation where some of us may even question whether E-books (Electronic books) will replace traditional printed books in the near future (Hillesund 2001). According to a research conducted by Ian Rowland at the University College London (2007), he mentions that even though the E-books (Electronic books) are the new kid in the block, most of the research studies have been conducted on primarily on journals to investigate how digital resources are used within academic environment and argues that more research needs to be done to see the impact of E-books in the academic environment. At the same time Lamothe, (2013) states

that the definition of an E-book has varied from time to time, where many tend to consider an E-book (Electronic book) as simply being the content reproduced digitally either in text, PDF or even web compatible formats and it is also worth mentioning here that according to Lynch (2001), some E-books which have been printed digitally cannot be converted back in to print as well. An article published by Nicholas Carr on Wall Street Journal (January 5th 2013), states that the opinions regarding E-books (Electronic books) and their printed hard copy versions have varied from time to time. Based on his findings he believed that E-books (Electronic books) would play a role more like as audio books rather than replacing the printed books. Based on a research article published by Mark Nelson (2008), the higher education will adapt to E-books within next few years and few academic institutions such as Stanford University have invested a large amount of money in E-books (Electronic books), sending a very clear signal to the rest of the academic institutions that E-books will be the front runners in the library catalogue. Ismail and Zainab (2005) mention that libraries tend to go for E-books (Electronic books) simply because of the facts such as limited shelving spaces, increasing

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cost of new buildings and resources, decreasing budget and most importantly the increasing demand from users for electronic books. It is also worth mentioning that E-books have also created a convenient and easier access for reading materials for everyone including remote users-books which have many user friendly features making this version of reading material more popular among readers where they can easily navigate through books, watch videos, on line dictionaries or even do a full text search within a book or a collection of books, Snowhill (2001).

The concept of E-books is still at its infancy in Sri Lanka. But with the modern advancement in technology more and more people have become heavy Internet users. Therefore it is vital to evaluate their perceptions on E-books (Electronic books) before any large investments in library catalogues of Sri Lankan academic institutions and so far no research has been done to evaluate the impact of E-books and perceptions of E-books (Electronic books) in Sri Lankan academic institutions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A request to conduct this study was handed over to the Kotelawala Defence University's ethical review committee, prior to the data collection. A verbal consent from each participant was collected once after explaining the main aim and objectives of this study to the participants. The privacy and the confidentiality of each participant were respected and protected at all times and the collected data were destroyed (under proper supervision) once after the completion of this study. A questionnaire was developed related to the usage and the perception towards E-books and this questionnaire was distributed among the first year undergraduate students of Faculty of Allied Health Sciences at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University Sri Lanka. The responses for the questionnaire were collected and Statistical analyses were carried out on using Software Package called GraphPad Prism®.

Each student was given the questionnaire as they were entering the classrooms and the content of the questionnaire was explained to them before they had started answering the questionnaire and this was carried out in classrooms at the faculty of Allied Health Sciences. The study group was made of 174 first year undergraduate students (both males and females) and the questionnaire was in both English and Sinhalese language and they were only expected to complete the questionnaire in one language only. The answered questionnaires were collected on the same day at the same premises. The participation of the participants was on voluntary basis and they had the right to refuse their participation or leave the study at any time and this was clearly explained to the participants prior answering the given questionnaire.

RESULTS

Demographic Data

174 students were participated in this study and among them 107 (61.5%) were females and 67 (38.5%) were males. Of the 174 participants, 45.9 % (80 students) of them were between ages of 19 years to 21 years and 54.1 % (94 students) of them

were between the ages of 22 years to 24 years. When the students were asked whether they were bringing any text books to the class room and as illustrated in Figure 1, 81.6 % (142 students) of them replied back saying that they were bringing textbooks to the class room occasionally while 12.6% (22 students) of them said that they were bringing the text books all the time to the class room and 10 (5.8%) students mentioned that they never bring any text books in to the class room.

Table 1. Demographic Data

	Percentage (%)
Age	
19 – 21	45.9
22 - 24	54.1
Gender	
Male	38.5
Female	61.5

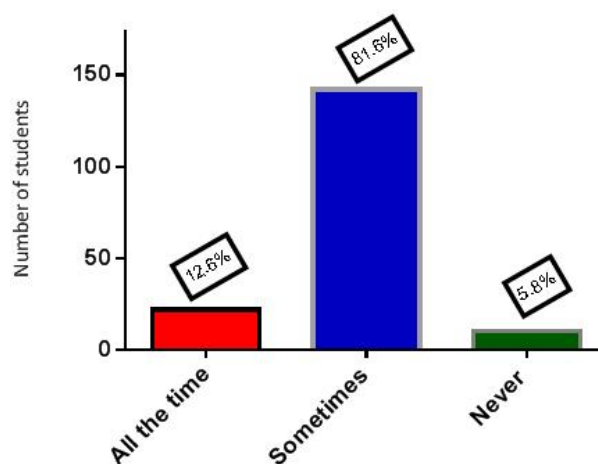


Figure 1. Student response for bringing textbooks to the classroom (n=174)

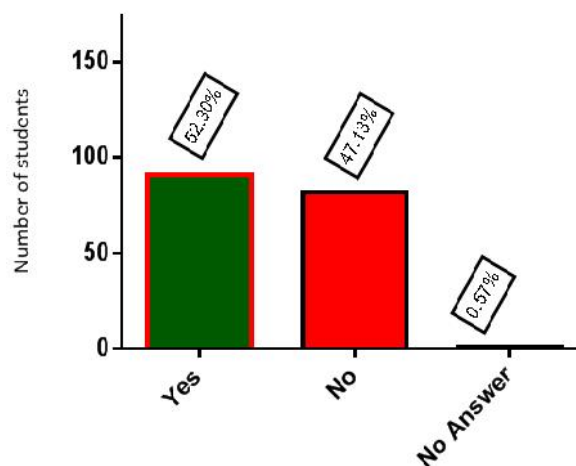


Figure 2. Student response for if they have used an E-book on a previous occasion (n=174)

Based on the students who had said that they were never used to bring any textbooks and the students who had said that they were bringing text books occasionally in to the classroom, these students were asked again for the reasons for not bringing any

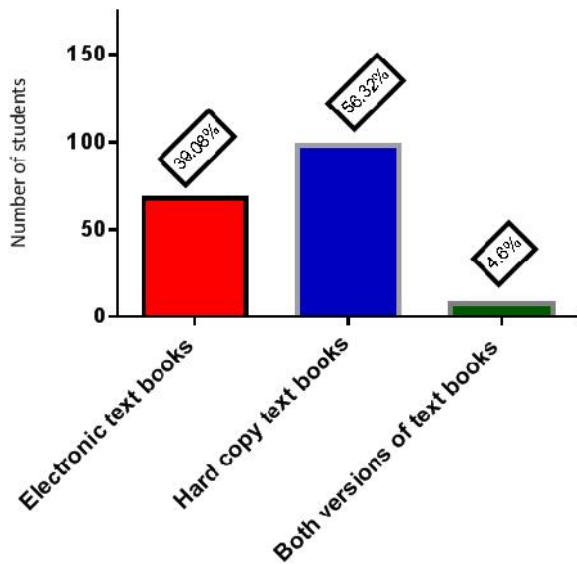


Figure 3. Student response for their preferred reading version of recommended textbooks (n=174)

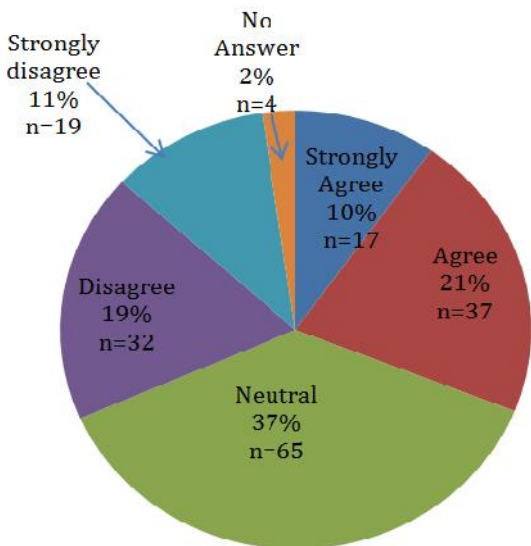


Figure 4. Student response for the question if the textbooks used in the classes were available electronically would they more likely to bring textbooks to class (n = 174)

textbooks in to the classroom. 77 Students (44.25%) of them mentioned that the weight of the books was the main reason for not bringing these books in to the class rooms at all or bringing these occasionally in to the class room. Only 48 students (27.58%) said that they don't have these recommended textbooks with them and 8 students (4.59%) said that they share textbooks with other students in the class room. When the students were asked whether they have used an E-book before (Figure 2), 91 students (52.30%) said 'yes' and 82 students (47.13%) said 'no' while there was only one student who didn't answer to that particular question in the questionnaire. As illustrated in figure 3, Students were also asked whether they prefer reading E-book version of the recommended textbooks or the hard copy version of the recommended textbooks. 68 Students (39.08%) said that they prefer E-book version while 98 students (56.32%) said that they prefer the hard copy version the recommended textbooks. There were only 8

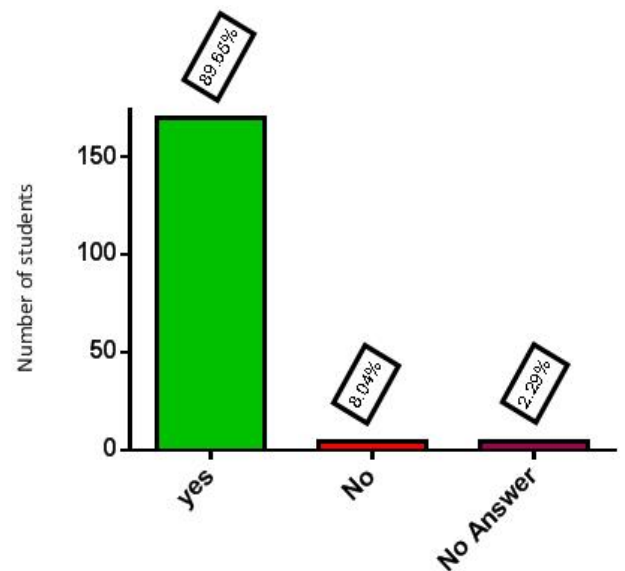


Figure 5. Student responses for the question whether they would more like to use E-version of the recommended textbooks if these were available electronically (n=174)

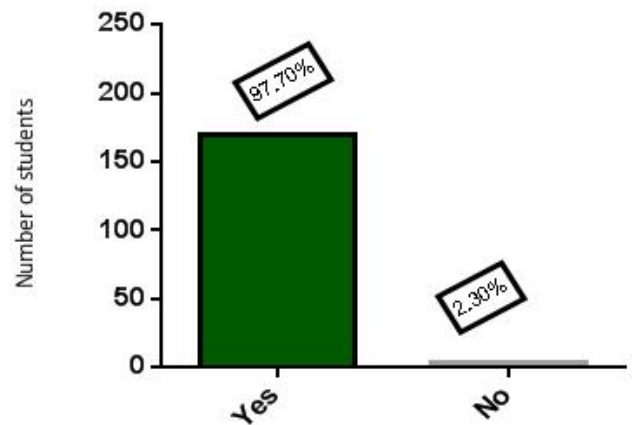


Figure 6. Student responses for the question whether they want to try E-books in future (n=174)

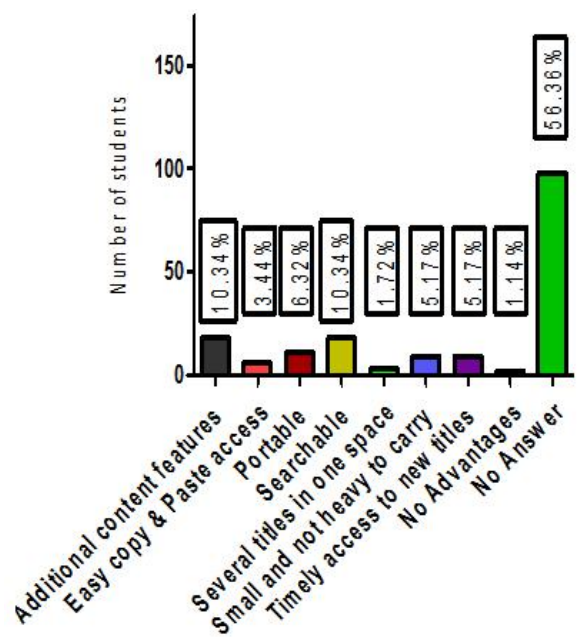


Figure 7. Student response for advantages of E-books (n=174)

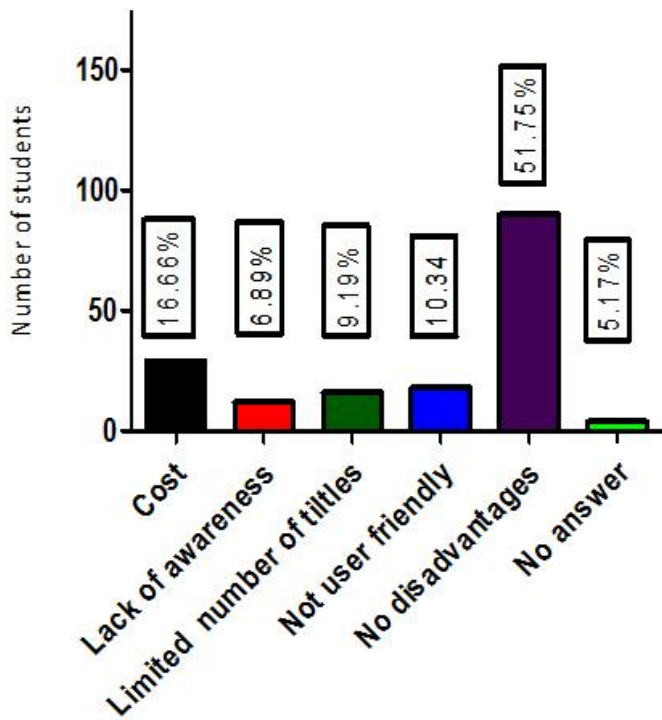


Figure 8. Student response for disadvantages of E-books (n=174)

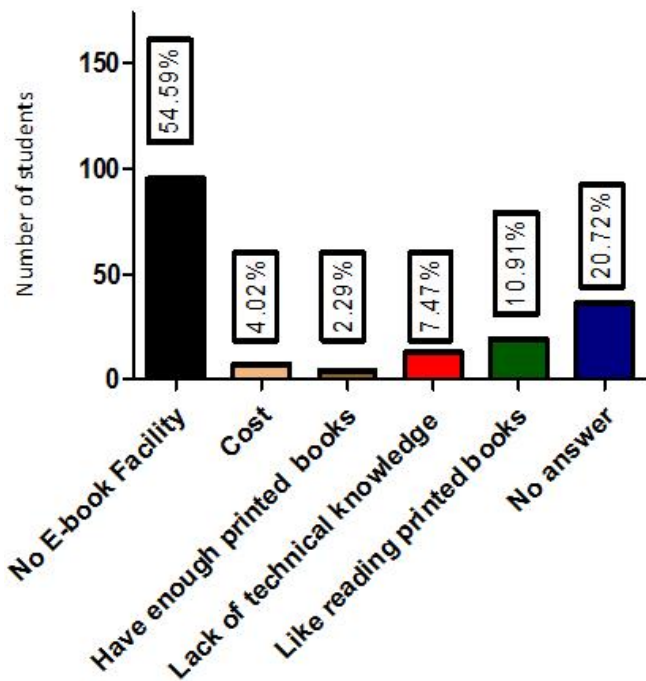


Figure 9. Student response for not using E-books at the time of this study (n=174)

students (4.6%) who actually preferred both versions of the recommended textbooks. As demonstrated in the figure 4, at least 30 % of the students replied that they would not bring the hard copy version of recommended textbooks in to the class room if these were available as E-books. As illustrated in the figure 5, out of 174 students, 156 (89.65%) students said that they would more likely to use the electronic version of the recommended textbooks if they were available electronically while, 14 students (8.06%) rejected this idea and only 4 students (2.29%) refrained from answering this question. Out of

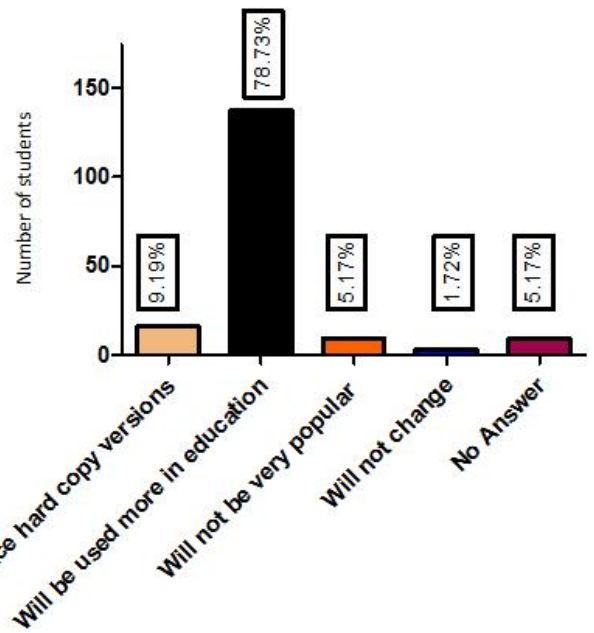


Figure 10. Student responses regarding the future of E-books in Sri Lanka (n=174)

the 174 students, 170 of them (97.70%) said that they want to try E-books in future while only 4 of them (2.30%) said that they still want to use hard copy version of recommended textbooks in future (Figure 6). The student's responses regarding the advantages of E-books and disadvantages of E-books are listed in figure 7 and figure 8, respectively. The responses for not using E-books at this moment and their responses regarding the future of E-books in Sri Lanka are listed in figure 9 and figure 10 respectively.

DISCUSSION

The study sample was made of 174 participants, where all of them were below the age of 24 years and were first year undergraduate students at Sir John Kotelawala Defence University. It was evident that the students didn't want to bring any hard copy version of recommended textbooks in to the class room. There were only 22 students (12.6%), those who mentioned that they bring textbooks all the time while majority of them (142 students, 81.6%) mentioned that they only bring text books occasionally in to the class room. This was evident further, when they were asked about the reasons for not bringing textbooks in to the class room. 77 students (44.25%) mentioned that the weight of the textbooks was the major issue for not bringing textbooks in to the classrooms. According to Agrawal & Rai (2013) that an individual carrying a backpack which exceeds 10% to 15% of their body weight may increase the risk of having back pains and even possible risk of having back pain related disorders as well. This may also lead to poor posture as well. They have also mentioned that with daily physical stress associated with carrying backpacks can cause significant forward lean of the head and trunk as well. Skaggs *et al* (2006) states that the weights of students' backpacks seem directly proportional to the likelihood of back pain. According to American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA, 2013), students shouldn't carry no more than 10% of their body weight. So it is fair enough to assume that the students would not to bring heavy text books in to the class rooms unless these

are essential for class room studies. 91 students (52.30%) said that they have used E-books previously while only 82 students (47.13%) haven't used E-books on a previous occasion. So it is fair enough to assume that there is a change in reading habits from traditional hard copy books to modern electronic books and this was more evident when considering the given fact that there were more students who had actually used E-books than the students who hadn't used E-books on a previous occasion. Wouter van der and Olaf (2009) published that Springer publication and Springer's eBook usage was already 50% of its journal usage, where Springer still believes strongly in the print model versions. As a result of it, they have introduced huge discounts only in their hard copy version books, expecting to attract more readers to buy hard copy versions. This is a clear indication that there is a cultural shift in people's reading habits and this has been identified and acknowledged by a world leading global publisher such as Springer.

Even though there was clear evidence to assume that students want to use e-books more, students still mentioned that the preferred reading material would be a hard copy book over an E-book (56.32% against 39.08%). This could be due to the fact that there were no E-book facilities available at Kotelawala Defence University at the time of this study and this was clearly demonstrated by student responses in figure 9. One interesting outcome from this study was Even though the students mentioned that they want to use E-books more in the future (97.70%), still there was a major neutral response from the students (37%, 65 students) where they said that they would still bring the text books in to the class room even if these text books were available electronically. This needs to be investigated further more in future for the actual reasons related to the question. When the students were asked about the advantages of E-books, majority of them didn't answer the question (no answer). This could have been due to the fact that the options given in the questionnaire under advantages were not related to what they have actually experienced with E-books so far.

According to student's responses received, the cost of E-books and the lack of technical knowledge were not the major reasons for not using E-books in their studies. The main reason for not using E-books in their studies was due to the fact that E-book facility wasn't available for them during the time of this study. It was also noticed that a majority of them (51.75%) agreed that there were no disadvantages in using E-books in their studies and this was clear, positive indication to support the idea that student want to have more e-book facilities in future.

Finally it was evident after this study, that majority of the students (78.73%) believed that E-books will be used more and more in the purpose of education in the coming future in Sri Lanka while only 12 students (6.89%) who all together believed that either E-books will not be very popular in Sri Lanka or will not be in a better situation than its current situation. It is also worth mentioning here that even though the students had believed that E-books will be more popular in the future in Sri Lanka. As observed by Wanigasooriya 2008, our study group had also suggested (only 16 students, 9.19%) that E-books would not replace the traditional hard copy version of textbooks used in Sri Lanka soon.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Majority of the students have used E-books previously and it wasn't a new concept to them. Students also think that even though E-books will be more popular in Sri Lanka, that they will not replace the hard copy version of textbooks. The students were interested in using E-books more frequently for their study purposes and by providing them with new E-book facilities will encourage them to use E-books for their study purposes more frequently in a useful manner.

It is recommended to carry out more research work with large scale surveys such as library surveys with library users and direct one to one interviews with academics and educational consultants and also with the general public will provide a much deeper insight to the actual demand for E-books and its real potential impact it can have on Sri Lankan academia. The same questionnaire should be developed further in order to identify the gateways, which the students had used to access E-books and also to have their own opinion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of E-books as well. It is also recommended to conduct awareness programmes to educate students how they can reduce the weight of the backpack by using E-books and its long term health benefits to them as well.

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