The Star

Are M’sian youths reading enough?

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THE rewards of reading are innumerable but are Malaysian youths reading enough outside of their academic books?

BRATS Bright Roving Ambitious Talents

According to National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang, a series of studies has shown a positive increase in the reading culture among Malaysians, with the average number of books read per person rising from two in 2005 to 15 in 2014, and most recently, to 24 last year.

In his speech, delivered by National Unity Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Hasnol Zam Zam Ahmad at the Karnival Baca Perdana 2024 on Oct 4, Aaron added that the 2022/2023 Malaysian Reading Profile Study, conducted by the National Library of Malaysia, found that 69.9% of Malaysians read to enhance their knowledge.

Here, participants of the BRATs Young Journalist Programme, run by The Star’s Newspaper-in-Education (Star-NiE) team, share their reading journeys.

For updates on the BRATs programme, visit facebook.com/niebrats.



“I set a goal to read 40 books this year, but I’m currently 10 short. At my school, students are required to read for 15 minutes daily, so I used to finish about one book a week. However, due to schoolwork and final-year exam preparations, I have little time to read outside of school these days. I prefer ebooks; I can easily check the ratings online, and they’re often free. Parents can encourage reading by setting an example from an early age.”

Neoh Hui Yi, 15



“I’m an explorer of both fiction and non-fiction. I prefer physical books and save money by getting second-hand ones from my aunts or buying pre-loved books. I used to read over 60 books a year, but that has dropped to over 40. Social media and doomscrolling have cut into my reading time, which I’m trying to manage. After finishing a book, I enjoy journalling or drawing scenes from it. Reading outside of school is a productive escape that can help improve language skills. Government-backed campaigns promoting pre-loved books could inspire more reading while being affordable and sustainable.”

Nittila Thamothran, 18



“With growing academic and leadership commitments, as well as social media being a major distraction, I now read fewer than 10 books annually, which is far less than I’d like. I used to borrow physical books from the Selangor Library or ebooks via the National Library’s Libby app, but now I buy physical copies. Reading is important to me for knowledge, creativity, innovation, empathy and humanity. I often share book rants on social platforms. I’d encourage more people to share about books, form reading circles, and revive libraries. We should all make reading ‘a thing’.”

Amira Aisha, 20



“Since starting university, my reading habits have slowed. I now read about eight books a year, compared to an average of 15 during my school days. The is largely due to an increasingly tight schedule, managing commitments like assignments and part-time jobs. I enjoy reading, especially fantasy and adventure fiction. My favourite aspects of reading include holding a physical book, curating music playlists to match the tone of each book, and discussing the plots with my friends. I usually buy books in bulk at annual book fairs, spending around RM120.”

Wong Hoi Kei, 22



“When I was younger, I’d finish a book in two or three days, but now I read around 15 books a year as other hobbies take up my time. To save money, I buy books on sale for RM10 each. Reading helps me relax as I often imagine different outcomes from the stories. Book signings and author meet-and-greet sessions have inspired me to read more Mandarin books, as I usually read in English. For children, I suggest starting with comics or short stories that match their interests.”

Tan Wei Yee, 21



“Every year, I read about 60 to 70 books, mostly novels. Due to the rigours of A-Levels, I have limited the number to fit my schedule. I get most of my reading material from a bookstore that sells more affordable titles compared to elsewhere. I love reading because it provides escapism and an educational experience. I believe the easiest way to inculcate a reading culture is to use social media as a platform to promote and cultivate a love of literature.”

Hayley Poh, 17



“My reading has dropped to about 30 books this year, although I usually maintain a pace of one book every two days. This change is mainly because I have been devoting more time to my International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) exam preparations. I prefer physical books because I enjoy adding to my collection. I

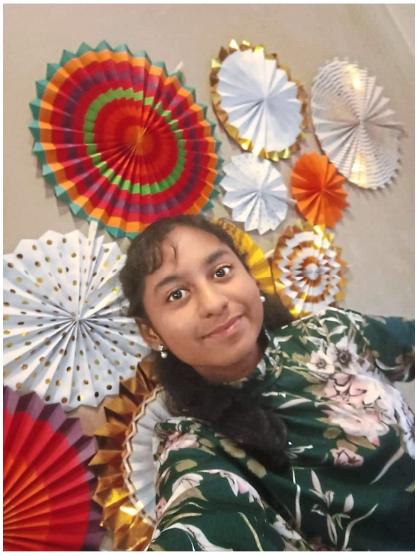
spend about RM1,200 on books annually. To promote reading among youths, I suggest endorsing reading clubs for teens. These clubs would create a common space for readers to socialise.”

Kannchana Vhina, 16



“Reading is a hobby close to my heart. I began collecting the books I wanted at age 11. Since starting university, my reading has decreased from 40 to 50 books annually to 20 to 30 books. I still try to find time to read ebooks online and borrow books from my university’s library. I also collect second-hand books from booths at my university. After finishing each book, I write a review in my journal or notepad for easy reference. Reading not only expands your vocabulary and knowledge but also tests your patience as you complete each book.”

Leong Weng Sam, 21



“My love for storytelling drives my passion for reading, allowing me to understand stories from different perspectives. As a student balancing school and hobbies, I read about 12 books annually. I like to tell my friends about books to pique their curiosity and exchange novels with them to share the thrilling experience. Having some friends who dislike reading, I understand that the main issue is the length of novels. Thus, I suggest they start with short stories to develop their interest and gradually move on to longer novels. Parents should cultivate the habit of reading in children by introducing them to interactive books from an early age.”

Jeanne D. Sylvester, 16



“I read a lot during my primary school years and the Covid-19 pandemic, mainly because I had more free time, a strong eagerness to read, and my parents did not allow me to have electronic devices. They encouraged my reading by buying new books and taking me to the library weekly. I used to read a 300-page book a day, and often referred to these books to improve my writing skills. Since starting my IGCSE exam preparations, I no longer grab a book to read as often. It’s sad to think I’ve lost that spark. I usually end up reading stories online, which can’t compare to having a book in hand.”

Maryam Tik Khaleilah, 16



“I read about two to three books annually, which shows there’s significant room for improvement. My main struggle is that I tend to prioritise other commitments, causing me to neglect reading after a long day. However, I believe reading is a highly beneficial habit that should be nurtured in our generation. Parents should lead by example and provide early exposure to reading as an enjoyable pastime.”

Charis Chiang, 21