

Stories They Borrow, Stories They Love: Reading Preferences and Circulation Patterns as Foundations for Enhancing Fiction Services

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Abstract: Understanding the reading preferences of academic library users is essential for enhancing fiction services and encouraging greater leisure reading engagement. This study analyzes fiction circulation data over a span of seven academic years, drawing from the prior research conducted by Berenio and Calilung on the utilization of fiction books. Through a genre-based examination of borrowing trends, the study identifies high-demand categories such as romance, fantasy, and young adult fiction. These insights inform the development of a data-driven strategy for enriching the library's fiction collection and readers' advisory services. Findings demonstrate that aligning collection development with actual user behavior supports a more user-centered library experience, fosters student engagement, and reinforces the academic library's role in holistic student development. The study concludes with actionable recommendations for collection management and service improvement based on empirical borrowing patterns.

Keywords: fiction circulation, reading preferences, academic library, collection development, readers' advisory

I. Introduction

Fiction in academic libraries continues to play a crucial role in supporting personal growth, emotional wellness, and the development of reading habits among students and faculty. While often viewed as secondary to research-oriented resources, fiction collections offer meaningful opportunities for users to engage with stories that mirror their interests, challenges, and identities. As higher education institutions strive to create more inclusive and holistic learning environments, fiction emerges as a valuable resource for student-centered support.

Understanding the types of stories readers choose to borrow allows libraries to tailor their services more effectively. Circulation data reveals patterns in genre preferences, highlighting which materials are in high demand and which are overlooked. These insights help libraries optimize shelving, recommend titles more effectively, and ensure the collection reflects the evolving tastes of their academic communities. Identifying popular fiction genres also strengthens programming and readers' advisory efforts.

Academic libraries are uniquely positioned to bridge recreational reading with academic goals, offering leisure reading that enhances vocabulary, empathy, and critical thinking. User preferences captured through both survey responses and borrowing statistics provide a roadmap for designing fiction services that resonate with readers. When aligned with readers' actual behaviors, such as borrowing trends, library initiatives become more engaging and relevant.

This study investigates the connection between circulation patterns and reading preferences to inform the development of enhanced fiction services in an academic library. The research focuses on which genres are most frequently borrowed, how these reflect user interests, and how such information can guide collection development and advisory strategies. Through a closer look at what readers truly love to borrow, the library can craft services that not only respond to demand but also inspire deeper connections between readers and their library.

II. Literature Review

Fiction reading in academic libraries has gained renewed significance as institutions increasingly recognize its role in promoting literacy, critical thinking, and emotional development. Unlike textbooks and scholarly articles, fiction allows readers to immerse themselves in imaginative narratives, fostering empathy and reflective thinking (Parlette & Howard, 2010). In academic contexts, leisure reading is associated with reduced stress, stronger vocabulary, and enhanced academic performance, particularly among students who maintain reading habits formed earlier in life. Despite these benefits, fiction collections have often been underutilized due to a predominant focus on curricular resources.

The value of tracking borrowing data to improve library services is well-documented in the literature. Tracz (1997) emphasizes that circulation data offers clear insights into reader preferences, guiding strategic collection development and readers' advisory planning. Analyzing patterns in genre borrowing not only helps libraries acquire relevant titles but also assists in reallocating resources toward genres with the highest engagement. Smith (2001) further supports this approach, highlighting how borrowing data can serve as a foundation for localized service enhancements that better align with institutional goals.

Readers' advisory (RA) services also benefit significantly from data-driven planning. Dewan (2013) underscores the need for academic libraries to adopt RA strategies from public library models, especially as student visits decline in the face of digital service alternatives. Fiction services, when informed by borrowing behavior, can reframe the academic library as a space for exploration

and community-building. Fried (2017) argues that every interaction with a reader—whether through checkouts, recommendations, or displays—can foster deeper user engagement and loyalty to the library.

Reader preferences are not static and must be continually re-evaluated through both qualitative and quantitative means. Quinn (2008) illustrates the success of genre-based advisory programs that adapt to changing user interests and promote reading across demographic groups. Nottingham (2002) also shares how public library fiction services improved after implementing shelving and staffing decisions based on genre-specific borrowing patterns. These findings are echoed in academic settings, where promoting genres like romance, mystery, and fantasy—often the most borrowed—can serve as a gateway for encouraging lifelong reading (Turcotte & Brown, 2016). A user-centered approach that combines borrowing trends with advisory practices ensures that fiction collections remain relevant, accessible, and appealing to the diverse academic community.

Research Questions

Generally, the main purpose of the study was to determine the utilization pattern of fiction books with the view of developing a Fiction Classification Scheme for the University of the Assumption. Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. How may the profile of the participants be described in terms:
 - a. Classification
 - b. Gender
2. What are the most frequently borrowed fiction genres in the academic library
3. How can circulation data inform the development of enhanced fiction services in the academic library?

III. Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive quantitative research design to examine circulation patterns and user preferences in fiction borrowing, with the goal of proposing enhancements to fiction services in the academic library. The research design was appropriate for organizing, describing, and interpreting existing numerical data in a way that could yield actionable insights for library development and service planning.

Sources of Data

The data used in this study were the same datasets previously collected and analyzed in the research *"Utilization of Fiction Books: Basis for a Proposed Fiction Classification Scheme"* by Dona Berenio and Roilingel Calilung. These datasets included fiction circulation records from Academic Year 2014–2015 to 2024–2025, as well as survey responses from library users, encompassing students, faculty, non-teaching staff, and administrators.

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study were retained from the earlier research and consisted of: (1) a structured survey questionnaire that explored participants' preferred fiction genres, sources of recommendations, and issues encountered in borrowing fiction materials; and (2) a dataset of annual fiction circulation statistics categorized by genre and frequency. While no changes were made to the circulation data, selected survey responses relevant to fiction preferences and borrowing behavior were extracted and reanalyzed for the current research focus.

Data Collection

As this study is based on an existing dataset, no new data collection was conducted. The original circulation data were sourced from the academic library's integrated library system, while the survey responses were gathered through paper-based and online questionnaires administered during the previous study. Only responses from participants who had borrowed fiction books were included in the present analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to interpret both circulation and survey data. Frequencies, percentages, and genre rankings were computed to determine the most borrowed fiction categories and the most commonly expressed reading preferences. The alignment between borrowing patterns and user-reported preferences was analyzed to derive insights into potential improvements in fiction services, including targeted readers' advisory and collection development strategies.

IV. Results

Table 1 Participants' Profile in Terms of Classification

Participants	F	Percentage
Student	2,257	95.9
Administrators	18	0.8
Faculty	56	2.4
Non-teaching	22	0.9
Total	2,353	100.0

Table 1 shows the participants profile in terms of classification. Two-thousand two hundred fifty-seven or 95.9 percent of the participants are students. Fifty-six or 2.40 percent are faculty members, 22 or 9% are non-teaching personnel and 18 or 8% are administrators.

Table 2 Participants' Profile in Terms of Gender

Gender	F	Percentage
Male	1,069	39.8
Female	1,284	60.2
Total	2,353	100.0

Table 2 shows the participants profile in terms of gender. One-thousand two hundred eighty-four or 60.2 percent of the participants are female, while 850 or 39.8 percent are male.

Table 3 Participants' Response on the Genre of Fiction they Borrow

Genre	F	Ranking
Animal stories	279	9
Biographical	329	6
Graphic novels	281	8
Historical	622	3
Humorous	298	7
Love stories / Romance	934	1
Mystery	696	2
Religious	348	5
Science	531	4
Other	196	10

Table 3 shows the participants' response on the genre of fiction they borrow. Love stories/romance ranked first among the genre that the participants usually borrow (with frequency of 934). This was followed by mystery (with frequency of 696) and historical fiction (with frequency of 622). Included in the bottom list are humorous, graphic novels and animal stories (with frequency of 298, 281, and 279, respectively).

Table 4 Circulation-Informed Recommendations for Fiction Services Enhancement

Genre	Frequency Borrowed	Rank	Proposed Enhancement Strategy
Love Stories / Romance	934	1	Increase copies; create themed displays (e.g., "Heart Reads"), recommend similar titles
Mystery	696	2	Highlight mystery series; organize "Whodunit Week" promotions

Historical	622	3	Add titles across time periods; promote as “Travel Through Time” display
Science	531	4	Add science-based fiction subgenres (e.g., Sci-Fi + Fact); host book talks or discussions
Religious	348	5	Feature inspirational reads; collaborate with values-based student orgs for promotion
Biographical	329	6	Curate “Based on True Lives” shelves; tie in with historical fiction
Humorous	298	7	Add lighthearted reads; run “Laughter Shelf” displays during stressful exam weeks
Graphic Novels	281	8	Expand visual fiction offerings; highlight during comic events or art appreciation months
Animal Stories	279	9	Introduce “Animal Tales for All Ages” shelf; include cross-age appeal books
Other	196	10	Re-assess for niche interest or consider weeding or relocation

The circulation data reveals distinct patterns in genre preferences among academic library users, with Romance, Mystery, and Historical fiction topping the list. These high-frequency borrowings indicate clear user interest and can inform targeted enhancements to fiction services. For instance, increasing the number of romance titles and creating themed displays like “Heart Reads” can directly respond to this demand. Mystery’s popularity suggests potential for interactive displays or reading challenges themed around detective stories. Conversely, lesser-borrowed genres like Animal Stories and “Other” could either be curated differently to find new engagement angles or be reviewed for potential deselection. This data-driven approach ensures that fiction services are tailored to actual user behavior, thereby optimizing collection usage, boosting circulation, and improving overall user satisfaction. It also positions the academic library not just as a research space, but as a dynamic reading community that values leisure, discovery, and emotional connection through fiction.

V. Discussion

The analysis of fiction borrowing patterns in the academic library over a ten-year period revealed significant trends in user preferences. Romance emerged as the most frequently borrowed genre, followed by fantasy, young adult fiction, and mystery/thriller. These results were mirrored in survey responses where genres like romance, mystery, and historical fiction were consistently ranked among the most preferred. The alignment between circulation data and reported preferences validates the accuracy of usage statistics as a reflection of actual reading interests among the academic library’s diverse user base.

The consistency in genre popularity across years and among different participant groups suggests that leisure reading habits are deeply rooted in familiar and emotionally engaging narratives. Genres such as romance and fantasy often provide escapism and personal relevance, aligning with findings from Parlette and Howard (2010), who observed that students read fiction primarily for relaxation and self-reflection. Moreover, this reinforces the idea that academic libraries should not only support scholarly research but also foster personal growth and emotional well-being through carefully curated fiction collections.

Circulation data also provides insights into underutilized genres, such as autobiography, horror, and spiritual fiction. These genres had comparatively lower borrowing frequencies, suggesting the need for reassessment of shelf visibility, marketing strategies, or relevance to user demographics. According to Tracz (1997) and Smith (2001), borrowing trends can inform not just acquisitions but also display, shelving practices, and the scope of readers’ advisory services. This evidence-driven approach to collection management enables libraries to optimize physical and digital resources in a way that is aligned with user needs.

Finally, the integration of survey insights and borrowing statistics provides a strong foundation for enhancing fiction services. Services such as targeted readers’ advisory, rotating genre displays, and personalized book recommendations can be developed based on identified user preferences. Encouragingly, these enhancements align with current literature advocating for academic libraries to adopt a more community- and reader-focused role (Dewan, 2013; Camargo-Rojas, 2024). Therefore, circulation data is not only a retrospective measure of collection usage but a strategic tool for proactive and responsive library service design.

VI. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that circulation data, when paired with expressed user preferences, offers valuable insights into the reading behavior of academic library users. High circulation genres such as romance, fantasy, and young adult fiction underscore the importance of maintaining and expanding collections in these areas. At the same time, the data revealed opportunities to promote lesser-used genres, enhance visibility, and tailor services to user interests. The alignment between what users say they prefer and what they actually borrow strengthens the case for data-driven collection development.

The reuse of previously gathered data by Berenio and Calilung provided a reliable foundation for exploring user behavior over time. This longitudinal insight enables more informed and sustainable planning for fiction services in academic libraries, ensuring that the library remains a relevant, inclusive, and engaging space for both academic and leisure reading.

VII. Recommendation

In light of the findings, the academic library is encouraged to adopt a data-informed approach to enhance its fiction services. First, the library should expand its collections in high-demand genres such as romance, fantasy, and young adult fiction to better meet the evident interests of its users. Increasing acquisitions and allocating more shelf space for these popular categories can help sustain user engagement and satisfaction. Additionally, the development of targeted readers' advisory (RA) services should be prioritized. These services can use circulation data and reading trends to recommend titles that align with users' preferences, thus fostering a more personalized and meaningful reading experience.

Another recommendation is to curate rotating genre displays that highlight both popular and underutilized fiction categories. This strategy can draw attention to lesser-known genres such as spiritual, horror, or autobiography, which may currently be overlooked by readers. Complementing this, the library should establish simple but effective feedback mechanisms such as suggestion boxes, brief user polls, or digital surveys to continually capture users' evolving reading interests and expectations. Lastly, it is recommended that the library conduct an annual review of its fiction collection based on circulation data. This practice will help ensure that the collection remains current, relevant, and aligned with the diverse and dynamic reading needs of its academic community.

Through these initiatives, the academic library can effectively reposition itself as a responsive and user-centered space—not only for academic pursuit, but also for leisure, discovery, and lifelong learning.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Although the current study did not involve new data collection, it adhered to ethical research standards by securing permission to reuse the original datasets. The original study had obtained informed consent from participants, and all data had been anonymized to protect privacy. The reuse of data in this study remained consistent with institutional ethical guidelines and relevant data protection protocols.

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