

Students Usage of an academic Library: a user survey conducted at the Main Library University of Peradeniya

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Abstract

Since the university library is committed to provide an excellent service for its users, it has to develop an on-going dialog with the users. One of the main tools that can be used to assess the library services is the user surveys. This study was undertaken to assess library user satisfaction with current information services and resources while identifying user needs. A questionnaire based survey was used for data collection. The questionnaires were distributed among 800 undergraduates who visit the library. It was found that the undergraduates are overall satisfied with available library resources, services and facilities. But it further found that library resources and services are not being fully utilized by undergraduates. Based on these findings, it was recommended that a comprehensive information literacy program should be conducted to promote awareness and use of electronic information resources. It was also recommended that the library should increase the acquisition of electronic information sources while continuing to acquire general and reference materials to fulfill the current research needs of the users.

Key word: User studies, User needs, User assessment, University library use, academic library use, undergraduate library use

1. Introduction

The academic libraries have been described as the “heart” of the learning community, providing a place for students and faculty to conduct their research and advance their knowledge. In the education system, an academic library is the centre of academic life. A university library or any other library attached to an institution of higher education exists to support the goals of its parent organization. Since university libraries are an integral part of the higher education system, they should provide support services for the formal educational programs as well as for facilities for research and for generation of new knowledge. It is important for any information professional working in an academic or any other library to know the real needs of the user community.

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Understanding the needs of the target group will help to develop the diverse strategies that are appropriate to obtain effective results.

Since the university library is committed to provide excellent resources and services, it has to develop an on-going dialog with its user community. On the other hand, academic libraries have to improve the quality of their services to survive in this volatile competitive environment .Therefore it is crucial to evaluate the library service from customer's point of view. At the same time in order to set up user –centered service the library needs to know the users and user needs. One of the main tools that can be used to evaluate and assess the library services is the user survey. It is impossible to assess the changing needs of the clientele unless user surveys are conducted to determine user needs and their reading interests.

The university community is not a static environment but, rather, one fraught with change and adjustment to change. How do academic libraries within a university setting effectively address the evolving service and resource needs of a diverse patron community? One method that has received increasing attention is the development and implementation of internal instruments specifically designed to assess user satisfaction with services and resources. (Clougherty, 1998)

User surveys

Library user surveys have become widespread in academic libraries during the past twenty years. Rapid changes in library services and operations, demand for internal institutional accountability, and assessment expectations by external accrediting agencies have contributed to further development and application of user surveys within academic libraries during the past decade. (Hiller, 2001)

The purpose of employing the user studies are described by Cullen (2001) in the following terms:

- Provide detailed information about user's opinion of the service
- Help to clarify the librarians concept of the services as well as their assumptions about the user needs

- Indicate problems
- Suggest solutions

Lancaster(1977) in his book on the measurement and evaluation of library services stated that library surveys are shifting their emphasis toward the library user, patterns of library use, and the degree to which user needs are being met. Busha and Harter (1980), in their text on research methods, mentioned that user studies are needed to justify and expand library services and usage and to learn more about how people communicate. More specifically, they stated that user studies are needed to: predict library usage; determine why people do or do not use libraries; identify what group borrow which kinds of materials; identify what groups use which services; suggest how user can be encouraged; explore how use patterns differ; measure the effects of mass media on library use; and identify actual needs.

The popularity of the user study is probably a function of the service-orientation of contemporary library philosophy. Librarians have become increasingly sensitive to user requirements and user study offers a means of defining a library's clientele, establishing levels of demand for various services and tailoring those services to meet the interests' of that clientele. While some user studies have restricted themselves to gathering data about patterns of library use, many of authors aim at evaluating users' attitudes to the library, and assessing the degree of satisfaction being achieved. (McMuedo, 1980)

Knowledge of the information needs and information seeking behavior of users is vital for developing library collections, upgrading facilities and improving services to effectively meet the information needs of users. (Tahir, 2008)

A user study at University of Peradeniya, Main Library

The library system of University of Peradeniya consists of the main library and eight specialized branch libraries. At present it possesses more than 700,000 volumes and continues to be the largest University library in Sri

Lanka. The University of Peradeniya Main library serves approximately 7000 undergraduates and postgraduates and about 900 faculty staff.

The mission of University of Peradeniya library is to develop and provide user focused, relevant, quality information required for independent thinking , life long learning ,knowledge based society to excel in teaching and learning , research and professional contribution to national development in an intellectually stimulating university environment. One of the major initiatives developed to achieve this goal was conducting a user survey to assess the services of the library. The University of Peradeniya Main library conducted a user survey in May 2009, to assess undergraduate resource and service needs. More specifically this study was conducted to assess library user satisfaction with current information services and resources, to help identify library user needs and the impact of library services and resources.

2. Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the user survey were:

1. To learn what library services, resources and facilities undergraduates use for their learning and research
2. To know how satisfied undergraduates are with available resources and services in the library
3. To suggest remedies that may help the undergraduates to use the library more effectively.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted among the students who use the library. In order to meet the objectives of the study, survey methodology was used. The main research instrument was self administered questionnaire which consisted of structured questions. Most of the closed ended questions were designed to elicit responses on a five- point Lickert scale. The questionnaire was basically divided into four sections.

Section 1: Library usage and purpose of visits

Section 2: Sources of information and their importance for learning

Section 3: User satisfaction on library resources and user opinion on various attributes of library and facilities

Section 4: Comments or suggestions about library resources, services and facilities

The population of the study consisted of 800 undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts. The questionnaires were distributed among the students who visit the library by the staff of the library hence response rate was 100%. The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS (version 17.0).

Literature Review

During the last decades the interest in students' library use and information needs has increased mainly because of the increase in student numbers and libraries needs to meet their client's demands in the best possible way. Studies of students' attitudes to and use of university libraries have been conducted in several countries (Eskola,1998).

Williams (1995) surveyed Canadian undergraduate library use, and found that active learners who participate more in class and who read, write and study more are regular and active library users. Fowowe (1989) found difference in the frequency of library use of by faculty and students, and that 94.8% of students use library facilities. Olanlokun (1982) found that students use the library for class work, research, discussions, leisure, and other purposes. Ajayi(1993) notes that that students who do not appreciate the value of the library are at disadvantage and may visit the library to only read for examinations. Studies of undergraduates' students' relations to libraries have been conducted in the Nordic countries in Denmark 1995, Sweden 1995 and Finland 1996. The results show that students are rather frequent library users although there are large differences in how students of different disciplines utilize library services. The student want more study carrels, more course literature and more generous opening hours. According to the Finnish and Swedish studies

students themselves ask for more education in information seeking and library use. (Hoglund, 1996).

A study by Fister(1992) concluded that faculty plays a large role in guiding the research of their students. She noted that using finding tools may be a good starting point for the preliminary phase of the research process: later phases force students to rely more on citations as the research questions are more clearly defined.

Specific user related characteristics that have been measured in the past according to Powell (1997) includes frequency of library and information use, attitudes and opinions regarding libraries, reading patterns, levels of satisfaction, demographic data, personality, lifestyle and awareness of library services. Majid (2001) found that the adequacy of collection, services and facilities were closely linked to the perceptions of library effectiveness. Certain other factors contributing positively to the perception of library effectiveness were the adequacy and effectiveness of library promotion, involvement of users in the selection of library materials, convenient library location, participation in user education programmes, availability of assistance for using library resources and facilities and subject background of library professional. Ajibero (1980) found that Nigerian university libraries did not meet user expectations. As a result, most students did not learn how to use the library and were not aware of the relationship of the library to their studies.

Callinan (2005) observed that there are differences in the extent to which scores of information are used by students in different years of their studies. Apart from web sites and web- based lecture notes, lack of awareness is the primary reason why undergraduate students did not use the library's electronic data bases.

Fidzani(1998) has explored that journals, library books and text books are most popular sources of information for course work and research and students need to be taught how to use available library resources and services. Gelfand (2005) noted that the growing emphasis on usability

studies and libraries trying to respond to user needs by becoming a more user –centered organization forces an organization to listen carefully to its users. Creaser (2006) explained that one aim of user surveys must be to improve the services provided to users. High overall satisfaction levels are good for publicity, and may persuade institutional management that all is well with the library, but they should not lead to complacency within the service.

4. Analysis of Data

4.1. Visit to the library

Significant variance is evident, in term of how frequently undergraduates visited the library. Figure 1 indicates the frequency of library visit by undergraduates.

Figure 1 shows that a simple majority of the respondents (474; 59.5%) visited the library daily, while 181 (22.7%) visited when necessary. It further shows that the respondents who visited the library once a week are equal to those who visited more than once. (N =70; 8.8)

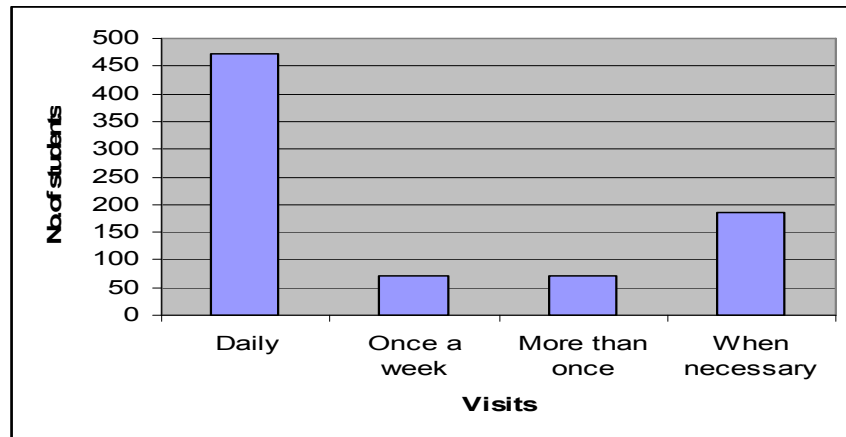


Figure 1- Library Visits by Undergraduates

4.2. Purpose of visit to the library

Purpose of visits gives essential information about the reading materials that are required for the library users. This helps the librarians in developing the library collection as well as the services

and facilities to provide better service to its users. Figure 2 indicates the purpose of visits to the library by undergraduates.

Figure 2 shows that 243 of respondents (30%) visited the library for more than three purposes which is a good sign about library usage. 179 of respondents (22%) visited the library for reference, borrowing books and to read their notes.102 of respondents visited the library for reference and borrowing books while 68 of respondents visited for reference, borrowing books and internet searches. 72 of respondents visited the library for borrowing books only followed by 68 respondents visited for reference, borrowing books and for internet search and 65 respondents visited for reference purposes only.

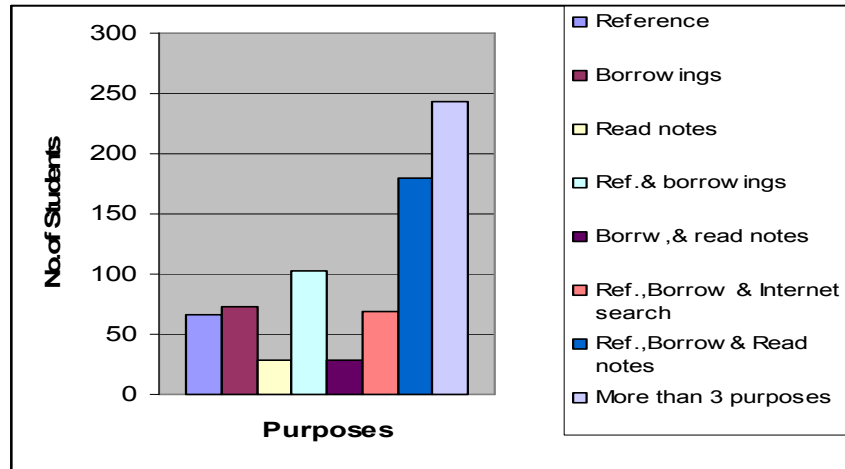


Figure - 2 Purpose of visits to the Library

4.3. Sources of Information used by undergraduates

The respondents were asked to mark about services and facilities they use for getting information for their learning and research activities.

Table 1 shows that borrowing facilities, reference collection and photocopy service were the most used services and facilities by the undergraduates. Hereby 75% of respondents used the internet facilities while 67% of respondents used Scheduled Reference Services.

Table 1 - Sources of information used by undergraduates

Services & Facilities	No. of respondents	No. of not respondents & %	Yes score	Yes %	No score	No %
Borrowing Facility	774	26 (3%)	744	96.1	30	3.9
Reference Collection	770	30 (3.8%)	733	95.2	37	4.8
Scheduled Reference Services (SR)	576	224 (28%)	387	67.2	189	32.8
Theses Collection	492	308 (38.5%)	245	49.8	247	50.2
Internet Facilities	631	169 (21.1%)	470	74.5	161	25.5
Inter- Library Loan Service	459	341 (42.6%)	68	14.8	391	85.2
Electronic Journal services	472	328 (41%)	103	21.8	369	78.2
Library Web Page	529	271 (33.9%)	265	50.1	264	49.9
Email Facility	557	243 (30.4%)	314	56.4	243	43.6
Current Periodicals	446	354 (44.3%)	174	39	272	61
Bound Periodicals	446	354 (44.3%)	94	21.1	352	78.9
Palm Leaf Collection	437	363 (45.4%)	88	20.1	349	79.9
Photocopy Service	734	66 (8.3%)	685	93.3	49	6.7

More than a half of the respondents used Email facilities and Library web page to get information they required. Surprisingly more than 40% of respondents did not mention anything about the following services and facilities i.e. Current periodicals (44.3%), Palm leaf collection (45.4%), Bound periodicals (44.3%), Inter-library loan service (42.6%) and Electronic journal services (41%). Reason may be the respondents were not aware of those services and facilities available in the library.

4.3. Importance of different information resources for learning and research

Respondents' opinions were sought using a five point Lickert scale on the importance of different information resources for their learning and research activities. A list of ten information resources was provided including open ended option. Below is the analysis of the required responses.

Table 2 - Importance of different information resources for learning and research

Rank	Information Source	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Reference Materials	4.45	1.175
2	Internet	4.33	1.373
3	Text Books	4.12	1.447
4	Supplementary Readings	4.08	1.446
5	Maps	4.06	1.652
6	Inter-Library loan	4.02	1.892
7	Electronic Databases	3.94	1.751
8	Electronic Journals	3.86	1.773
9	Scholarly Journals	3.86	1.719
10	Popular Magazines	3.82	1.656

(Scale:1= Not at all Important 2= Less Important 3= Some what Important 4= Important 5= Very Important)

Reference Materials were ranked as the most important Resource for learning (Mean= 4.45) followed by Internet (Mean= 4.33), text books (mean = 4.12) while supplementary Readings and Maps were ranked as 4th and 5th with mean scores of 4.08 and 4.06 respectively. Popular Magazines and Scholarly Journals were considered as some what important which have given a similar importance by the respondents for both of them.

4.5. User Opinion on various attributes of the library

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on various attributes of the library by giving four statements. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of respondent's opinion about various attributes of University of Peradeniya main library.

Table 3 - Descriptive statistics of Respondent's opinion about various attributes of Library

	Attributes	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1	Easily locate resources	760	1.90	0.723	1	5
2	Resources are current & Up to date	722	2.20	0.905	1	5
3	Excellent assistance from the Library staff	738	2.01	0.834	1	5
4	Library Orientation programmes are helpful	717	2.50	1.248	1	5

(Scale:1= Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly Disagree 5= Don't Know)

As shown in Table 3, respondents were, by and large satisfied with the quality of University of Peradeniya library services. Respondents showed highest level of agreement with the statements of "I can easily locate

resources I need in the Library” (mean=1.90) and “I receive excellent assistance from library staff” (mean=2.01) and lowest level of agreement with the statement of “Orientation programs conducted by library have been helpful” (mean=2.50).

4.6. User satisfaction on Library facilities

Respondents were asked to mark their satisfaction on various library facilities according to five point Lickert Scale. Table 4 shows the user satisfaction with the given facilities.

Table 4 - User Satisfaction on Library Facilities

Library Facility	Number	Mean	Std. deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Reading Materials	773	3.94	1.551	1	5
Lightning	702	4.13	1.408	1	5
Photocopy service	759	3.49	1.740	1	5
Computers	722	3.30	1.748	1	5
Library catalogs	695	3.78	1.660	1	5
Seating capacity	682	4.12	1.425	1	5
Cleanliness	701	4.26	1.290	1	5
Staff	736	4.11	1.415	1	5
Security	729	3.95	1.540	1	5
Opening Hours	699	3.98	2.687	1	5

(Scale:1= Not at all Satisfied 2= Less Satisfied 3= Some what Satisfied 4= Satisfied 5= Very Satisfied))

As shown in table 4, respondents were satisfied about cleanliness (Mean=4.26), Lightning (Mean=4.13) and seating capacity (Mean= 4.12).

They are also satisfied with the services of library staff (Mean=4.11) followed by the library opening hours (Mean=3.98), security service in the library (Mean=3.95), reading materials available in the library (Mean=3.94) and Library catalogs (Mean=3.78). It also showed that the number of computers available for students' use and with the photocopy service the users are satisfied to some extent with mean scores of 3.30 and 3.49 respectively. It is evident from table 4 that in general the respondents were satisfied with the facilities available in the library.

7. Additional Comments or suggestions

The open ended questions regarding additional comments or suggestions were received from 286 respondents out of 800. Table 5 shows the responses received as additional comments or suggestions.

Table 5 - Additional Comments or suggestions

	Responses (N= 286)	Frequency
1	Library needs to: add new books and reference resources in various subjects disciplines, increase no. of journals and add more electronic databases	129
2	Library needs more computers with speed internet access for students' use	59
3	Library hours should be extended till 8.00 pm	34
4	Improve photocopy service by providing more machines to reduce long queues	35
5	Library needs to enhance its physical environment by providing more ventilation and noise control	18
6	Library needs to automate all library operations by using integrated library software package	11
	Total	286

As shown in table 5, the most important suggestion was to increase the number of information resources including books, reference resources with current editions and subscription of more journals (print and electronic) in various subject fields.

5. Findings of the study

Basically the findings of the study are presented under four main sections:

Section 1: Library usage and purpose of visits

Library usage

The results of the study revealed that majority of respondents (60%) visited the library daily while 23% of respondents visited when necessary.

Purpose of Visit

The main purposes mentioned by the respondents for visiting the library were for reference, for borrowing books and read their notes in the library. Another most important finding was that more than 30% of respondents come to the library for more than three purposes.

Section 2: Sources of information and their importance for learning

Sources of information

More than 90% of respondents reported that they used borrowing facilities (96%), reference collections (95%) and photocopy service (93%) for their information needs. Nearly 80% of respondents mentioned they have not used the Inter Library Loan facility (85%), the palm leaf collection (80%), bound periodicals (79%) and electronic journal services (78%) for their information purposes.

The study also revealed that more than 40% of respondents did not mention anything about the usage of palm leaf collection (45%), current periodicals (44%), bound periodicals (44%), inter library loan (43%) and electronic journal services (41%)

Importance of information resources

Most of the respondents (85%) mentioned that the reference materials were most important (mean=4.45) source of information for their learning

while internet (mean=4.33) and text books (mean=4.12) were ranked as 2nd and 3rd important information sources.

Section 3: User satisfaction and user opinion on various attributes of library services and facilities

User opinion on various attributes of library services and facilities

Most of the respondents (88%) reported their positive opinion on two statements on “I can easily locate the resources I need in the library” and “I receive excellent assistance from library staff” with the high mean scores of 1.90 and 2.01 respectively. But the lowest level of agreement on Library orientation programs indicated negative opinion of the respondents regarding user education programs conducted by the library.

User satisfaction on library facilities

Descriptive analysis of data showed that the respondents were satisfied with the physical environment of the library i.e. cleanliness (mean=4.13), lightning (mean=4.13) and seating capacity (mean=4.12).The overall results showed the respondents were satisfied with the facilities available in the library in meeting their information needs.

Section 4: Comments or suggestions about library resources, services and facilities

Most of the respondents (45%: n=129) commented that the library should add more books and reference materials on various subject disciplines and increase number of journals (print and electronic). In general all the comments or suggestions showed that the library should be improve upon some services, in order to meet the users' information needs. (More computers photocopy machines and more opening hours)

Conclusion

Findings of the study shows that the undergraduate students are overall satisfied with the library resources, services and facilities. But the study further found that library resources and services are not being fully used

by the undergraduates because either they are not aware of the resources and services or do not consider them as important for their studies. Conducting a comprehensive information literacy program is crucial to educate undergraduates about resources and the services of the library and how to use them. The wider university should take responsibility of advertising that the library is providing a quality service for the users. The challenge is for the university library to continue to ensure that its user perception is maintained.

Recommendations

This study is an effort to fill the gap in understanding the information needs of undergraduates and their library use. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the University of Peradeniya library while addressing the information needs of the undergraduates and improving their satisfaction level.

1. As the respondents depend on few library resources and services, the library needs to promote awareness and use of electronic information resources by conducting comprehensive information literacy programmes.
2. While continuing to acquire general and reference materials the library needs to increase the acquisition of electronic information sources (Electronic journals and Databases) to fill the current research needs of the users.
3. Library should improve the physical environment of the library especially by providing required ventilation in the stacks area while taking measures to control the noise inside the library.
4. Library should take necessary actions to improve the perception of the library staff towards the customer oriented service. It is essential to conduct staff training sessions while increasing the staff for the reader service counters.
5. Further library must be more user centered rather than the system centered. The library should conduct user studies at regular intervals to develop an effective user centered library and information services.

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