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## Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour of Undergraduates: A Case Study Based on the Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

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### ABSTRACT

*Information seeking patterns are considered to be different among user groups. This study examines the issues of information seeking behaviors of the user groups of undergraduates of Agriculture faculty, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. The specific objectives of the study first, to identify the information seeking patterns of undergraduates, second, to examine the problems that undergraduates encounter when accessing the required information and finally, to identify workable strategies for effective information seeking behavior. A survey was conducted by using a structured questionnaire among the all undergraduates of the faculty. The findings revealed that majority of students in the category of very weak competence in relation to use of library and also spend relatively less time in the library. It has further shown that poor information seeking patterns and they do not show any planned library time for information collection. Most of the undergraduates are preferred to use e-resources than printed materials for their academic activities given the reason ease of access. The paper concludes that undergraduates are required proper instructions and programs aiming at improving their information seeking skills. The existing library services should target their strategies towards information seeking skills development and improving information resource awareness among undergraduates. It is recommended to librarians that the existing strategies should be re-designed and re-shaped to address this problem properly and to improve the information searching skills of undergraduates of the faculty.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Agricultural Undergraduates, E-resources, information Literacy, Information Seeking Behavior, Information Skills.*

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## **Introduction**

In today's knowledge economy, information has become one of the critical aspects of every human being. The need of information and the access to information is further critical event especially among the university undergraduates as they are known as active information seekers than the general public. In very formal manner information seeking behavior can be defined as the process of information acquiring, using and implementing information with a specific purpose. In the context of academicians, researchers and students it is even more important because they all need right and updated information for their research and study purposes (Pareek, Madan, Rana 2013)

According to Wilson (1999, 2000), information-seeking behavior includes "those activities a person may engage in when identifying their own needs for information, searching for such information in any way, and using or transferring that information". It is noted that, information-seeking behavior differs among user groups. As the university consists with different user groups with different purposes (i.e. academics, post graduates students, undergraduate students) academic libraries must understand the information needs of faculty and students in order to address those needs. This study examines the information seeking behaviors of the user group of undergraduates of Agriculture Faculty, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.

## **The Library system of Rajarata University of Sri Lanka**

The vision of the library is to be the best academic library in the country that caters to learning, teaching and research in the fields of Agriculture, Applied Sciences, Management Sciences, Medical and Allied Sciences and Social Sciences and Humanities. The library system of the Rajarata University comprises of main library and faculty libraries. The Library of Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka was established on 2nd May 2001. This library is situated in the faculty building complex at Puliyankulama, The Lending and the Reference sections are especially on agriculture and related subjects. Today it has a collection of more than 13000 including books (text and reference), bound periodicals, manuscripts, CD-DVD, atlas, slides, theses and dissertation, project reports. Its total membership of includes academic staff, undergraduates, administrative and non-academic staff.

The library is being automated using KOHA data base system. The Agricultural Library maintains a standard approach to issue the books. In terms of technology this library has online search system, online catalogue, e- collection and e-journals. The library has CD-ROM on subject area and also available e-journals through UGC- consortia and institutional subscription based. Also this library has identified the need of new technology in library access.

## **Literature Review**

This section serves the purpose of reviewing the available literature related to the current topic. More specifically, this section briefly reviews the literature in relation to different information needs, different seeking patterns and identified information seeking barriers.

There are many researches carried out in this area of information needs and seeking patterns of library users across the world. For example, A.K. Pareek and Madan S. Rana (2013) have carried out a study to find out information seeking behaviors and library use patterns of the researchers in the Banasthali University. This study investigates that IT based library services are being less utilized compared with printed sources by the research scholars. Researchers use a variety of information sources for their research. Books and e-journals are considered mostly. Researchers perceived the Banasthali University Central Library play an effective role in meeting their research needs, they also prefer to consult research guide and library first. It was also noted that there was little awareness of e-resources available in library, less use of document delivery services.

Subramaniam and Jayaraman (2013) have done a research based on Information Seeking Behavior and Library Use Pattern of Biotechnology Researchers in the Bharathidasan University in Tamilnadu. In this study 100 research scholars were surveyed in Bharathidasan University. This study investigates that IT based library services are being less utilized compared with printed sources by the research scholars. Researchers use a variety of information sources for their research. Books and e-journals are considered mostly. Researchers perceived the Bharathidasan University Central Library play an effective role in

meeting their research needs, they also prefer to consult research guide and library first. It was also noted that there was little awareness of e-resources available in library, less use of document delivery services. Further, Hadimani and Rajgoli (2010) have done a research on Accessing information literacy competency among undergraduates students of collage of Agriculture case study. The finding of this study has indicated that first, the college should have separate finding and other support for an information literacy agenda, technological infrastructure needs to be improved and that the librarians and faculty should collaborate to develop discipline specific research skills.

Another study was conducted by Shaheen Majid and Ai Tee Tan (2002) on Usage of information resources by computer engineering students: a case study of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. This study investigates the information needs and information seeking behavior of computer engineering undergraduate students at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. The purpose was to investigate the types of information sources used by the students, their preferred information formats, the importance of and reasons for using certain information sources and the use of various electronic information sources. A questionnaire was distributed among 200 randomly selected students and 102 completed questionnaires were returned. The study found that printed materials were the most preferred information format among the students. The top five most preferred information sources, in the order of importance, were: books, lecturers, the Internet, friends and manuals. Unexpectedly, the use of databases and electronic journals was quite low among the computer engineering students. The study recommends a promotional campaign for introducing electronic information sources to the library users.

Further, Weejethunga P. (2014) carried out a research on information seeking behavior and issues of Agriculture Undergraduate of University of Peradeniya. The finding lead to the conclusion, that the agriculture undergraduate often use search engines, Wikipedia and Classmates as information sources, use more self-taught methods to evaluate resources, consult classmate s more often than any other group of people for help, and they have problems in research-related tasks. Under these circumstances, serious attention should be paid to the quality of the information-seeking behavior of the agriculture students. These finding strongly recommends that the agriculture students urgently need more support from the faculty and the librarians to improve their information-seeking behavior if they do not explore the rich library and internet-based information resources for their learning and research. Lack of training in information skill can be identified as the main reason for the weaknesses in their information-seeking behaviors and the research practices.

Illeperuma .S. and Mudannayake,L (2008) shows that information gathering behavior of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Faculty of Agriculture and Sciences at University of Peradeniya. This paper discusses the information seeking behavior of the agriculture undergraduates in a Sri Lankan university. It established that the undergraduates often use the search engines, Wikipedia, and their own classmates than the other information resources; they use more self-taught methods than standard methods to evaluate the resources and seek help from the classmates in using the information resources. Findings further proved that their uses of various productivity tools are very low and the information-related research tasks are difficult for the majority. The paper concludes that these are the effects of inadequate Information Literacy (IL) training they receive and the study strongly recommends offering appropriate, context specific IL programmes, to enhance their information resource usage and research skills.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were:

1. To identify the information seeking patterns of undergraduates.
2. To examine the problems that undergraduates encounter when accessing to the required information.
3. To identify workable strategies for effective information seeking behavior.

## **Research Methodology**

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher adapted a survey strategy. The research instrument used for the study is questionnaire. The study population consisted of all the undergraduates of Agriculture Faculty. The Data obtained were analyzed using the Microsoft Excel 2007 package. Data were descriptively analyzed as percentage and proportion techniques. Raw Data were tabulated and presented in tables, line graphs and bar charts

## Result and Discussion

### Sample Distribution

Out of 364 user attitude questioners 300 duly completed were returned which indicated a response rate of 82% of this study .The response rate of the survey is shown in the table 1.

**Table 1: Respondent rate for the questioner**

Sample	Questionnaire distributed	Respondents	Respondents rate
All undergraduates of the Faculty	364	300	82%

Survey respondents were asked about the time spend per week in the library. As indicated in table 2, the majority of respondents 42% visit the library 2-3 hours per week, followed by 3-5 hours times in a week by 41% respondents, 12% visit library less than 2 hours per week, while 5% come more than five hours per week. The findings revealed that majority of the students in the category of very weak competence in relation to use of library and also spend less time in the library

**Table 2: Frequency of Library Visit**

Time spend	Percentage%
less than 2 hours	12
2-3 hours	42
3-5 hours	41
more than 5 hours	5

### Purpose of information seeking

In response of purpose of library visit, Figure 1 indicates that to reading books to return borrowed library materials, to read journals and research work are the four main purposes of library visit. To note making followed by 10% researchers, 5% users come to read news papers and to update knowledge by the respondents which have less.

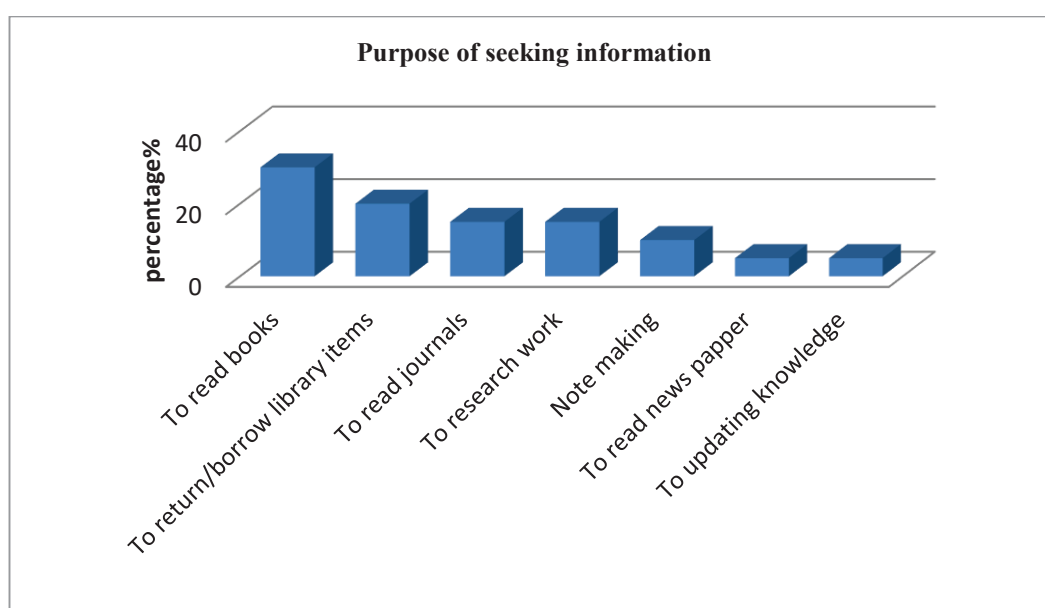


Figure1: Purpose of information seeking

## Preference of Information Resources

The most preferred types of resources of information by all groups were online resources and internet based information as shown in figure 2. However, students also expressed a need for training in the use of these online resources.

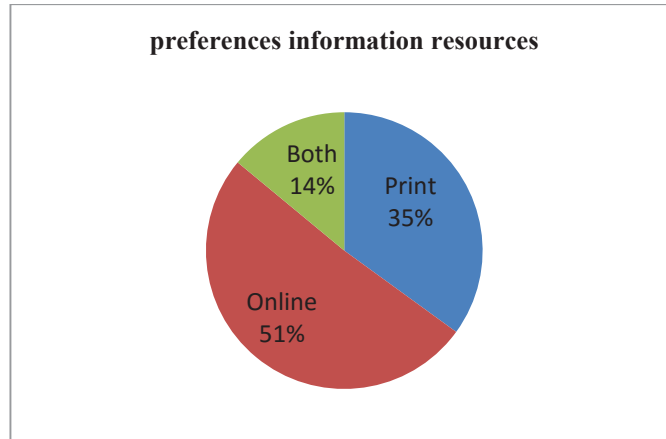


Figure2: preferences information resources

## Difficulties Faced in Library Using

Figure 3 indicates in response of problem faced during library visit. The majority (30%) of respondents indicated that lack of knowledge regarding e-resources. Twenty seven of respondents (27%) have indicated that user aloneness is not enough it is necessary for maximum utilization of the library. Lack of information materials, not familiar with OPAC also faced as difficulties when using the library. On the basis of finding (9%) of respondents do not have enough time to come to the library. Internet and other facilities also main difficulties faced by undergraduates when using the Agriculture Library.

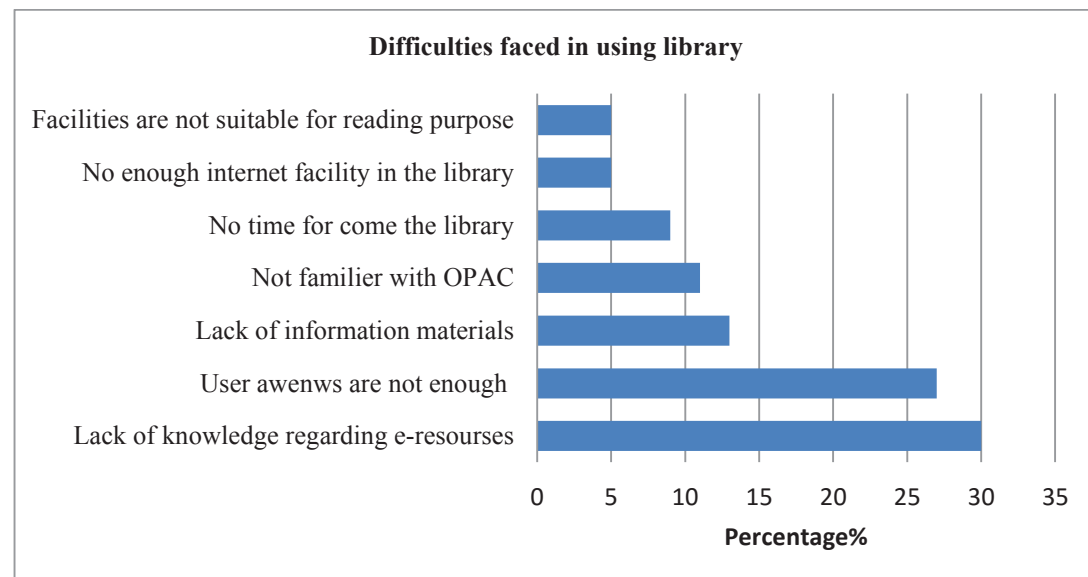


Figure 3: Difficulties Faced in Library Using

## Satisfaction with present library services

Figure 4 shows that respondents are mostly satisfy with collection of books and arrangement of library materials. 12% of respondents indicated they are satisfied with borrowing facility of the library. (10%) of respondents satisfy with searching OPAC. Satisfy with the service of library staff has indicated 7% percent of the total. Least number of respondents have satisfaction with journals (print) collection, e- journals and reading room facility in the Library.

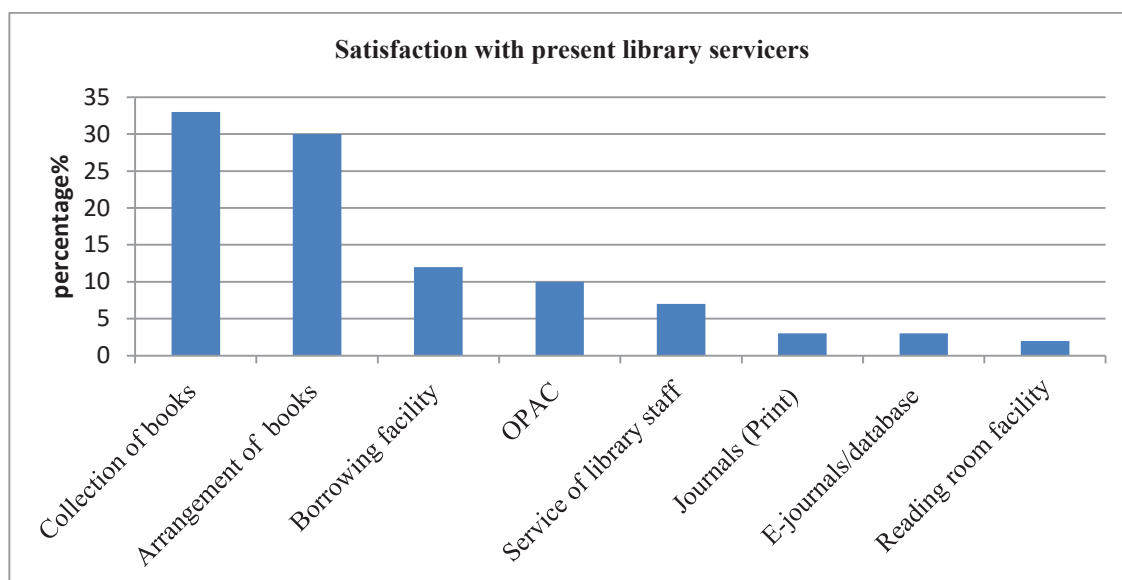


Figure 4: Satisfaction with present library services

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study 300 undergraduates were surveyed in the Agriculture Faculty, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. The findings revealed that majority of students in the category of very weaker competence in relation to use of library and also spend less time in the library. Majority of users showed satisfaction with collection of books and undergraduates use a variety of information sources for their academic needs. Books and e- resources are considered mostly. It was also noted that there was little awareness of e-resources available in library and need of advance training for undergraduates for using online resources. The results of this study revealed users who are more or less satisfied with library facility when they use the library. Therefore, facilities should be improved. Library handling of technology, computers, network should be developed, The existing library services should target their strategies towards information seeking skill development and information resource awareness among undergraduates. It is recommended to library service that the existing strategies should be re-designed and re-shaped to address this problem properly and improve the information skills of undergraduates of the Faculty. It is finally recommended that there is a need to make a plan for effective or better utilization of library sources and services.

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