

Information Seeking Behaviour of Faculty Members of Karpagam University in Coimbatore, India: A Study

S. Jayaraman¹ and B. Subramanian²

¹ Visiting Professor, Karpagam University, Coimbatore - 641 021, Tamil Nadu, India

² Ph.D. Research Scholar & Librarian, Karpagam College of Engineering, Coimbatore - 641 032, Tamil Nadu, India

Email: jaisraman@gmail.com, sumani_vishaka@yahoo.co.in

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Abstract – The purpose of this study is to identify the information channels used by the Karpagam University faculty members, information sources preferred by them, methods employed for getting the needed information and their library use pattern. A questionnaire was distributed to 160 faculty members and 132 filled questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 82.5%. Results show that most of the respondents seek information for preparing lectures. It is revealed that most of the faculty members used textbooks. Books were ranked as the most important source for teaching and research purposes. The internet had been almost universally adopted; they trace materials from the library via the internet. On the whole, respondents perceived Karpagam University library collections, services and facilities as adequate to meet their information needs effectively.

Keywords: Information Seeking Behaviour, Information Needs, Information Channels, Faculty members

I. INTRODUCTION

The Karpagam university library has a rich collection of 96,000 books and 600 journal subscriptions. Moreover, 4,000 journals are available online through UGC Infonet consortium. This study examines the kinds of academic information needed by respondents, which resources they prefer, whether they are satisfied with the library collections, and the general pattern of information seeking, with special reference to the influence of course of study.

Information is considered as an important resource that contributes towards the development of a nation. It provides the core for the development of knowledge, the basis for innovations, the resources for informed citizenry, and as a result, becomes a key commodity for the progress of a society. Since early of civilization, information and use of it's has been regarded as very essential. Existence and production of huge volume of information in different fields have changed our contemporary era to the "era of information", and created a phenomenon so called "information explosion" such that one of the most significant issues of the most significant

issues of the recent times is to distribute information based on real needs of the users and their abilities as well.

Regarding that one of the most crucial concerns of the members of faculty is to have access to the up-to-date information meeting their needs and consistent with their educational majors and courses they teach. Therefore, the librarians and the libraries as the knowledge expanders should pace steps into specifying such needs in order to meet them. Conducting such research in order to specify the needs and the targets, kinds of the required information sources, the tools and identify the obstacles in accessing information by the members of faculty seems to be necessarily required. The main goals of the present research are to discover, investigate and determine the information seeking behaviour of the members of faculty of the Karpagam University, Coimbatore. The increase in information available on the Web has affected information seeking behaviour. Innumerable types of information, in a large variety of containers and in many different locations, are all available in one place (Fidel *et al.*, 1999).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature of information seeking behaviour of faculty members available is greatly broad ranging. An attempt has been made to cover number of works that go beyond discussions of the information seeking behaviour itself and its direct applications to closely related topics such as information seeking. This broad review also includes topics like information seeking of faculty. Factors that affect information seeking behaviour include personal reasons for seeking information, the kinds of information being sought, and the ways and sources with which needed information is being sought (Leckie, Pettigrew, and Sylvain, 1996). Suriya, Sangeetha and Nambi (2004) carried out a research work on "Information seeking behaviour of Faculty Members from Government Arts Colleges in Cuddalore District." The purpose of their study was to investigate, how faculty members seek information from the library. It mentions that

most of the respondents 61 (38.12%) visited the library several times a week to meet their information needs. Regarding the type of search made by the respondents the majority of the respondents 91 (56.87%) made their search by subject.

The information-seeking activities of 31 faculties at Stanford University were studied by Reneker (1992). Using a naturalistic approach and qualitative techniques for the data collection, mainly personal interviews, the study found a close relationship between knowledge of the information environment and the sources used. Sethi (1990) used a questionnaire to study the information-seeking behaviour of 256 social science faculty members in Indian universities. It was found that respondents preferred journals, books, government documents, and reference sources for meeting their information needs. Hart (1993) reported faculty made about seven visits each semester to the library and looked at how scholars in different disciplines vary in their use of library resources.

Smith (1987) reported that about one-half of the respondents from Pennsylvania State University relied more on their personal collections and borrowing materials from other libraries. Guest (1987) noted that 85% of the respondents relied on their personal collection as a major source for information for teaching and research. The author also found that librarians were rated lowest as a source for getting information.

Abels (2004) mentioned that the frequency of use of the Internet in 1998-2000 had greatly increased. At the same time, expenditures on monographs showed steady increase. Challener (1999) investigated artists and art historians teaching in five liberal arts colleges and three universities. Results found that they need information for teaching. The participants almost all subscribe to art journals, and many read newspapers. They visit libraries frequently, usually more than one library, and unlike previous reports, the majorities are willing to ask the librarian for help. A large percentage of both art historians and artists are using computers for teaching. All 27 participants use slides extensively in the classroom, supplemented in most cases by textbooks.

Diani (1986) conducted a research on scientific information finding and distributing methods used by the members of faculty, agricultural department, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz by which he gathered the data through questionnaires. The results indicated that non-Persian books

were mainly used rather than other sources. Also, the personal library was highly preferred rather than other sources and centers; and 80% of the respondents mentioned to library with insufficient information sources.

Afshar Zanjani (1987) studied the specialty information finding methods by the members of faculty of Cultural Studies and Research Institute. The results revealed that the highest number of referring belonged to the central library of the institute and following it, the central library of Tehran University and library of the Literature and Humanities Faculty of Tehran University were registered. The personal library was with a remarkable significance. The main obstacles in the way of information seeking were lack of relationship between the libraries and international centers and poor familiarity of the members of faculty with the foreign languages and the well-known journals concerning their fields of studies and courses as well.

Bandara (1993) noted that 'if the library is to provide any meaningful information service, the user [information seeking] habits should be taken into consideration'. Since 1940s, numerous studies have been conducted investigating different aspects of this topic. Earlier studies primarily focused on scientists and technologists to assist in building information resources and systems to effectively meet their information needs (Reneker, 1992). Mwila (1993) used a questionnaire to study the use of University of Zambia library by its faculty for teaching and research purposes. It was found that humanities and social science faculty members used library more often compared to science faculty members.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study used questionnaire-based survey method, as many similar studies conducted earlier, have also used this method for data collection. This method is also preferred as it was less time consuming and economical for a scattered population. The population of the study consisted of all full-time academic staff working in the Karpagam University. Part-time and assistant lecturers were excluded from the population. The survey instrument consisted of two sections. Section 1 collected data on personal information about the respondents such as gender, academic rank, highest qualification and teaching experience.

In order to save time and ensure better response rate, one hundred and sixty questionnaires were personally

distributed to the academic staff in their offices. Respondents were requested to return the filled-in questionnaire to their departmental heads. Hundred and four (65%) filled-in questionnaires were returned within two weeks of distribution. A follow-up visit was made to non-respondents and a further 28 questionnaires were collected. A total of 132 filled-in questionnaires were received, showing an overall response rate of 82.5%.

IV. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The nature of information is not easy to describe. Perhaps the most explicit definition in the literature defines information as recorded experience that is used in decision making. Today, information technology has developed rapidly and has had a huge impact on access to information and on information seeking behavior. Librarian and library staff have to know and examine the criteria of information seeking and information used by users for providing information services, designing new information systems, intervening in the operation of existing systems, or planning in service programs.

The purpose of this study is to find the answers of the following questions:

1. What kind of information is needed for teaching and research?
2. What sources and channels are used, how and why are they used?
3. What difficulties and interconnected issues are involved in information seeking?
4. What study places are preferred by faculty members?
5. Does the physical environment of the library facilitate active learning?

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE I RESPONSE FROM FACULTY MEMBERS

Respondents	Questionnaire distributed		Response received	
	No. of Respondents	Percentage	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Lecturers	70	43.7	64	48.5
Asst. Professors	50	31.2	40	30.3
Associate Professors	20	12.5	18	13.6
Professors	20	12.5	10	7.0
Total	160	100	132	82.5

One hundred and sixty questionnaires were distributed and one hundred and thirty two responses were received. Of the 132 respondents, 64 (48.5%) were lecturers, 40 (30.3%) assistant professors, 18 (13.6%) associate professors, and 10 (7.6%) professors.

Respondents were asked to what purpose they are seeking information. 110 (83.3 %) faculty members sought information for preparing class lectures, 108 (81.8 %) for keeping up date knowledge, 80 (60.6%) for writing and presenting paper, 58 (43.9 %) for doing research work and 26 (19.6 %) for guiding research scholars.

TABLE II PURPOSE OF SEEKING INFORMATION

Purpose	Respondents	Percentage
For preparing class lectures	110	83.3
For updating knowledge	108	81.8
For writing and presenting paper	80	60.6
For doing research work	58	43.9
For guiding researchers	26	19.6

Respondents were asked to provide their teaching experience. The largest number of respondents, 50 (37.9%), has been teaching for the last 5 years or less. Thirty six (27.3%) respondents have between 6 and 10 years of teaching experience and 32 (24.3%) had between 11 and 20 years. 14 (10.6%) respondents have 21 or more years of teaching experience.

TABLE III TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Years	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 5 years	50	37.9
6 to 10 years	36	27.3
11 to 20 years	32	24.3
21 and above	14	10.6

Seventy four (56.1%) of the respondents were male and 58 (43.9%) were female.

TABLE IV GENDER

Respondents	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	74	56.1
Female	58	43.9

Faculty members were asked to indicate the type of information source which they used to seek information. For seeking information, textbooks were the popular type of information source for all faculty members (46.2 %). Twenty one point two percent of faculty members use journals.

Brown (1999) found that all of the scientists used textbooks, journals and monographs to support teaching activities.

TABLE V TYPE OF INFORMATION

Types of materials	Number	Percentage
Textbooks	61	46.2
Journals	28	21.2
Newspapers	12	9
Govt. Publications	7	5.3
Reference books	11	8.3
Thesis / Research reports	13	9.8

Respondents were asked to provide self assessment on their level of library use skills. It was assumed that library use skills might have a bearing on the ways respondents use the library to acquire the needed information. Those respondents who have better library use skills were expected to utilize library resources and facilities more effectively compared to those with poor library use skills. Data analysis showed that 34 (25.8%) of the respondents assessed their library use skills as 'very good', 72 (19.7%) as 'good' and 26 (19.7%) as fair. None of the respondents perceived their library use skills as 'excellent' or 'poor'.

TABLE VI SKILLS OF RESPONDENTS

Skill Level	Number	Percentage
Excellent	---	---
Very Good	34	25.8
Good	72	54.5
Fair	26	19.7
Poor	---	---

Respondents were also asked to provide self assessment on their level of computer use skills. It was assumed that level of computing skills might have an impact on their use of IT based library sources and facilities. Of the 132 respondents, four perceived his/her computing skills as 'excellent', 18 (13.8%) 'very good' and 60 (46.2%) as 'good' 42 (32.3%) as 'fair' and 8 (6.2%) as 'poor'.

TABLE VII COMPUTING SKILLS OF RESPONDENTS

Skill Level	Number	Percentage
Excellent	4	3
Very Good	18	13.8
Good	60	46.2
Fair	42	32.3
Poor	8	6.2

Respondents were asked how often they visited the library. Of the 132 participants who responded to this question, 10 (7.5%) respondents visited the library daily. Another 68 (51.5%) visited the library at least once or twice a week, 38 (28.7%) visited the library once or twice a month. A cross tabulation between the number of library visits and library use skills respondents was made to find out if any trend existed between these two variables. It was found that 81.3% of the respondents with 'very good' and 55.5% with 'good' library use skills visited their library once or twice a week. On the contrary, only 38.5% of the respondents with 'fair' library use skills made the same number of library visits. It appears that user with better library use skills are likely to visit library more frequently compared to those with low library use skills.

TABLE VIII LIBRARY VISITS

Visit Frequency	Number	Percentage
Almost daily	10	7.5
Once or twice a week	68	51.5
Once or twice a month	38	28.7
Several times a year	16	12.1
Never	--	--

Respondents were asked to provide their overall assessment of the effectiveness of KU library in meeting their information needs. Out of the 132 participants, 74 considered the library 'effective' in meeting their information needs. Another 52 (39.4%) of the respondents perceived the library as 'very ineffective'. It appeared that a majority of the faculty members were satisfied with the collections, services and facilities provided by the KU library for meeting their information needs.

TABLE IX LIBRARY EFFECTIVENESS

Effective level	Number	Percentage
Very effective	4	3.0
Effective	74	56.1
Somewhat effective	52	39.4
Ineffective	2	1.5
Very ineffective	--	--

VI. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the information needs and information seeking behavior of faculty members of Karpagam University, Coimbatore, India. It was found that respondents used a variety of information sources for teaching

and research. Books, thesis and journals were considered more important. It is interesting to note that, although respondents perceived the KU library as effective in meeting their information needs, they prefer to first consult their personal collections. It might be due to easy and convenient access to the personal collection and unawareness about library collection, services and facilities. It is understandable that no one library can acquire all materials produced in a particular discipline. However, in view of the fact that a considerable number of respondents visited other libraries, it is possible that they might not be aware of the interlibrary loan service provided by the KU library.

The study revealed that the respondents used IT based library sources and facilities less frequently compared with printed sources. It might be due to the lack of awareness about their availability, improper selection of materials or unfamiliarity with these products. Similarly, it is also noted that e-mail is the most popular internet application, whereas other internet based services and applications are only used by a limited number of respondents. This is a matter of concern, as presently, electronic information sources and the internet are considered extremely important tools for effective teaching and research. Therefore, the KU library might like to review its electronic information resources, while at the same time embark on an extensive library promotion and user education programme.

In regard to information seeking behavior of users in KU in Coimbatore, it is recommended that library staff could use their time in a better way by focusing on assisting users. In the reference section staff should help users to improve their skills in information seeking activities and to find the different type of information they need. Librarian should also assist users in learning the use of OPAC, search engine, CD-ROM techniques and inform them of the web sites available through the various networks. It is recommended that KU libraries should promote their activities through bulletin board and library web sites. Library web sites can cover information about the library, its activities, collections, online databases and methods of access. Librarians should continue to monitor technology and lifestyle changes. Adoption of technology should be based on evidence that supports adoption; evidence that validates the information seeker's perspective.

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