

Information Needs and Search Strategies of the Co-Ed College Students in Shillong: A Case Study

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This study discusses the information needs and search strategies of the co-ed college students in Shillong. It covers the different sources of information used by them and it also tries to bring out the problems they face during the search attempt for information. In this study we also tried to find out whether the students are using the library as one of the main sources of information or not, if not then what are the barriers that discourage them from doing so.

Keywords: *Information Needs, Search Strategies, Seeking Behavior, Information Used, Information Search*

0 INTRODUCTION

Information! Information! Information! Everywhere we are talking about information. Information is a vital source of every ones' life without which no one can survive in what we call as 'information age' or 'information society'. Due to the information explosion every body is sometimes confused or is not able to get the right. Information at the right time or sometimes does not get at all. These days plenty of information sources are available in various formats. Internet is one of those sources which can give all types of information required by the people at any time.

Library is considered as the heart of any institution or organization especially an academic institution. The all round development of the organization depends on the library. Therefore the college library should have a good collection of all types of information according to the requirements of the students, because at the college level, library is the main source of information which can really help in building up a bright future. Besides having a good collection, the library should also be able to

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provide the students with internet facilities from which they can access plenty of information.

1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Getting the right information at the right time is very important for college students. Therefore they should know which sources are the right sources for finding the information they need. But do the college students in Shillong know how to get the right information at the right time and from the right sources? What are the problems they face while seeking the required information? Is the library one of the sources which they depend on? What are the barriers that discourage them in using the library as one of the main sources of information? These are some of the research questions which motivated this study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Subrahmanyam (1983) conducted a study on the information seeking behavior of doctoral candidates in social sciences in Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, India. The method for data collection was interview. The research scholars were interviewed individually at their convenience and their responses were recorded and analyzed. The results of this study show that researchers made prolonged interaction with documentary sources and also made retrospective and current search. These were considered most useful type of information source in literature search. Moreover, abstracting and indexing journals were not used by the researchers except in psychology. The university library is the main source for locating the documents required. Besides this, inter library loan facility was utilized to a good extent. Ras (1987) carried out a survey on the information seeking behavior of scientists of the 'National Institute of Nutrition' Hyderabad by using a questionnaire method. The study revealed that information was sought out with regard to current information sources – documentary and non-documentary. The study concludes that non-scientists' information seeking behavior was mostly non-documentary and non-formal in character. Sangam (1989) analysed the information use pattern of researchers in the field of psychology by adopting a citation analysis method for this study. Twelve doctoral theses that had been accepted during 1964-1982 by the Karnataka University in the field of psychology were taken for the study. The important finding of this study show that books were the major sources of information, about 82.81% of books were used by the researchers in psychology followed by journal articles where 14.16% only were used and the finding also shows

that 93.80% of the documents cited were from their own field thus, indicating the fact that researchers in psychology depended on the information generated in their own field and their dependence on other subjects was very less. Moreover, 66.78% of documents cited were of Indian origin and the use of foreign language materials was very less. Journals of abnormal and social psychology ranked first in their citation (12.11%) followed by journal of personality and social psychology (9.95%). Another study was carried out by Lalitha (1995) on information seeking behavior of medical and engineering personnel. In this study the author described the results of a comparative study of the medical and engineering personnel of five libraries in Thiruvananthapuram, India. The students, teachers, practitioners and the research workers in both the fields were surveyed. The study has reported that neither of these professional groups seemed to have reportedly understood the complex nature of their information needs and their information sources. The study also further emphasized the need for user education for medical and engineering personnel. Lui and Redfern (1997) in their study on the information seeking behavior and needs of the Multi-cultural students at San Jose University (US) used a questionnaire method. The study has reported the results that students with English as their primary language usually were more successful in using the library than those from whom English is not their primary language. Moreover, students who used the library more frequently were more successful in locating needed information. However, the most interested finding was that students who ask reference questions more frequently were likely to be more successful in locating information. Asian students avoid asking reference questions, this is because of their cultural background. John (1997) analysed the information needs, use pattern and use behavior of social sciences researches by adopting the survey method based on questionnaire. The study revealed that books and periodicals are ranked first as well as second position as important sources of information. Some social science periodicals such as *Economic and Political Weekly*, seminar etc. were preferred by researchers in more than two disciplines. Only 10% of social scientists utilized users were fully satisfied with the collection in their library especially the non-book materials and abstracting and reviewing periodicals. The social scientists generally considered book catalogues and announcement bulletins as their first choice for gathering current information. A study conducted by Prasad and Tripathi (1998) revealed the results of a questionnaire survey undertaken at Banaras Hindu University based on the topic, "Information seeking behavior of physical

scientists and social scientist". The study found out the use of formal and informal channels of information, tools and techniques used for current awareness, publication output, use of materials available in languages other than English, types of information used and frequency of visits to the library. The study concluded that there are slight differences in the information seeking behavior and seeking strategies of the physical scientists in meeting their information needs. The study also further reported that there were no differences in their approach to information seeking process, information needs and sources used for satisfying their information requirements. Ammini (1999) carried out a survey on information need of the students of ship technology using the questionnaire method. The aim of this study was mainly the development of higher education with special emphasis on the post graduate studies and research in chosen disciplines under technology, industry and commerce. The results of the study are inconvenience of the library hours, users preference text books and dependence on library catalogues as a means for locating the information. Moreover, users consulted indexing and abstracting as well as review periodicals. At the same time periodicals collections were inadequate. The most important finding was that most of the users found problems in reading journals in German language.

3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

With the following objectives in mind the present study was carried out:

- (a) To find out the information needs of co-ed college students
- (b) To trace out the purpose of information search
- (c) To identify the strategies undertaken by the students for information search
- (d) To find out the information channel used by the students
- (e) To find out to what extent the college libraries are able to satisfy the students' needs
- (f) To know the sources of information which students are interested in using
- (g) To find out the information barriers encountered by them

4 METHODOLOGY

From the title itself it is clear that the present study is a case study. Review of relevant literature was also carried out to know about the relevant studies conducted in other places.

41 SAMPLE

For the study, 4(four) co-ed colleges situated in Shillong were selected namely St. Anthony's College, Synod College, Shillong College and Sengkhasi College, Co-ed Colleges were selected because it is easier for the researcher to collect the data from both the male and female students. 100 questionnaires were distributed to 100 students i.e 25 students were selected from each college where both male and female were selected randomly. Out of 100 questionnaires distributed only 88 were returned back i.e 88% of the students responded.

42 DATA SOURCES

Questionnaire method was adopted for the collection of data. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it could be answered within a short time and all the information needed for the study could be extracted from the students selected for the study. The questionnaire was divided into three categories i.e. Information needs, Information sources/channels and Information Barriers.

5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis was done according to the three categories of the questionnaire:

51 THE INFORMATION NEEDS

TABLE 1. Need for Information

Need for information	No. of Respondents	% of Response
Before writing an assignment	61	69.3
Before examination	21	23.9
An other reason	6	6.8
Total	88	100

Table 1 shows that 69% i.e most of the students realized the need for information before, writing an assignment and only 24% of them need the information before examination, only 6% of the students need the information for any other reasons such as (a) whenever they feel it is necessary for any task (b) for keeping themselves updated.

From the above table it is clear that 46.6% of the students search information for preparing for examination, 30% of them search for

TABLE 2. Purpose for Information Search

Purpose for information search	No. of respondents	% of response
Writing an assignment	21	23.9
Preparing for examination	41	46.6
Keeping up to date	26	29.5
Total	88	100

TABLE 3. Factors that Govern Information Search

Factors	No. of respondents To great extent	% of response	No. of respondents To some extent	% of response	No. of respondents Not at all	% of response	Total no of response
Purpose of information	39	44.3	47	53.4	2	2.3	88
Resources available	27	30.7	59	67	2	2.3	88

information just for keeping themselves up to date and 24% of them search for information for writing an assignment.

Table 3 indicates the responses made by the respondents on the factors that govern their information search for the first factor i.e. purpose of information, 53.4% of the respondents responded that this factor governed their searching to some extent only where as 44.3% responded that it govern them to great extent and only 2.3% of the respondents responded that it does not govern their search at all. The second factor i.e. resources available, 67% of the respondents support to some extent, 30.7% support to great extent and only 2.3% of the respondents responded that this factor does not influence them at all.

TABLE 4. When Information required is not available

When information required is not available	No. of respondents	% of response
Change my information need	10	11.4
Change my seeking strategy	26	29.5
Consult with the library staff	47	53.4
I give up	5	5.7
Total	88	100.0

Table 4 shows that 53.4% of the respondents consult with the library staff whenever the information required is not available, 29.5% of them change their seeking strategies, 11.4% change their information need and 5.7% of the respondents gave up when ever the required information could not be acquired.

TABLE 5 (a): Number of Students Who Visit The Library

Visiting of their college	No. of respondents	% of response Library
Yes	84	95.4
No	4	4.5
Total	88	100

From table 5(a) it is understood that 95.4% of the students do visit the library and only 4.5% of them do not visit the library.

TABLE 5(b). Purpose of Visiting The Library

Purpose of visiting the library	No. of respondents	% of response
To read books	20	23.8
To locate specific chapter	52	61.9
Feel lack of information	12	14.3
Total	84	100

Table 5(b) indicates that 61.3% of the students visit the library to locate the specific chapter for their study, 25% of them visit the library to read books and 13.6% of the students do visit the library because they feel lack of information.

TABLE 6. Frequency of Visiting The Library

Frequency of Visiting the Library	No. of respondents	% of response
Every day	13	14.8
Once a week	21	23.9
Almost daily	9	10.2
Sometimes	45	51.1
Total	88	100

Table 6 shows that 51.1% of the students visit the library sometimes, 23.9 % of them visit the library once a week only, 14.8% of them they visit the library every day and 10.2% of them they visit the library almost daily which means not every day but it could be twice or thrice a week.

TABLE 7. Factors Affecting Irregular Use of Library

Factor affecting irregular use of library	No. of respondents	% of response
Library atmosphere is not conducive to reading	37	42.05
Library timing are not convenient	36	40.90
An other reasons	15	17.05
TOTAL	88	100

The table above clearly indicates that 42.05% of the respondents do not use the library regularly due to the library atmosphere which is not conducive to reading, 40.90% of the respondents do not regularly use the library due to the library timings which are not convenient to them and 17.05% of them provide certain reasons such as (a) Not much document information is available and (b) Find difficulty in reading with others.

TABLE 8 (a). Helpfulness of Library Staff

Extent of helpfulness of library staff	No. of respondents	% of response
To a great extent	23	26.13
To some extent	56	63.63
Not at all	9	10.22
Total	88	99.98

Table 8 (a) shows that 63.63% of the respondents get help from the library staff to some extent only, 26.13% of the respondents responded that they get help from the library staff to great extent and only 10.22% of the respondents said that they are not getting help from the library staff at all.

TABLE 8 (b). Reasons Why the Library Staff Is Not Helpful

Reason for not helpful	No. of respondents	% of response
Staff members do not understand the students' needs	40	45.5
They are not communicative	38	43.2
Any other reasons	10	11.3
Total	88	100

Table 8(b) clearly indicates that according to the respondents, 45.5% of them responded that the reason why the library staff are not helpful is because they do not understand the students' information needs, 43.2% of the respondents say that the library staff are not communicative and 11.3 of the respondents provide different reasons such (i) they never ask for help from the library staff; and (ii) mostly the staff works only for the sake of earning and are not willing to help.

52 INFORMATION SOURCES/CHANGES

TABLE 9. Dependence on College Library

Extent of dependence	No. of respondents	%of response
To great extent	24	27.3
To some extent	61	69.3
Not at all	3	3.4
Total	88	100

Table 9 shows that 69% of the respondents depend on their college library to some extent only, 27.3% of them depend to great extent and only 3.4% of them who do not depend at all on their college library.

TABLE 10(a). Maintaining Personal Collection

Maintaining personal collection	No. of respondents	% of response
Yes	52	59.1
No	36	40.9
Total	88	100

It can be inferred from Table 10(a) that 59.1% of the students do maintain their personal collection where as 40.9% of them do not.

TABLE 10(b). Dependence on Personal Collection

Extent of dependence on collections	Personal collections	No. of respondents
To great extent	29	55.8
To some extent	23	44.2
Total	52	100

For those respondents who say that they do maintain their personal collection they were also asked to indicate how much they depended on it, 55.8% of them say that they depend to great extent and only 44.2% of them depend to some extent only.

TABLE 11. Membership of Other Libraries Apart From The College Library

Membership in other libraries	No. of respondents	% of response
Yes	5	5.7
No	83	94.3
Total	88	100

A majority of the respondent i.e 94.3% reported that they are not the member of other libraries where as only 5.7% of them say that they enrolled themselves as member of other libraries also apart from their own college libraries especially the State Central Library, Shillong.

TABLE 12. Dependence on Different sources of Information

Dependence on different sources	No. of respondents	% of response	No. of respondents	% of response	No. of respondents	% of response	Total no of response	Total % of response
	To great extent		To some extent		Not at all			
Books	63	71.6	-	-	88	100		
Journals	13	14.8	53	60.2	22	25.0	88	100
Newspapers	42	47.7	41	46.6	5	5.7	88	100
Television	44	50.0	35	39.8	9	10.2	88	100
Internet	45	51.13	31	35.23	12	13.64	88	100

The above table clearly indicates that 71.6% of the respondents rely on books to a great extent, 28.4% rely on it to some extent and there are none who do not rely on books.

About 60.2% of the respondents use journal as one of their sources of information to some extent, 14.8% indicate their use to a great extent and 25% indicate that they never used it at all.

47.7% of the respondents indicate the use of newspapers a great extent, 46.6% to some extent and 5.7% responded not at all.

50% of the respondents indicate the use of television to a great extent, 39.8% rely on in to some extent and 10.2% do not rely on the television.

The table above also indicates that 51.13% rely on internet to a great extent, 35.23% rely on it to some extent and 13.64% do not depend on it at all.

Besides, these sources about 5.7% of the respondents opted for the

other sources of information such as Radio and through conversation with friends and teachers.

TABLE 13 (a). Internet Facilities in The Respective Colleges

Availability of internet facilities	No. of respondents	% of response
Yes	53	60.2
No	35	39.8
Total	88	100

In Table 13 (a), there are 60.2% of the respondents who said that their college does provide internet facilities for them and 39.8% of them say that their college does not provide internet facilities for searching the information.

TABLE 13(b). Extent of Help From The Internet Facilities

Extent of help from the internet facilities	No. of respondents	%of response
To great extent	32	60.4
To some extent	21	39.6
Not at all	-	-
Total	53	100

Out of 53 respondents who responded that they have internet facilities in their respective colleges, 60.4% of them depend on internet to a great extent. Whereas 39.6% of them depend to some extent only and none of them say that they do not depend at all.

53 INFORMATION BARRIER

TABLE 14. Constraints in Collecting Information

Constraints in collecting information	No. of respondents	%of response
Yes	68	77.3
No	20	22.7
TOTAL	88	100

From table 14 we find that 77.3% of the students are facing some constraints while collecting the information they need and 22.7% do not.

From the above table 64.7% of the respondents indicate the barrier for collecting the required information is the shortage of resources to a great

TABLE 15. Extents of Barrier In Collecting

Extent of barriers sources	No. of respondents To great extent	% of response	No. of respondents To some extent	% of response	No. of respondents Not at all	% of response	Total no of response	Total % of response
Shortage of resources	44	64.7	24	35.3	—	—	68	100
Un-cooperative attitude of the library staff	9	13.2	35	51.5	24	35.3	68	100
Lack of knowledge in using the library	8	11.8	40	58.8	20	29.4	68	100
Ineffective services of the library	8	11.8	33	48.5	27	39.7	68	100
Communication barriers	9	13.2	45	66.2	14	20.6	68	100

extent, 35.3% indicate it to some extent and none of the respondents says that there is shortage of resources. In the second point, we find that 51.5% of the respondents indicate the cooperative attitude of the library staff to some extent, 35.3% indicate that the library staff is not cooperative at all and 13.2% responded to a great extent only. In the third point, 58.8% of the respondents show that there is lack of knowledge in using the library, 29.4% indicate that lack of knowledge in using library is not at all a barrier and 11.8% of the respondents indicate the lacking of knowledge in using the library to a great extent. 48.5% of the respondents cite ineffective services of the library as a barrier, 39.7% indicate not at all and 11.8% of the respondents indicate to a great extent regarding the ineffective services of the library. 66.2% of the respondents indicate the communication barriers to some extent, 13.2% indicate to a great extent and 20.6% indicate not at all while referring to the communication barriers.

COMMENTS FROM THE RESPONDENTS

The following are the comments provided by the respondents on their libraries:-

1. Internet facilities should be provided to the students free of charge.
2. More journals should be subscribed by the college libraries.
3. Surroundings of the library should be pleasant.

4. Government should take certain responsibilities in building up the college libraries.
5. Awareness programmes and encouragement should be given to the students to make use of computers as well as the various sources that are available in the library.
6. Book collection should be increased.
7. Library staff should be more communicative and more helpful in locating the desired information.

6. FINDINGS

After the data were analyzed properly the following are the major finding of the study:-

1. The main problem is the collection of resources where 67% of the respondents reveal that college libraries do not have adequate collections or we can say that libraries do have their collections but their helpfulness is only to some extent.
2. Another factor that affects the irregular use of the library is that, the library atmosphere is not conducive to reading and also the library timing is not convenient. In this case 82.9% of the respondents supported the above view point.
3. It was also found out that the library staff was not communicative, in this case 43.2% of the respondents supported this point.
4. Frequency of visiting the library by the college students is also very low where only 14;8% of the students do visit it daily. And most of them do visit it sometimes only.
5. Library staff are some how helpful to the students if not to a great extent but at least to some extent. However, in this case 89.76% of the students agree to it.
6. It was also found out that only 27.3% of the respondents depend on their college library to a great extent while the remaining 72.7% depend either on their personal collections or on other libraries particularly the "The State Central Library, Shllilong".
7. Moreover, the study has also found out that there are still many more students that do not use internet as one of their sources of information. In fact other sources of information such as journals, newspapers, television are also less reliable to the students. Books however, were considered to be their best sources for acquiring information whereby 71.6% of the respondents rely on it.

7. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the above finding here are some of the suggestions:

1. Library staff should be more communicative, friendly, and helpful. They should also try to know and understand the requirement of the students. Therefore, in this case the college libraries should employ well qualified staff who can fully understand the users' needs.
2. More journals and newspapers should be subscribed to college libraries so that students can acquire the current information.
3. College libraries should also provide internet facilities to the students. For this, the libraries should arrange a kind of programme that will encourage those students who are still unaware of the use of computers.
4. There should be adequate amount of documents both Indian and Foreign publications.
5. Library timing should also be fixed according to the convenience of the students.
6. Library user education should be conducted from time to time.
7. The library atmosphere should be welcoming, comfortable and pleasant for the students to read.

8. CONCLUSION

From the finding of the study it is understood that there are many problems faced by the students while seeking the information which they need. The college library plays a vital role in bringing up the career of the students. Most of the students will depend on the library for their study. The library should have enough collection, should have qualified library staff who will be able to help the students in getting what they want, should have a library atmosphere which is conducive to reading. In this world of technology, the college library should also be modern enough and provide the students with internet facilities which can help them in getting the required and up dated information within one click. Therefore the higher authorities who look after the colleges should take initiative seriously in bringing up good libraries for the betterment of their institutions.

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