

USER BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS TOWARDS LIBRARY SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Libraries in higher educational institutions have evolved from traditional repositories of books into dynamic learning environments that provide access to print, electronic, and digital information resources. Undergraduate and postgraduate students constitute the primary users of these services, and their behaviour towards library usage significantly influences the effectiveness of academic support services. Understanding students' information needs, resource preferences, frequency of library visits, and satisfaction levels is essential for improving library services and promoting academic excellence. This article examines the user behaviour of undergraduate and postgraduate students towards library services in higher educational institutions by reviewing existing literature, identifying the factors influencing library usage, and discussing strategies for enhancing library services. The study highlights that digital literacy, accessibility of electronic resources, quality of services, infrastructure, and librarian support are major determinants of library usage. The findings emphasize the need for user-centric library services that meet the evolving academic and research requirements of students.

Keywords: User behaviour, Undergraduate students, Postgraduate students, Library services, Information-seeking behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries play a crucial role in supporting teaching, learning, research, and knowledge creation within higher educational institutions. Traditionally, libraries focused on maintaining printed collections; however, technological advancements have transformed them into hybrid information centres offering digital databases, e-books, institutional repositories, multimedia resources, and online reference services. Consequently, the behaviour of library users has undergone substantial changes.

Undergraduate students generally use library resources for coursework, assignments, examinations, and skill development, whereas postgraduate students rely heavily on advanced scholarly resources for dissertations, research projects, and publications. Their expectations from library services vary according to academic requirements, digital competency, and research experience. Understanding these behavioural differences enables library administrators to improve resource allocation, enhance user satisfaction, and promote effective utilization of library services.

CONCEPT OF USER BEHAVIOUR IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

User behaviour refers to the manner in which individuals identify their information needs, search for information, evaluate available resources, and utilize library services to accomplish academic or research objectives. In academic libraries, user behaviour encompasses patterns of library visits, preference for printed and digital resources, use of electronic databases, interaction with librarians, and

satisfaction with available facilities. The increasing adoption of information and communication technologies has transformed traditional information-seeking behaviour into digitally oriented learning practices. Students now expect instant access to quality information through online catalogues, digital repositories, mobile applications, and cloud-based library services.

RESEARCH GAP

Most previous research has focused either on the utilization of specific library resources or on user satisfaction with traditional library services, while comparatively few studies have examined students' overall behavioural patterns toward both physical and digital library services in an integrated manner. Although numerous studies have investigated library usage and information-seeking behaviour in higher educational institutions, significant research gaps remain. The rapid adoption of digital technologies, electronic resources, artificial intelligence, remote access facilities, and online learning platforms has fundamentally transformed students' interactions with academic libraries, yet many existing studies do not adequately capture these emerging behavioural changes. Furthermore, limited research has compared the behavioural differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding their preferences, frequency of library use, digital competencies, and expectations from modern library services. Most investigations have been conducted in individual institutions or specific geographical regions, reducing the generalizability of their findings. There is also insufficient empirical evidence regarding the influence of technological infrastructure, information literacy, service quality, and institutional support on students' library usage behaviour. Therefore, a comprehensive study examining students' behaviour toward both conventional and digital library services in higher educational institutions is essential to provide updated evidence that supports effective library planning, user-centered service development, and continuous improvement in academic information services.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study is important because academic libraries remain central to teaching, learning, research, and knowledge creation in higher educational institutions. As educational environments become increasingly digital, students' expectations and information-seeking practices continue to evolve. Understanding user behaviour enables library administrators to design services that meet the academic and research needs of diverse student groups. The study provides valuable insights into students' preferences for printed resources, electronic databases, digital libraries, remote access services, and research support facilities. It also helps identify factors that encourage or discourage effective utilization of library resources. The findings will assist librarians in improving service quality, developing information literacy programmes, expanding digital collections, and enhancing user satisfaction. Educational administrators can use the results to formulate policies that strengthen library infrastructure and promote equitable access to information resources. Faculty members will benefit from understanding students' information needs and incorporating appropriate library resources into teaching practices. Additionally, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in library and information science by providing empirical evidence on changing user behaviour in the digital era. Ultimately, the research supports the development of student-centered library services that improve academic performance, research productivity, lifelong learning, and institutional excellence.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Higher educational institutions invest substantial financial and technological resources in developing modern academic libraries; however, the effective utilization of these services varies considerably among students. While libraries provide extensive collections of printed books, electronic journals,

digital repositories, internet facilities, research support, and information literacy programmes, many students continue to underutilize these resources because of limited awareness, inadequate digital competencies, lack of information literacy skills, or preferences for freely available online information. The rapid transition toward digital learning environments has further altered students' information-seeking behaviour, creating challenges for libraries in meeting changing user expectations. Undergraduate and postgraduate students often exhibit different patterns of resource utilization, but these behavioural differences are not always clearly understood by library administrators. Furthermore, insufficient knowledge regarding the factors influencing library usage limits the ability of institutions to improve service quality and maximize resource utilization. Without a comprehensive understanding of students' behaviour toward library services, institutions may fail to develop effective strategies for enhancing user engagement and academic support. Therefore, there is a need to investigate students' behavioural patterns, preferences, satisfaction levels, and influencing factors to strengthen library services and ensure that academic libraries continue to play a meaningful role in supporting education, research, and lifelong learning.

LIBRARY SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Modern academic libraries provide a comprehensive range of services designed to support students' academic and research activities. These include: These services collectively contribute to effective learning and research by ensuring timely access to reliable information resources.

USER BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS

Undergraduate students primarily utilize library resources for academic coursework, examination preparation, project work, and general knowledge enhancement.

Figure: 1



LIBRARY SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

1. Circulation Services: Circulation services are the core functions of an academic library that facilitate the borrowing, returning, renewing, and reserving of library materials such as books, journals, dissertations, and multimedia resources. These services ensure that users have timely access to the information resources required for academic learning and research. Modern circulation systems are automated using integrated library management software, enabling students to check book availability, renew borrowed materials online, and receive due-date reminders. Barcode and RFID

technologies have further improved the efficiency and accuracy of circulation activities. Effective circulation services reduce waiting time, enhance resource utilization, and promote equitable access to library collections. They also help libraries monitor usage patterns, manage inventories, and maintain accountability for borrowed materials, thereby supporting teaching, learning, and research in higher educational institutions.

2. Reference and Information Services: Reference and information services assist library users in identifying, locating, evaluating, and utilizing information effectively. These services are provided by trained librarians who guide students and researchers in accessing printed and electronic resources relevant to their academic needs. Reference services include answering queries, literature searches, bibliographic assistance, database navigation, citation guidance, and referral services. In modern academic libraries, reference support is offered through face-to-face interactions, email, online chat, and virtual consultations. These services play a significant role in improving information literacy and research quality by helping users retrieve reliable and authoritative information efficiently. Effective reference services encourage independent learning, enhance research productivity, and enable students to develop critical thinking skills necessary for academic success and lifelong learning.

3. Digital Library Services: Digital library services provide users with online access to electronic information resources through institutional digital platforms. These services include access to e-books, e-journals, digital theses, institutional repositories, multimedia collections, and subscribed databases. Digital libraries enable users to retrieve information anytime and anywhere using internet-enabled devices, thereby overcoming geographical and time constraints. They support remote learning, online education, and collaborative research activities. Advanced search features, metadata indexing, and digital preservation techniques improve the accessibility and organization of digital resources. Digital library services also facilitate knowledge sharing among institutions and researchers. As higher education increasingly embraces digital transformation, these services have become essential in supporting teaching, research, innovation, and continuous learning while reducing dependence on printed materials.

4. E-books and E-journals: E-books and e-journals have become indispensable resources in academic libraries, providing instant access to current and scholarly information. E-books offer comprehensive digital versions of textbooks, reference books, and research publications, while e-journals provide peer-reviewed articles across diverse academic disciplines. Students and researchers can access these resources remotely through institutional subscriptions, making information available beyond library working hours. Advanced search functions, bookmarking, highlighting, downloading, and citation export features enhance usability and research efficiency. Electronic resources also support interdisciplinary research by providing updated knowledge and global scholarly perspectives. Their accessibility on computers, tablets, and smartphones promotes flexible learning environments. Consequently, e-books and e-journals significantly contribute to improving academic performance, research productivity, and knowledge dissemination in higher educational institutions.

5. Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC): The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is a computerized library catalogue that enables users to search and locate library resources efficiently. It provides bibliographic information such as title, author, publisher, subject, call number, and availability status of books and other materials. Users can perform keyword, title, author, or subject searches and reserve materials through the OPAC interface. Modern OPAC systems integrate digital resources, institutional repositories, and external databases, providing a comprehensive information retrieval platform. The system minimizes manual searching and improves accessibility by allowing users to identify relevant resources quickly. OPAC also supports personalized accounts where users

can monitor borrowing history, renew books, and manage reservations, thereby enhancing overall user convenience and library service quality.

6. Institutional Repositories: Institutional repositories are digital archives that preserve, organize, and disseminate the scholarly output of higher educational institutions. These repositories typically contain theses, dissertations, research articles, conference papers, faculty publications, datasets, and institutional reports. By providing open access to academic content, repositories increase the visibility, accessibility, and impact of institutional research. They support knowledge preservation, promote academic collaboration, and ensure long-term digital storage of scholarly works. Institutional repositories also facilitate compliance with open-access publishing policies and funding agency requirements. Advanced search capabilities enable researchers to discover relevant institutional research efficiently. Consequently, institutional repositories serve as valuable knowledge management systems that contribute to research excellence, academic reputation, and global dissemination of scientific and scholarly information.

7. Remote Access to Databases: Remote access to databases enables students, faculty members, and researchers to utilize subscribed electronic resources outside the physical library premises. Through authentication systems such as VPNs, proxy servers, or institutional login credentials, users can access scholarly databases, e-books, journals, and research tools anytime and from any location. This service supports distance education, online learning, and flexible research activities by eliminating geographical barriers. Remote access became particularly significant during periods of virtual learning and continues to facilitate uninterrupted academic work. It ensures continuous availability of quality information resources while promoting independent learning and research productivity. Secure authentication mechanisms protect licensed resources while maintaining convenient access for authorized users, thereby enhancing overall academic support services.

8. Internet and Wi-Fi Facilities: Internet and Wi-Fi facilities are fundamental components of modern academic libraries, enabling users to access online information resources, digital databases, learning management systems, and scholarly communication platforms. High-speed internet connectivity supports research, online learning, video conferencing, collaborative projects, and access to cloud-based educational resources. Wireless connectivity allows students to use personal laptops, tablets, and smartphones within library premises, creating flexible learning environments. Reliable internet infrastructure also supports digital library services, online catalogues, institutional repositories, and multimedia learning resources. Libraries equipped with strong internet facilities encourage technology-enabled education and improve users' digital competencies. Consequently, internet and Wi-Fi services have become essential in promoting academic excellence, innovation, and knowledge sharing in higher educational institutions.

9. Research Support Services: Research support services are specialized library services designed to assist researchers throughout the research process. These services include literature searching, systematic review support, citation management, research data management, bibliometric analysis, publication guidance, journal selection, copyright advice, and research impact assessment. Librarians provide expert assistance in accessing scholarly databases, identifying relevant literature, and managing references using citation software. Research support also includes workshops on research methodologies, academic writing, and open-access publishing. By facilitating efficient information retrieval and scholarly communication, these services improve research quality and productivity. Research support services play a critical role in helping students and faculty members conduct high-quality research, publish internationally, and contribute to institutional research excellence.

10. Information Literacy Programmes: Information literacy programmes equip students with the knowledge and skills required to identify, locate, evaluate, and ethically use information from various sources. These programmes teach users how to formulate research questions, conduct effective database searches, evaluate the credibility of information, avoid misinformation, and cite sources correctly. Information literacy also promotes ethical information use by emphasizing plagiarism prevention and intellectual property rights. Academic libraries organize workshops, orientation sessions, online tutorials, and hands-on training to improve students' research competencies. Information-literate individuals become independent learners capable of making informed academic decisions. These programmes significantly enhance critical thinking, lifelong learning, digital literacy, and research effectiveness while preparing students to succeed in academic, professional, and information-rich environments.

11. Plagiarism Checking Assistance: Plagiarism checking assistance helps students and researchers maintain academic integrity by identifying similarities between submitted work and existing publications. Libraries provide access to plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin, iThenticate, or other institutional tools. Librarians guide users in interpreting similarity reports, correcting citation errors, paraphrasing appropriately, and understanding ethical writing practices. These services educate users about intellectual property rights, copyright compliance, and responsible research conduct. Plagiarism assistance reduces instances of academic misconduct while improving the originality and credibility of scholarly work. Regular training sessions on citation styles, referencing techniques, and academic writing further strengthen ethical research practices. Consequently, plagiarism checking services contribute to maintaining high academic standards and research quality.

12. User Orientation Programmes: User orientation programmes familiarize new students and faculty members with library resources, services, facilities, policies, and technologies. These programmes introduce users to library catalogues, digital databases, borrowing procedures, reference services, institutional repositories, and online learning resources. Orientation sessions may include guided library tours, practical demonstrations, workshops, and interactive training activities. The primary objective is to develop confidence in using library resources independently and efficiently. Well-designed orientation programmes improve resource utilization, reduce user confusion, and encourage greater participation in academic and research activities. They also enhance users' awareness of emerging library technologies and specialized support services. Effective orientation programmes foster positive library experiences and promote lifelong information-seeking skills.

13. Inter-library Loan Services: Inter-library loan services enable libraries to obtain books, journal articles, dissertations, and other academic materials from partner institutions when required resources are unavailable locally. This cooperative arrangement expands access to scholarly information without requiring libraries to own every publication. Users submit requests through library staff or online systems, and materials are borrowed or shared electronically depending on licensing agreements. Inter-library loan services support advanced research by providing access to specialized and rare information resources. These services encourage collaboration among academic libraries, optimize resource utilization, and reduce duplication of expensive collections. Consequently, inter-library loan services significantly enhance research opportunities and ensure equitable access to scholarly information across institutions.

14. Reading and Discussion Spaces: Reading and discussion spaces provide comfortable, well-designed environments that support individual study, collaborative learning, academic discussions, and research activities. Modern academic libraries offer silent reading areas, group discussion rooms, multimedia learning spaces, collaborative workstations, and technology-enabled study zones. These

facilities create flexible learning environments that accommodate diverse learning styles and academic needs. Comfortable seating, proper lighting, air conditioning, charging points, and internet connectivity contribute to a productive study atmosphere. Discussion rooms encourage teamwork, project-based learning, and knowledge sharing among students and researchers. By providing conducive physical learning environments alongside digital resources, reading and discussion spaces enhance student engagement, academic performance, creativity, and overall satisfaction with library services.

CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS

Despite technological advancements, students continue to encounter several challenges:

- Limited awareness of electronic resources.
- Inadequate digital literacy skills.
- Difficulty accessing subscription databases.
- Information overload.
- Poor internet connectivity.
- Insufficient training in research methodologies.
- Limited availability of updated books.
- Lack of personalized research assistance.

Addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the benefits of library services.

Strategies for Enhancing Library Services

Higher educational institutions can improve user engagement through several initiatives:

- Strengthening digital library infrastructure.
- Expanding access to e-books and online journals.
- Conducting regular information literacy programmes.
- Providing personalized research consultation services.
- Introducing mobile-based library applications.
- Extending library working hours.
- Enhancing remote access facilities.
- Regularly updating print and electronic collections.
- Collecting user feedback for continuous service improvement.
- Integrating artificial intelligence tools for information retrieval and user support.

These measures can significantly improve students' learning experiences and increase effective utilization of library resources.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY

The findings of this study have important implications for students, librarians, academic administrators, policymakers, and researchers. By identifying the behavioural patterns of students toward library services, the study will enable libraries to develop user-centered services that align with

contemporary educational needs. The results will assist librarians in improving circulation systems, expanding digital collections, strengthening research support services, and designing effective information literacy programmes. Academic administrators can utilize the findings to allocate resources efficiently, modernize library infrastructure, and formulate policies that encourage greater utilization of library facilities. Faculty members may integrate library resources more effectively into classroom teaching and research activities, thereby enhancing students' academic engagement. The study also contributes to institutional planning by identifying barriers to library usage and recommending practical strategies for improving accessibility, service quality, and technological support. From a scholarly perspective, the research enriches the literature on user behaviour and information-seeking practices in academic libraries, particularly within rapidly evolving digital environments. The findings may also serve as a foundation for future comparative studies involving different institutions, disciplines, or countries, thereby contributing to the continuous improvement of library services and promoting knowledge-based educational development.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the anticipated findings, higher educational institutions should continuously modernize library services to meet the changing information needs of students. Libraries should strengthen digital infrastructure by expanding subscriptions to electronic journals, e-books, and online databases while ensuring seamless remote access. Regular information literacy programmes and user orientation sessions should be organized to improve students' searching, evaluation, and ethical use of information resources. Librarians should provide personalized research consultation, reference assistance, and training on citation management and plagiarism prevention. Institutions should invest in high-speed internet connectivity, comfortable reading spaces, collaborative learning environments, and technology-enabled study facilities. User feedback should be collected periodically to evaluate service quality and identify emerging needs. Libraries should also integrate artificial intelligence-based search tools, mobile applications, and cloud-based services to enhance user convenience and accessibility. Collaboration with faculty members is recommended to encourage greater use of library resources in teaching and research activities. Finally, periodic assessment of user behaviour should be conducted to monitor changing preferences and support evidence-based decision-making. Implementing these recommendations will improve library utilization, enhance student satisfaction, strengthen research capabilities, and contribute to the overall quality and effectiveness of higher education.

CONCLUSION

The behaviour of undergraduate and postgraduate students towards library services reflects the changing nature of higher education and technological advancement. While undergraduate students primarily seek resources for coursework and examinations, postgraduate students require specialized research support and access to scholarly information. Libraries must therefore adopt user-centred approaches that integrate digital technologies, quality information resources, and personalized services to meet diverse academic needs. Continuous assessment of user behaviour will enable higher educational institutions to design responsive library systems that foster academic excellence, research productivity, and lifelong learning.

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