

INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES UNDERGRADUATES AT SOUTH EASTERN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

MIM. Jazeel¹ & K. Dehigama²

¹Department of Islamic Studies, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

²Library, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
Jazeelmi@seu.ac.lk, kdehigama@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: This research is taken up to study the information seeking Behaviour of undergraduates of Faculty of Arts and Culture and Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, with special reference to their information needs, main sources of information and barriers they encountered in meeting these needs. This study employed a survey research design and therefore the structured questionnaire was among 187 students to collect data. Study sample (N161) is characterized by the 79% female undergraduates and 98% Tamil language speaking undergraduate students. The findings of the study established that information needs of the undergraduates are led by prepare for examination. A great majority of the students indicated that lecture notes as their main information source, while 76% rated university library and the Internet (63%) is followed by. They start seeking for information, using lecture notes (86%), inquiring from the senior students (74.53%) and browsing internet. Challenges encountered while seeking for information is attributed to both institutional and personal reasons. Since it is established undergraduates are not in a closer relationship with the library professionals, with a view to provide them with a more conducive learning environment, and effective and productive services, it is recommended to reach out students by conducting frequent information literacy skill programmes.

Keywords: Behavior, Undergraduate, Information

1. INTRODUCTION

South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) is the successor of South Eastern University College started initially with two faculties; Faculty of Arts and Culture (FAC) and Faculty of Management and Commerce in 1995. With the expansion of SEUSL, other faculties, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Languages (FIA) and Faculty of Engineering (FE) were opened. FAC, which is one of the prime faculties in the university provide its undergraduates flexibility in the selection of range of courses in order to accommodate the changing requirements of the students as well as the society. While FAC accommodates 814 students, being the only one faculty of its (SEUSL Statistics, 2014/2015) nature, FIA caters to 1051 undergraduate students (Academic Division - SEUSL-2014/2015). SEUSL is now upgraded as a fully-fledged university with its five faculties and an excellent library. Users of the library are catered with excellent facilities and effective and efficient services understanding the key role of information plays in problem solving, decision making and academic success of undergraduates (Wang and Frank, 2002). The approach that is involved in searching and retrieving of information is known as Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB) (Nadzir & Salim, 2013). Ability to understand information needs, identify various information sources available, finding identified sources using appropriate strategies as well as overcoming the challenges faced in accessing information significant in this regard. Therefore, this study is taken up to understand the ISB of undergraduates of Faculty of Arts and Culture and Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, with special reference to their information needs and challenges they faced in meeting these needs. The outcome of the study would help undergraduates, in order to facilitate them with a more conducive learning environment throughout their academic life and also librarians in making their services further efficient and productive.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the changing needs of ISB of undergraduates in universities is significant in order to plan, implement services and information systems according to the requirement. Wright et al (2006) posit information seeking behavior studies are essential to understand how students obtained, managed and used the required information. "The approach involved in retrieving the relevant

information or also known as the information seeking behaviour should begin with identifying the needed information. This is followed by selecting the appropriate sources of information and finding the required information by using selected strategies” (Nadzir& Salim, 2013: p168) In identifying different information seeking behaviours among undergraduates of school of Computing at the Utara Malaysia Nadzir (2015) established that academic information is the most needed information followed by research information, information related to higher education and general information. Study further revealed that unavailability of required materials in order to fulfill information needs is the major barrier in accessing information. Kakai, Ikoja-Odongo and Kigongo-Bukenyas' (2004) carried out a cross sectional survey to find out ISB of 104 undergraduates of Department of Biochemistry in the Faculty of Science and the Department of History in the Faculty of Arts, Makerere University Uganda. In their findings main information needs are associated with the course work and assignments, preparation for examinations and tests, general reading to enhance lecture notes, and class–group discussions. Tallying with the finding of Littlejohn and Benson–Tally (1990), this study confirms that students’ information needs are related to their studies. While the selected groups are mainly depending on the text books, limitations in borrowing, insufficient number of books, out dated materials, poor user educated programs are attributed among the barriers limiting the students’ access in information in the library. Undergraduate students low level of ISB and their lack of basic skills on effective use of information is established in the study carried out by Rasuli et al (2013). Selecting first year biology and final year biochemistry undergraduates of University College Dublin, as the sample of his quantitative study Callinan (2005), investigates the characteristics of ISB pertaining to them. The study highlights the lesser usage of electronic databases by biology undergraduates is characterized due to lack of awareness. In another study conducted by Whitmire (2002) on the undergraduates in the humanities, established that their higher library usage that is attributed by frequent usage of catalogues, seeking help from the librarians, searching of library collections and usage of journal indexes and reserve collections. Oyadei (2014) established that assignments, examinations, seminars and workshops are played a key role among the factors that influence the ISB of undergraduate students. He further found that internet, lecture notes, text books and handout are the most preferred and used information sources.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aims to

- Understand the information needs of the selected undergraduates
- Identify the Main sources of information used by the undergraduates
- Detect the barriers encountered by the undergraduates in meeting their information needs

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey research design to elicit data from the selected undergraduates. A self-administered structured questionnaire was the instrument used to collect data in the research. Due to its inherent characteristics of relatively ease of administer, inexpensiveness and ability to reach large number of participants (Nardi, 2006; Singh, 2007) questionnaire survey was selected in the study. The population consist of randomly selected undergraduates of Faculty of Arts and Culture and Faculty of Islamic Studies, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. 10% of the total student universe of two faculties were selected for the study. Questionnaires were administered among selected undergraduates in the lecture rooms with the help and consent of the lectures. Students were explained the purpose of the study and each question was explained in Tamil as the questionnaire was prepared in English language. In the study undergraduate students were asked about their demographic features, including gender, mostly used language in daily communication and English language competency. Then their information needs, sources they used to find information, how students start searching for information and barriers they encountered in finding information were included in the questionnaire. 167 out of 187 questionnaires were completed and returned by the undergraduates, yielding a 86% response rate. Data drawn from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS version 19.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Demographic Characteristics

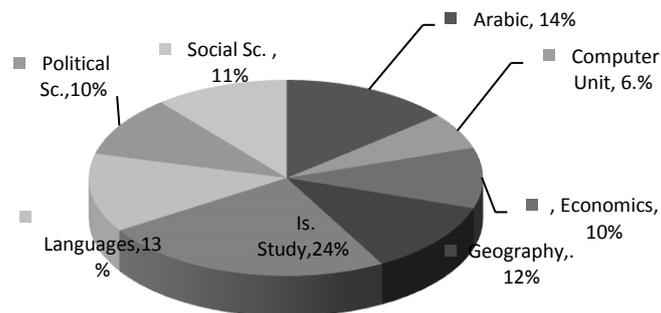


Figure 1: Questionnaires Received from Each Department of Study

Structured printed questionnaires were self-administered among 187 undergraduate students of the both faculties. Randomly selected students represented Departments of Arabic, Computer Unit, Economics, Geography, Islamic Study, Languages, Political Science and Social Science (Figure 1). Out of 167 questionnaires received 6 questionnaires were rejected due to incompleteness. Thus 161 duly completed questionnaires were selected for the study. Demographic characteristics of the study demonstrated female undergraduate students (79.1%) are the majority belonged to the selected study population.

5.2 Language Preferences in Seeking Information

SEUSL is situated in a Tamil language speaking area and majority of its student population is belonged to Muslim and Tamil community (SEUSL Statistics, 2014/2015). This setting is characterized by the information provided by the respondents of the study. Accordingly, out of the 161 total respondents 98% use Tamil language for communication followed by Sinhala language and English language (figure 2).

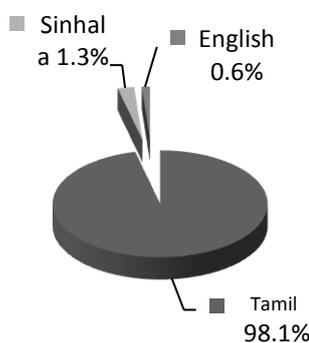


Figure 2

Language used in daily communication

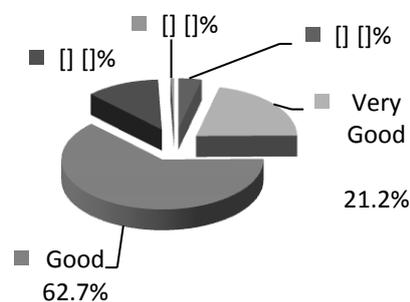


Figure 3

English Language competency of respondents

While students and their environment is predominantly use Tamil language for communicating in day to day life, English language is profoundly used in the university setting and most of the library materials, resources from the World Wide Web and Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) as well as scholarly databases are available in English. Therefore, English language capability is vital to cope up with academic setting. Therefore, undergraduate students were asked to indicate their competency in English language. Only 6 students indicated their English language skills as excellent (Figure 3).

101 respondents, i.e. more than half of the respondents indicated their knowledge in English language is good.

5.3 Information Needs

There is an inseparable relationship between information and need. As pointed out by Prasad (2000) information is originated and generated due to the constant demand or need for it. Previous studies revealed that need for information is varied among individuals, groups or classes. The findings of the study revealed that information needs of the undergraduates are led by prepare for examination (82.60%) and followed by five other reasons as demonstrated in the Table 1 below. Results of this study confirm the findings of the research carried out by Kakai, Ikoja-Odongo and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004). Accordingly, undergraduate information needs are prioritized to fulfill their need to prepare for examinations test, course assignments and their final year dissertation.

Table 1: Main Categories of Information Needs

Information Need	No	Percentage
Prepare for examinations	133	82.60%
Write assignments/Dissertation	121	75.16%
Employment Information	101	62.73%
Health Information	13	8.07%
Keep informed with current affairs	3	1.86%

A strong majority of respondents (126) rated that they are preferred to fulfill their information need in English language followed by Tamil language. As depicted in the demographic information, 98% of the undergraduate students under study use Tamil language for day to day communication. In such situation at the backdrop, 72% respondents indicated that their first preference in fulfilling their need for information is English language. This may be attributed to the availability of huge number of materials in the university library and other sources such as internet.

5.4 Information Sources

In the questionnaire it was asked to select the given information sources according to priority basis. Accordingly, 142 of the respondents (88%) indicated lecture notes as their main information source, while as indicated by 76% university library come into play the second role in this regard. Internet was the thirdly prioritized information source as 63% undergraduates indicated. Text books and photocopies received from other sources except from university library was followed by the Electronic Resources (ERs) and scholarly databases. Findings of this study on most preferred information sources by the undergraduates, is in conformity with the findings of Oyadeyi, (2014) and Kakai, Ikoja-Odongo, & Kigongo-Bukenya, (2004), where they reported heavy dependence of the lecture notes by the undergraduates of Ondo State University of Science and Technology in Nigeria and of undergraduate students of Makerere University, Uganda respectively.

5.5 Patterns of Information Seeking

To determine how undergraduates begin their information needs, respondents were given seven options for selection in the questionnaire. Findings of the study indicates using lecture notes (86%), inquiring from the senior students (74.53%) and browsing internet are the main three ways of start searching for information. Findings reveals that students look for most easiest and trouble free ways to seek for information. Reliance of senior students' knowledge on the required information, since they have passed through the same study programme in the previous years, may be the reason behind the preference of consulting senior students. One may anticipate that undergraduates would inquire

from the library staff or lecturers when seeking information due to their knowledge on the information sources. Results however, demonstrate that students have not considered them as appropriate to assist their needs. Findings more over indicated that very less number of respondents searching library catalogues (5.59%) which is very unsatisfactory. This is in agreement with the findings of Onuoha, &Awoniyi,(2011) which also indicated the less access to library catalogue.

Table 2: Information Seeking Behaviour

Information Seeking	No	Percentage
Lecture Notes	139	86.34%
Inquiring from senior students	120	74.53%
Browsing the internet	96	59.61%
Searching the library shelves directly	52	32.30%
Seeking assistance from library staff	38	23.60%
Searching library catalogues	9	5.59%
Inquiring from lecturers	2	1.24%

5.6 Problems Encountered in Seeking Information

To establish the problems encountered by undergraduate students, two types of questions were asked from the respondents; first part was about the library procedures (institutional) while the latter is about the personal difficulties (personal) in meeting the information needs.

Findings established both institutional and personal barriers intercept considerably in information seeking of the respondents. Majority of the respondents had positive perceptions of the services provided by the library. However, 93% indicated that training they received on information resources, both printed and electronic are not adequate. Respondents also indicated that restrictions applied in borrowing facilities have negative impact on their information seeking behavior. Less number of copies available in the library for referencing and borrowing have an effect on information seeking behavior.

. Table 3: Problem in Meeting Information Needs

<i>Problems Encountered -Institutional</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Inadequate training on information resources	150	93.17%
Restrictions in borrowing	125	77.64%
Less number of copies	79	49.07%
Less number of access points to ERS	52	32.29%
Closed access collections	19	11.80%
Restrictions in accessing to ERs	13	8.07%
Less supportive library staff	8	4.97%

Students were asked to indicate their personal difficulties in order to determine the problems faced in seeking information in printed and electronic media. Accordingly it is established that lesser knowledge in search strategies (91%) is prevalent among undergraduate students. Findings however revealed that 92% of these students have participated for the instructional programmes carried out by the library. In the meantime, unawareness of information sources are indicated as major factor that challenges the seeking for information. A g Great majority of the respondents (77.63%) are unfamiliar with the library classification system, Online Public Access Catalogue and stack arrangement. This factor correlates with the reason for hardly using the library catalogue for undergraduates' information seeking as mentioned above (Table 2).

Table 4: Barriers in Meeting the Information Needs

Barriers Encountered-Personal	No	Percentage
Lack of knowledge in search strategies	147	91.30%
Unawareness of information sources	126	78.26%
Unfamiliarity of the organization of the library (classification system, stacks, OPAC)	125	77.63
Shyness in asking for assistance	81	50.31%
Lack of ICT know how	11	6.83%
Language factor	4	2.48%
Inability to deal with information overload	2	1.24%

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study is established that majority of the respondents (98%) use Tamil language in their daily communication. However, 78% students demonstrate the penchant of using English language in their information seeking. It is evident that student's information needs are mainly attributed to prepare for examinations, writing assignments and final year dissertation and employment information. This implies, after fulfilling the information needs pertaining to their academic requirements, students are concern about their future employment prospects. Therefore, it can be recommended to post current employment news and links in library web site for the use of prospective undergraduates. Lecture notes play major role as an information source as well as when beginning for information search. It is clearly demonstrated the reluctance of asking help from the lectures and library staff in regarding the relevant information sources. This may be attributed to because undergraduates perceptions about their aloofness or superiority. Therefore, the library staff particularly should take necessary measures to establish the trust among students in order to equip them with necessary information skills. Less usage of OPAC is a very discouraging circumstance for library professionals. Not reaping of desired benefits is not only waste of time, money, energy and efforts put in creating and maintenance of OPAC. It is vital to understand the reasons behind hardly consulting the library catalogue for seeking their information. As Onuoha & Awoniy (2011) mentioned these may be due to not proper functioning of library catalogue or lack of skills to use search strategies. Identified challenges of information seeking in both institutional and personal level should be bring to an end by taking necessary measures. Library workshops information literacy programmes should be frequently conducted in order to make undergraduates aware of library information sources, search strategies, setting of the

library. Reaching out the students will make undergraduates close to library staff and will be more educated about the library setting.

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