Original Article

Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour of Post Graduate Students of School of Economics at Madurai Kamaraj University: A User Survey

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ABSTRACT

According to Davidson and Lingam (1997), the understanding of information needs and information-seeking behavior of various professional groups is essential as it helps in the planning, implementation and operation of information system and services in the given work settings. With this broad theme in mind, this study was conducted with a sampling population of 50 post graduate students of School of Economics, Madurai Kamaraj University with a specific purpose to trace out their information needs and information seeking behavior. A structured questionnaire was used as a data gathering tool. The findings of the study revealed that: 26% of the respondents use the internet of web pages and 24% of the respondents use the on line e-resources to get information; 22% of the respondents are using the internet daily in the library; 40% of the respondents use Google, 22% of the respondents use Yahoo and Alta vista and 16% of the respondents use other search engines; 24% of the respondents use OPAC (library catalogue) and 38% of the respondents use the book reviews to trace the relevant documents available; 40% of the respondents make use of keyword search, 22% of the respondents use 'Title search', 28% of the respondents use "author search" and 10% of the respondents make use of 'subject search' as their mechanisms; 30% of the respondents each feel 'lack of time due to abundant literature' and 'Inadequate resources /library online resources" are the main reasons for getting the required information belated; 48 % of the respondents make use of the internet facility at University library; 8 students are very fluent in using the e-resources available in the library and 21 of them (42 %) are good in using such resources.

Keywords: Information needs, information behavior, information seeking, search engines, internet, place of access, e-resources, source of reference

INTRODUCTION

a. Information need

Information need is often understood in information science as evolving from a vague awareness of something missing and as culminating in locating information that contributes to understanding and meaning (Kuhlthau, 1993). Information need is described as an anomalous state of knowledge (Belkin et al, 1982) or a gap in individual's knowledge in sense-making situations (Drevin & Nilan 1986). Wilson points out that there must be an attendant motive when a person experiences an information need (Wilson 1997). Line (1974) defined that information need is what an individual ought to have for his work, his edification, his creation etc.

b. Information behavior

Information behavior can be defined by the general model of information behavior developed by Wilson (Wilson 1997). According to Wilson, a general model of information behavior needs to include at least the following three elements:

- An information need and its drivers, i.e., the factors that give rise to an individual's perception of need;
- The factors that affect the individual's response to the perception of need; and
- The processes or actions involved in that response."

Taylor (1991) defines information behavior as the product of certain elements of the information use environment The elements are:-

- The assumptions formally learned or not, made by a defined set of people concerning the nature of their work.
- The kinds and structure of the problems deemed important and typical by this set of people.
- The constraints and opportunities of typical environments within which any group or subgroup of this set of people operates and works.
- The conscious, and perhaps unconscious, assumptions made as to what constitutes a solution, or better said, a resolution of problems, and what makes information useful and valuable in their contexts.

Based on the definition he believes that the information behavior of different groups of people also is different.

c. Information Seeking Behaviour

Information seeking is a basic activity indulged in by all people and manifested through a particular way of behavior. It is also an aspect of scholarly work most interesting to academic librarians who strive to develop collections, services, and organizational structures that facilitate seeking of information (Wiberley, 1989).

Information seeking behavior is a broad term which involves a set of actions that an individual takes to express information needs, seek information, evaluate and select information, and finally uses this information to satisfy his/her information needs. Varies factors may determine the information seeking behavior of an individual or a group of Individuals. It is, therefore, desirable to understand the purpose for which information is required, the environment in which the user operates users' skills in identifying the needed information, channels and sources preferred for acquiring information, and barriers to information.

Information seeking behavior that results from recognition of some need (Wilson, 1981) is defined by Kriekelas (1983, p. 6-7) as any activity of an individual that is undertaken to identify a perceives that the current state of possessed knowledge is less than that needed to deal with some issue (or problem)".

School of Economics, Madurai Kamaraj University: A Profile

Madurai Kamaraj University (MKU) established in 1966, has 18 Schools comprising 73 departments, 66 affiliated colleges and 15 institutions. University Grants Commission (UGC) has recognized MKU as 'University with Potential for Excellence' School of Economics which had it origin way back in 1959 as the extension centre of the university of madras blossomed in to a full-fledged department of economics at the time of the formation of Madurai university in the year 1966. Department of econometrics was created in 1982.

The department of economics which made significant progress ever since its establishment was selected by the UGC under Departmental Research Support Programme (DRS) in 1991 for its further growth. Subsequently the department of economics was converted into a school of economics with seven departments namely mathematical economics, Econometrics, Industrial economics, Agricultural economics, Environmental economics, rural development economics and Human Resource development economics in the year 1991.

Objectives of the study

- ✓ To identify the information need of surveyed respondents.
- ✓ To find out the frequency of library visit by the surveyed respondents.
- ✓ To identify the channels of information used by the respondents.
- ✓ To identify the use behavior pattern of surveyed respondents.
- ✓ To identify the level of experience in the internet usage among the surveyed respondents.
- ✓ To identify the mechanism of collection of information sources available in the library.
- ✓ To find out the mode of accessing the information services provided by the library
- ✓ To find out the satisfaction level with regard to quality of e-resources available from the surveyed respondents.

Selection of sample (Figure /Table 1: Department-wise distribution of samples)

For the selection of sample, a stratified random sampling method was used. 50 respondents were selected giving equal weightage to all the five departments of School of Economics namely - Environmental economics, Mathematical economics, Rural development, Econometric and Industrial econometric - for this study in the library. (10 from each department).

Department

- Environmental Economics
- Mathematical Economics
- Rural Development
- Econometric
- Industrial Econometric

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20
20
20
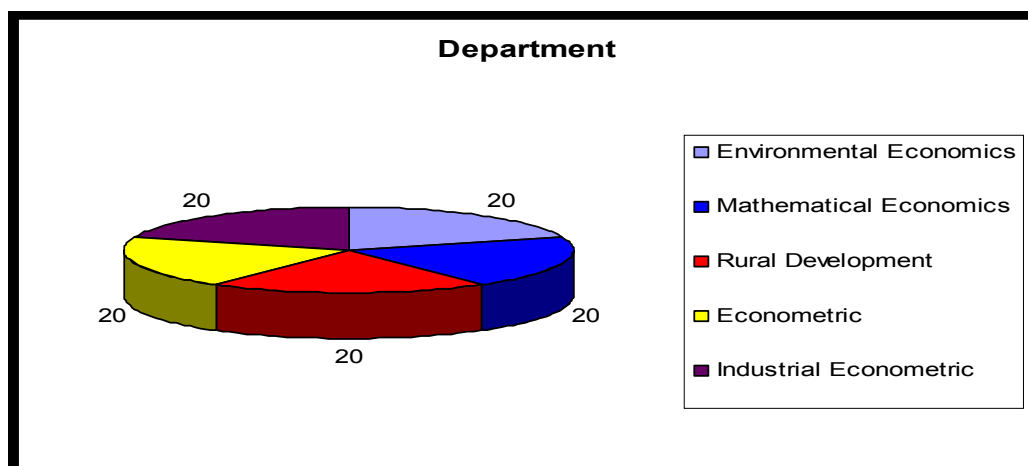
Collection of data
A structured questionnaire was designed keeping in view the objectives of the study.
Contents of the questionnaire
Questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first section contains the questions relating to the background information of the respondents. It includes questions about the course of study and the department of the respondent. It also includes questions about the frequency and purpose of visiting the library and total hours spent on an average per week in the library.
The second section contains questions relating to satisfaction of users with regard to services and facilities provided by the library. It includes questions relating to their satisfaction on library collection, frequency of internet use, frequently used search engines, quality of e-resources available, tools used to locate information, searching strategies used in browsing and reasons for getting the information belated.
Design of the questionnaire
Pilot study on a group of 20 persons was conducted before proceeding with actual work. The questions were prepared in a very simple language so that the users could understand them easily and fill up them within 20 minutes. The questions were of the type of specific information questions which call for a specific item of information or questions with "Yes" or "No" answers or multiple answers.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION
The questionnaires were distributed to the users personally and were collected from them by giving sufficient time to fill up the questionnaire. Some of the questionnaires were filled up by the authors when the respondents were providing answers to the questions. The doubts raised by the respondents were clarified by the authors. Every effort was made by the authors to get reliable data from respondents. The total data needed for the study was collected during the period December 1st 2012 – March 28th 2013.
Limitations of the study
The study is limited to the Information needs and information seeking behavior of post graduate students of School of Economics only.
Review of Literature
Majid, Shaheen and Kassim Gava Mugeraa(2000) narrates information needs and seeking behavior of users is vital for developing library collections, services and facilities to meet their information needs effectively. The purpose of this study is to identify the information channels used by the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) students information sources preferred by them methods employed for getting the needed information and their library use pattern.
Shokeen and Kushik (2002) studied information seeking behavior of social scientists working in the universities located in Haryana. They reported most of the social scientists visit the library daily. The first preferred method of searching the required information by the social scientists followed by searching through indexing and abstracting periodicals, and citations in articles respectively. The social scientists use current journals followed by books.
Cothey (2002) examined the information seeking behavior of 206 college students using the World Wide Web during a 10-month period. The study was intended to suggest how the general population uses the web. It was concluded that Web users have become more passive and more eclectic as they become more experienced using the Web.
Kerins, Madden and Fulton (2004), examined the information-seeking patterns of final year postgraduate students split evenly universities. It was reported that students seem to have a preference for channels

that require the least effort such as the Internet. To examine that the result was due to the fact that student viewed the Internet as a speedy current information source which fed initial information needs quickly.

Chikonzo and Aina (2006) researched into the information needs and sources of information used by students at the University of Zimbabwe. Findings from the study revealed that writing assignments and studying for tests or examination were the primary tasks for which they required information and the major sources used to obtain information were books, videos, lecture notes, handouts, the internet, projects, CD-ROM database and journals. The students confirmed making little use of indexes, abstracts and dissertations.

Ajiboye and Adeyinka (2007) examined the information seeking behaviour of postgraduate students in the University of MKU. The result of the study revealed that the internet is the most consulted source followed by students' class notes and handouts.

Research by the British Library and JISC (2008) explains that the information seeking behaviour of the young people of today is mostly "horizontal, bouncing, checking and viewing of nature". Horizontal information seeking, best known as bouncing, describes an activity when users only visit one or two Web pages and seldom go back to these Web pages (Nicholas and Rowlands, 2008: 128). Navigation explains the time students spend on library Websites without finding the information they are looking for. Viewing is an activity where the students browse through titles, content pages and abstracts of electronic books (E-books) or electronic journals (E-journals).

Tahir Muhammad Mahmood, Khalid etal. (2008) stress that a thorough understanding of user information needs and information seeking behavior is fundamental to the provision of successful information services.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Table -2: Respondents based on Genders

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	31	62
Female	19	38
Total	50	100

The above Table No.2 shows the gender-wise distribution of the respondents. 62% are male Respondents and 38% are female respondents. The above table shows that male respondents are more than the female respondents in the study.
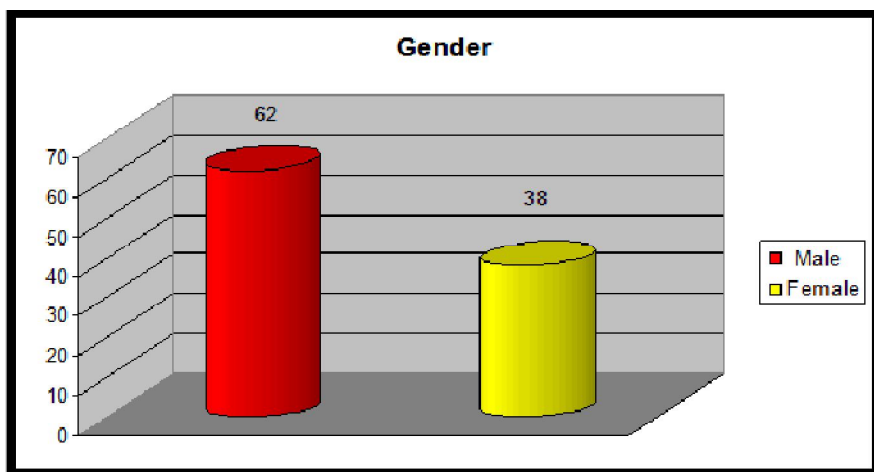
Table:- 3 Types of documents used for reference

S. No.	Types of resources	No. of Respondents	Total No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Text book	11		22
2.	Journal	12		24
3.	Web pages	13	50	26
4.	On line e-resources	12		24
5.	Others	02		4
	Total	**50**		**100**

It is being noticed from the above table that 22% of the respondents have learnt to use the textbooks as their source of reference, 24% of the respondents have learnt to use the journals, 26% of the respondents have learned to use the internet of web pages and 24% of the respondents have learnt to use the online e-resources.
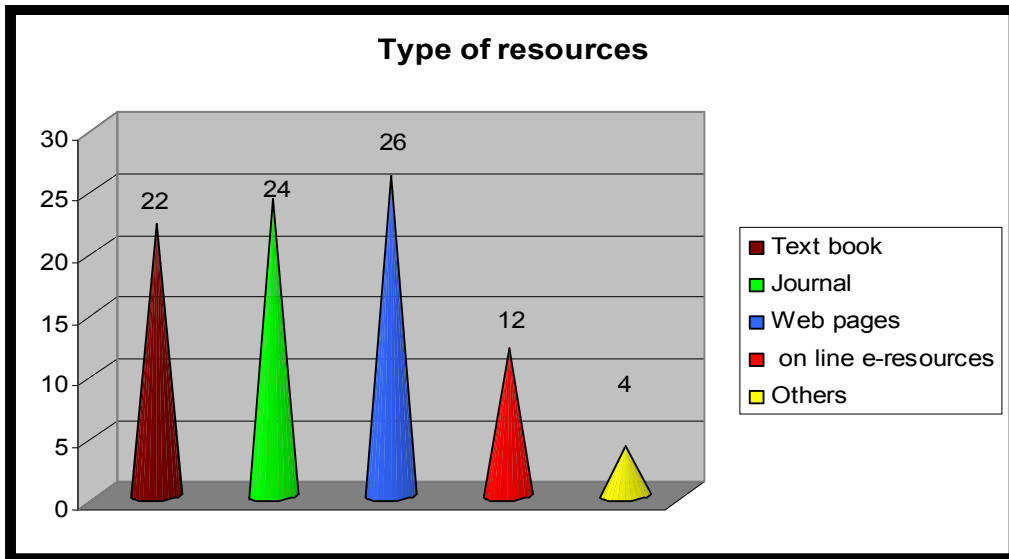

Type of resources

Table:-4 Frequency of using the internet

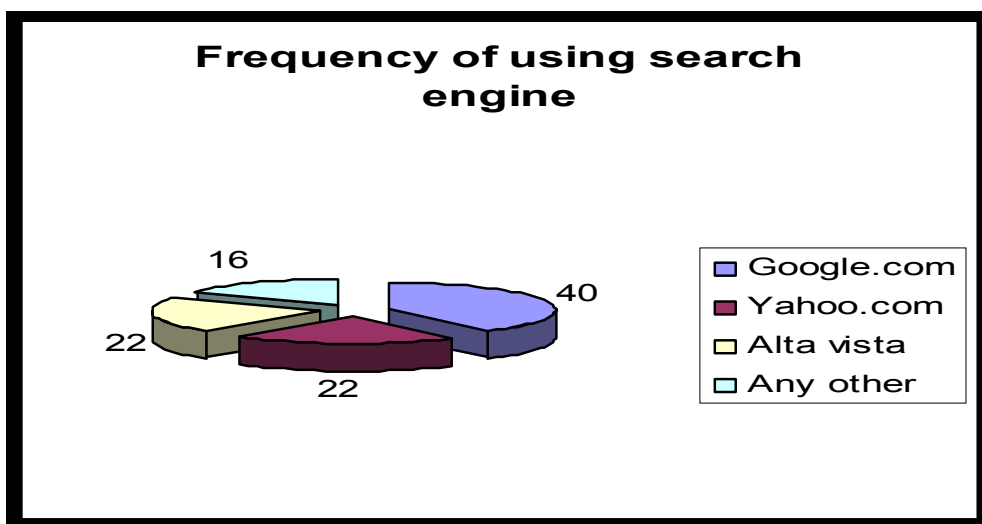| S. No.	Internet	No. of Respondents	Total No. of Respondents	%
1.	Daily	11		22
2.	At least once a week	19		38
3.	At least once a fortnight	07	50	14
4.	At least once a month	05		10
5.	Others	08		16
Total		**50**		**100**

It is clear from the above that 22% of the respondents are using the internet daily in the library, 38% of the respondents using the internet at least once a week in the library, 14% of the respondents using the internet at least once in a fortnight in a library and 10% of the respondents use the internet at least once a month in the library.
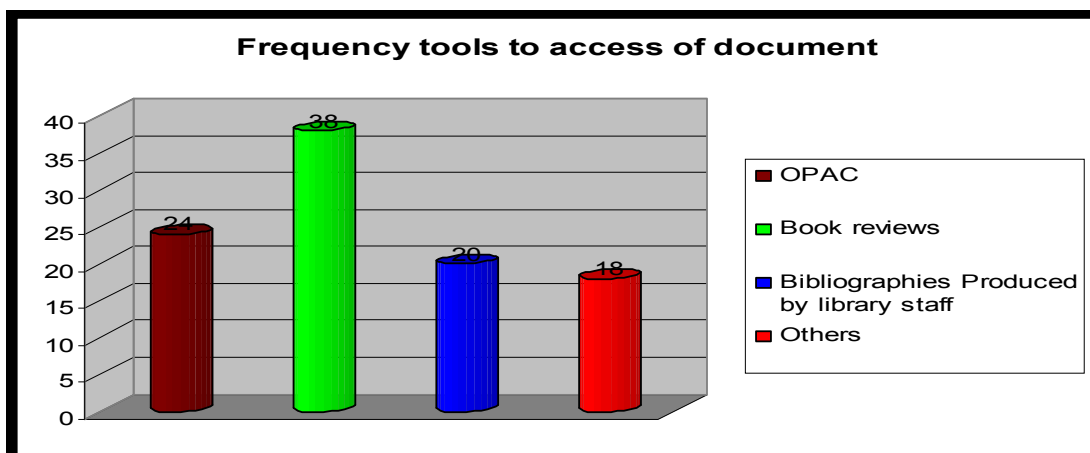

Frequency of use the internet
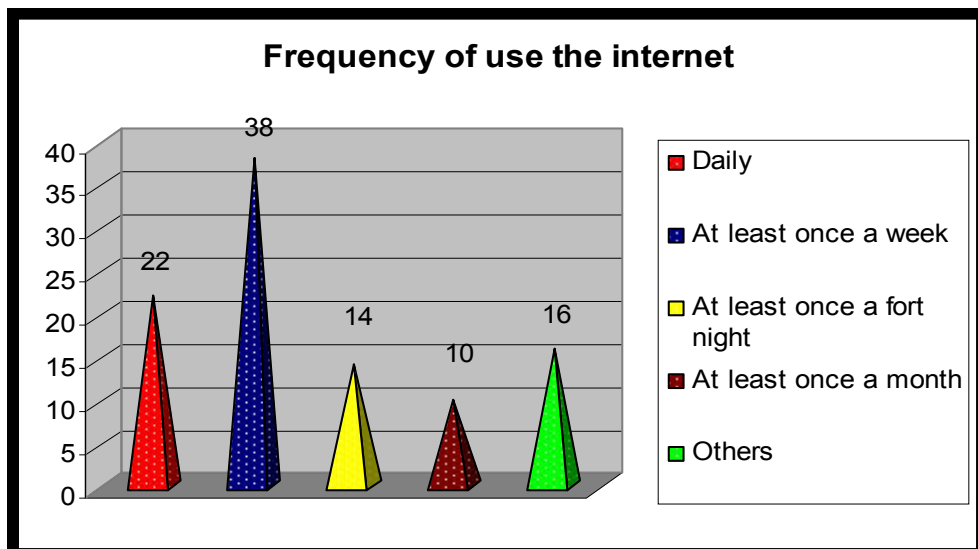
Table:- 5 Frequently used search engines

S. No.	Search engine	No. of Respondents	Total No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Google.com	20		40
2.	Yahoo.com	11		22
3.	Alta vista	11	50	22
4.	Any other	08		16
	Total	**50**		**100**

From the above table, it is identified that 40% of the respondents use Google, 22% of the respondents use Yahoo and Alta vista and 16% of the respondents use other search engines. .

Table:-6 Tool used to identify the existence of relevant documents

| S. No.	Tool using access	No. of Respondents	Total No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	OPAC	12		24
2.	Book reviews	19		38
3.	Bibliographies Produced by library staff	10	50	20
4.	Others	09		18
	Total	50		100

From the above table, it is inferred that 24% of the respondents use OPAC (library catalogue), 38% of the respondents use the book reviews, 20% of the respondents use the bibliographies provided by the library staff and 18% of the respondents use other kind of tools to trace the relevant documents available in the library.

Table:- 7 Search Strategies to access Information

| S. No.	Search Options	No. of Respondents	Total No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Keyword search	20		40
2.	Title search	11		22
3.	Author search	14	50	28
4.	Subject search	05		10
Total		50		100

From the above table, it is evident that 40% of the respondents make use of keyword search, 22% of the respondents use 'Title search', 28% of the respondents use "author search" and 10% of the respondents make use of 'subject search' as their mechanisms while accessing the required information.
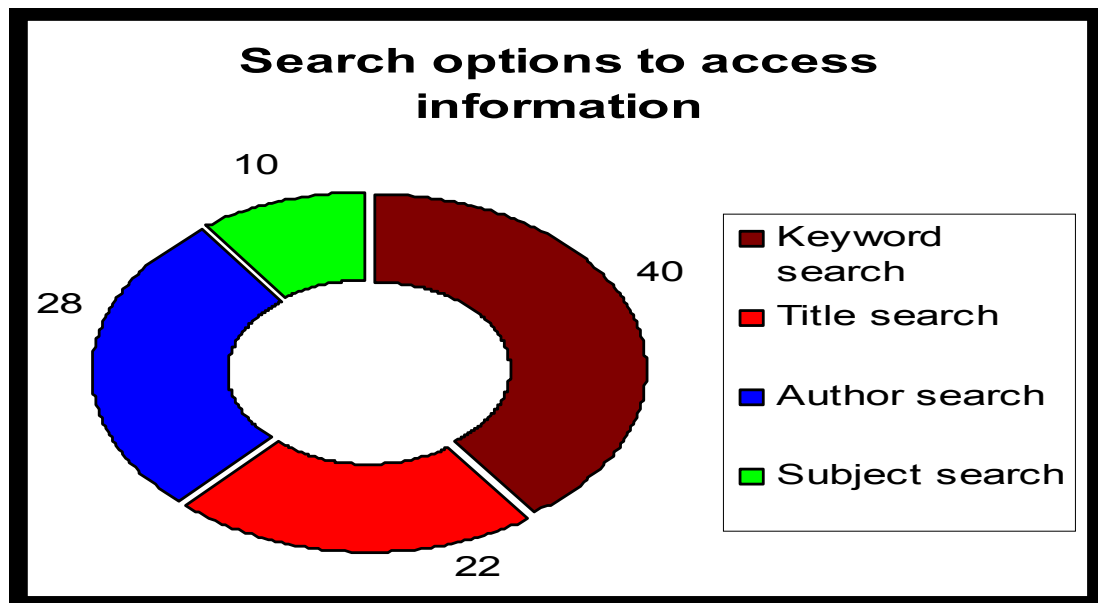
Table:- 8 Delay for getting the required Information

| Sl. No.	Reason for the delay	No. of Respondents	Total No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Lack of time due to abundant literature	15		30
2.	Inadequate resources in library	15		30
3.	Heavy work load	07	50	14
4.	Lack of access to library	13		26
Total		50		100

From the above table, it is transparent that 30% of the respondents each feel 'lack of time due to abundant literature' and 'Inadequate resources /library online resources" are the main reasons for getting the required information belated. 14% of the respondents opined that 'Workload' is the main reason but 26 of the respondents opined that 'lack of access to library UGC – Infonet or Textbook/Periodical section' is a yet another cause of not able to get the needed information in time in the library.

Delay for getting required of information

- Lack of time due to Literature
- Inadequate resources in library
- Work load
- Lack of access to library
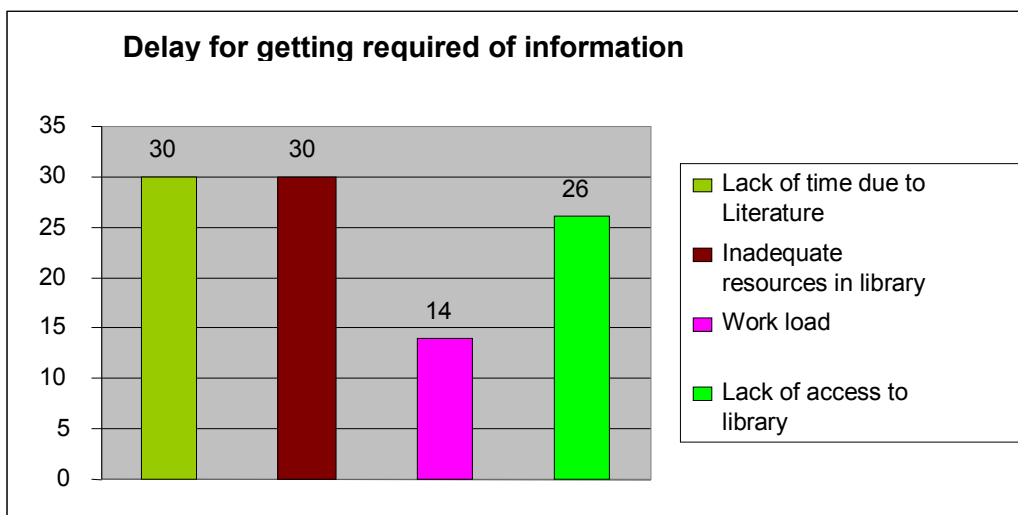
Table:- 9 Place of accessing the facility of internet

Sl. No	Use the facility of internet	No of respondents	Total no of respondents	Percentage
1.	University library	24		48
2.	Computer centre	8		16
3.	Internet café	6	50	12
4.	Home	5		10
5.	Anyother	7		14
Total				100

Table 9 depicts that while 48 % of the respondents make use of the internet facility at University library, 16 % of the respondents use internet at Computer centre. While Internet café is the place of accessing internet for 12 % of the respondents, it is their home for 10% of the respondents. Thus, the most favoured place for accessing internet facility is university library.


Place of accessing Internet Facilities

- University library
- Computer centre
- Internet café
- Home
- Anyother
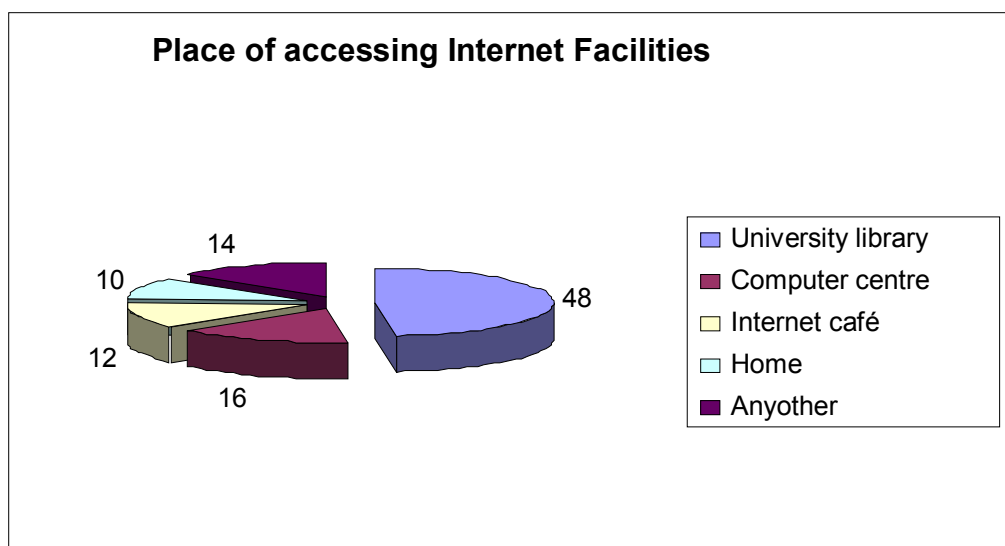
Table:- 10 Ability to use the electronic resources

Ability to use electronic resources	No of respondents	Total No of respondent	Percentage
Very good	8		16
Good	21		42
Fair	14	50	28
Bad	3		06
Very Bad	4		08
Total	50		100

From the above table, it is noticed that 8 students are very fluent in using the e-resources available in the library. While 21 of them (42 %) are good in using such resources, 14 of them (28 %) are fair too. Only 14 % of them are not that fair in their ability to use the available electronic resources. .
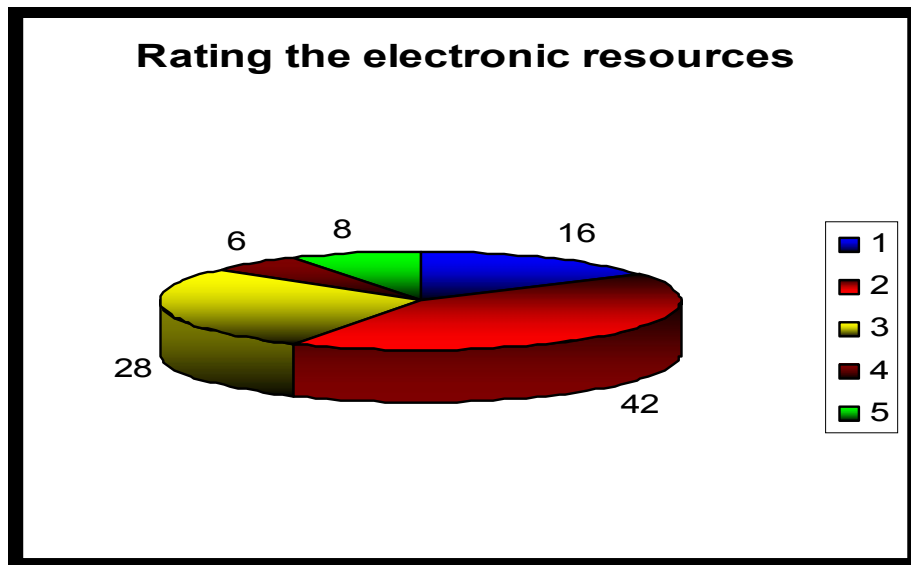
FINDINGS

- ❖ 22% of the respondents have learned to use the textbooks as their source of reference, 24% of the respondents have learned to use the journals, 26% of the respondents have learned to use the internet of web pages and 24% of the respondents have learned to use the on line e-resources.
- ❖ 22% of the respondents are using the internet daily in the library, 38% of the respondents using the internet at least once a week in the library, 14% of the respondents using the internet at least once in a fortnight in a library and 10% of the respondents use the internet at least once a month in the library.
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- ❖ 40% of the respondents make use of keyword search, 22% of the respondents use 'Title search', 28% of the respondents use "author search" and 10% of the respondents make use of 'subject search' as their mechanisms while accessing the required information.
- ❖ 30% of the respondents each feel 'lack of time due to abundant literature' and 'Inadequate resources /library online resources" are the main reasons for getting the required information belated. 14% of the respondents opined that 'Workload' is the main reason but 26 of the respondents opined that 'lack of access to library UGC – Infonet or Textbook/Periodical section' is a yet another cause of not able to get the needed information in time in the library.
- ❖ 48 % of the respondents make use of the internet facility at University library, 16 % of the respondents use internet at Computer centre. While Internet café is the place of accessing internet for 12 % of the respondents, it is their home for 10% of the respondents. Thus, the most favoured place for accessing internet facility is university library.
- ❖ 8 students are very fluent in using the e-resources available in the library. While 21 of them (42 %) are good in using such resources, 14 of them (28 %) are fair too. Only 14 % of them are not that fair in their ability to use the available electronic resources. .

SUGGESTIONS

1. All kinds of reference books should be made available in the library.
2. The library staff may be equipped with sufficient ICT knowledge and browsing skills by the means of formal training programmes.
3. User Education programmes needed to be conducted to educate the users on
   a. Use of Search Engines

> b. Use of available e-resources
> c. Use of Library OPAC.
4. More e-journals need to be acquired through UGC-Infonet E-Journals consortium.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE