

READING HABITS OF FACULTY MEMBERS IN NATURAL SCIENCES: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

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The present study on reading habits of faculty members is based on a user survey carried out at University of Delhi. Factors affecting the reading habits, average time spent in library, sources used in library, etc. were studied.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is primarily an intellectual activity and reading habit is a sort of attribute of a human being. Like other habits, the habit of reading in an individual develops during the course of time. Psychologically, habit is a product of learning, however reading is an art of interpreting the printed tools and written words. It is important for the professional staff of a library to know about the reading habits and information needs of the clientele being served.

Reading habit has been an area of active interest among the librarians and information scientists. It results from the recognition of some need perceived by the user, who as a consequence makes demand upon formal system such as libraries, information centers, or other persons in order to satisfy the perceived need.

READING HABITS

Smith and Robinson defined reading as "an active attempt on the part of reader to understand a writer's message" [1]. Reading is primarily an intellectual activity and its practice is influenced by many factors like home environment, subject background, age, status, etc. Reading helps in the resolution of personal need and in the attainment of mental maturity and independence of thoughts. Devarajan defines reading as an art of interpreting printed and written words [2]. It is a basic tool of education and one of the most important skills in everyday life.

Habit is a psychological aspect and is developed during a course of time as a part of personality of an individual. Rahman in his report on "Reading for Pleasure" mentioned that lack of appreciation and understanding of good books and the failure to derive pleasure from a habit of reading underlines the problem of educational growth [3].

William S. Gray indicates that reading influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as attitude, moral belief, judgment, and action of the reader [4]. The reading habit has one of the most powerful lasting influence in promotion of ones personal development in particular and social in general. Herman emphasized that status, age, group, sex and information needs of the library users influence reading habit [5]. It is lack of appreciation and understanding of good books and failure to derive pleasure from the habit of reading that affects of educational growth. The factors affecting the readings habits are: nature of a reader, needs of a reader, nature of information required educational qualifications of a reader, cost of reading material, availability of reading material and way of interaction of users and information.

Bryan relates the reading habits in relation to the library and mentions that the librarian's task is to find the right book for the right reader at the right time [6]. A librarian must know his books, he must know his readers and he must know what effect will be produced by bringing the two together.

The present article is a questionnaire based study of the reading habits of faculty members in natural sciences at University of Delhi. In order to carry out the study, a questionnaire was designed for the faculty members of the Delhi University in natural

Table 1 – Faculty wise distribution of faculty members

Department	Professors	Readers	Lecturers	Total	%
Anthropology	2	3	2	7	13
Botany	3	4	2	9	17
Chemistry	5	4	2	11	21
Geology	2	2	2	6	11
Physics & Astrophysics	7	6	2	15	28
Zoology	3	2	-	5	9
	22	21	10	53	

The reading habits of faculty with respect to their professional requirements, their educational qualifications, psychological needs, etc have been studied.

OBJECTIVES

The following were the specific objectives of the study:

1. To identify the kind of literature being read by the faculty members;
2. To study the influence of subject background on the reading habits of faculty members;
3. To study the frequency and extent of the use of the library by the faculty members;
4. To find out the adequacy or otherwise of the library collection;
5. To find out whether the manpower is well equipped to provide the services to the faculty members; and
6. To identify the barriers which keep away the members from reading and using the information.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the study a questionnaire was designed and distributed among the respondents. The study was limited to find the reading habits of faculty members in natural sciences in University of Delhi, North Campus. The data analysis and interpretation is based on a sample of 53 randomly

selected respondents out of three categories viz., Professors, Readers and Lecturers. The subject and departments in natural sciences include Anthropology, Botany, Chemistry, Geology, Physics & Astrophysics and Zoology.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Faculty wise distribution of respondents

Out of the total population, one-third members of was taken as sample. Out of the sample population of 53, only 47 (88.6%) members responded. Largest number responded from the Physics department and smallest number of respondents was from Zoology department (Table 1).

Library meeting the general reading needs of the faculty members

In 31% cases, the University library is able to fulfill the information requirement of faculty members and an equal number of faculty members are maintaining a personal collection. The laboratories of the faculty members (23%) are also having a good collection of information sources in their discipline (Table 2).

Frequency of the library visits

Twenty two percent of the faculty members were able to visit the library every day. However, majority of the faculty members (46%) visit the library once a week. Twenty eight percent of the faculty members visit the library once in a fortnight and just four percent faculty members visit the library more than once a day (Table 3).

Table 2 – Libraries meeting the general and technical need of faculty members

Source Library meeting technical & general information needs	Professors	Readers	Lecturers	Total	%
University library	13 (12.62)	13 (12.62)	6 (5.83)	32	31
Outside libraries	8 (7.77)	5 (4.85)	2 (1.94)	15	15
Personal library	17 (16.50)	11 (10.68)	4 (3.88)	32	31
Departmental library	14 (13.59)	7 (6.80)	3 (2.91)	24	23
				103	

Numbers given in bracket show percent

Table 3 – Frequency of library visits

Frequency of library visit	Professors	Readers	Lecturers	Total	%
Fortnightly	3 (6.82)	7 (15.91)	3 (6.82)	13	28
Weekly	10 (22.73)	7 (15.91)	4 (9.09)	21	46
Almost daily	6 (13.64)	3 (6.82)	1 (2.27)	10	22
More than once in a day	2 (4.55)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2	4
				46	

Numbers given in bracket show percent

Table 4 – Reason(s) for not using the library frequently

Reason for not consulting the library very frequently	Professors	Readers	Lecturers	Total	%
Distance of library	3 (7.69)	5 (12.82)	1 (2.56)	9	23
Shortage of time	5 (12.82)	8 (20.51)	3 (7.69)	16	41
Non-availability of material	2 (5.13)	6 (15.38)	1 (2.56)	9	23
Poor services of library	2 (5.13)	1 (2.56)	0	3	8
Any other reasons	1 (2.56)	0	1 (2.56)	2	5
				39	

Numbers given in bracket show percent

Reasons for not visiting the library very frequently

In majority of the cases the faculty members (41%) are not able to visit the library frequently due to their teaching assignments and research work. However, in 23% cases, the reason was distance of library and non-availability of the required material. A small

population (8%) of faculty members blamed the poor services of library for their infrequent visit (Table 4).

Sources of scientific and technical information

Journals were the main source of S&T information for majority of the respondents (42%). However, conferences were another useful source of

Table 5 – Sources of scientific and technical information

Source of Scientific & Technical Information	Professors	Readers	Lecturers	Total	%
Journals	21 (20.19)	16 (15.38)	7 (6.73)	44	42
Conference	14 (13.46)	11 (10.58)	7 (6.73)	32	31
Discussion	8 (7.69)	4 (3.85)	5 (4.81)	17	16
Other Sources	5 (4.81)	4 (3.85)	2 (1.92)	11	11
<i>Numbers given in bracket show percent</i>				104	

Table 6 – Purpose of reading

Purpose of reading	Professors	Readers	Lecturers	Total	%
To meet teaching and research requirements	21 (28.77)	16 (21.92)	7 (9.59)	44	60
For recreation	3 (4.11)	5 (6.84)	1 (1.37)	9	13
To be knowledgeable	9 (12.33)	8 (10.96)	3 (4.11)	20	27
<i>Numbers given in bracket show percent</i>				73	

Table 7 – Material for general reading

General reading material	Professors	Readers	Lecturers	Total	%
Fictions	17(8.21)	11(5.31)	2(0.97)	30	14.49
Non-Fiction	18(8.70)	17(8.21)	11(5.31)	46	22.22
Newspapers	28(13.53)	17(8.21)	9(4.35)	54	26.09
Magazines	29(14.01)	19(9.18)	12(5.80)	60	28.99
Others	8(3.86)	8(3.86)	1(0.48)	17	8.21
				207	100.00

Numbers given in bracket show percent

Table 8 – Opinion about the library services and collection

Opinion about the Library Services & Collection	Professors	Readers	Lecturers	Total	%
Excellent	1 (2.1)	0	0	1	2
Good	15 (31.9)	8 (17.0)	4 (8.5)	27	57
Average	4 (8.5)	10 (21.3)	3 (6.4)	17	36
Not satisfactory	1 (2.1)	1 (2.1)	0	2	4
				47	

Numbers given in bracket show percent

information. Personal discussions (16%) and other conventional and non-conventional sources (11%) were also useful. The non-conventional sources of information included the micro-fiche, online databases, electronic databases, etc (Table 5).

Purpose of reading

Ogunrombi has summarized the purpose of reading into four main types [7]. These are:

1. Reading for pleasure
2. Reading for information
3. Reading for knowledge (studying); and
4. Reading for any combination of above

Maximum number of faculty members (60%) read for meeting their professional obligations of teaching and research. The second largest category of the faculty members (27%) were reading to keep themselves up to date in their field. It was found that 13% were reading for the sake of recreation (Table 6).

Sources of information

The sources of information under the study can be divided into two categories i.e. scientific information and general information. The faculty members read scientific information sources in order to meet their professional obligations and read general information sources for recreation, general knowledge, etc. General reading is a clear indication of reading as a habit as it is not being done out of compulsion. Magazines and newspapers are the most preferred general reading material of the faculty members (Table 7).

Opinion about the library services and collection

Majority of the faculty members graded the services and collection of library as good (57%) and 36% rated the services as average. Only 2% rated the services as excellent (Table 8).

CONCLUSION

The present study on the reading habits of the faculty at the University of Delhi shows that the university library and personal collections are the major source of information. It is also seen that majority of faculty members visit the library on a weekly basis and the distance is a major reason for not visiting the library more frequently. The study also shows that the most important purpose of reading by the faculty members is to meet the teaching and research requirements.

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