

# Electronic Information Seeking behavior of Education Postgraduates: A Case Study at University of Peradeniya Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

The present study explored electronic information seeking behavior of postgraduate students in Education in relation to their scholarly activities. The present study was conducted to examine whether the postgraduate students utilize electronic resources and services provided by the library and the extent to which the library was used. A questionnaire was administered to all the postgraduate students in the Department of Education, Faculty of Arts, and University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka in September 2017 and the data were statistically analyzed using SPSS software. The results revealed that most of the respondents used electronic resources available in the library, and websites and online catalogs are the most preferred electronic resources. This study showed that most of the respondents used e-resources for their research works and writing assignments and the average time spent for using e-resources was one to two hours per week. It is evident that most of the respondents preferred to access e-resources from the University library and the cybercafés and most of them were aware of e-resources available in the library. The study further identified some constraints users face when using electronic resources.

**Keywords:** Education, Electronic Information, Information Seeking Behavior, Postgraduates

## 1. Introduction

The rapid growth of technology has certainly enhanced the use of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the libraries also use ICT for satisfying diverse user needs. The technology has led to proliferation of electronically available information resources (Oduwole & Akpati, 2003). New information technologies particularly, the Internet, is drastically transforming access to information, is changing the learning and research process. Never has an invention had such an impact on education (Langlois, 1997). Libraries all over the world make available a wide variety of electronic information sources for use by their users. They may either be accessed remotely via the Internet or locally. Some of the most frequently encountered types are: E-journals, E-books, Full-text (aggregated) databases,

indexing and abstracting databases, Reference databases (biographies, dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias, etc.), Numeric and statistical databases, E-images, E-audio/visual resources “(IFLA and Institutions, 2012). The types and forms of e-resources in university libraries include e-journals, e-data archives, e-manuscript, e-maps, e-books, e-magazines, e-thesis, WWW, e-newspapers, e-research reports, and e-bibliographic databases” (Sharma, 2009).

To address the changing needs of the postgraduate students, the academic libraries need to know about the resources they use and whether they receive adequate information services required for their studies. To address these questions this study explores the postgraduate students electronic information seeking behavior and their use of e-resources as they pursue their learning and scholarly activities.

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## 2. Nature of the Problem

Postgraduate students are one of the main categories of users of a university library. The use of electronic resources available in the library is essential to the postgraduate students in order to achieve their academic objectives.

## 3. Scope of the Study

The scope of the present study is limited to the postgraduate students who followed courses in the Department of Education in the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

## 4. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine whether the postgraduates students utilize the electronic resources and services provided by the library and the extent to which the library was used.

This study was designed to explore the following research questions.

- What are the most preferred electronic resources used by the education postgraduate students?
- What is the frequency of access to e-resources and places where accessed to them?
- What are the purposes of using the e-resources?
- What are the problems faced when utilizing the e-resources?

## 5. Review of Related Literature

Several studies on use of e-resources by students, research scholars, and other professionals of various institutions have been carried out. Garg and Tamrakar (2014) evaluate the use of e-resources by the postgraduate students, research scholars and faculty members of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur, India, with a view to examine the exposure of users to e-resources; the study aimed to identify the most preferred format of the journals, awareness of e-resources, helpfulness of e-resources and efforts made by the library for better E services to their users. The study revealed that all user categories used available e-resources in the library and the central library played an important role in promotion, assistance and guidance in accessing the e-resources.

A study conducted to examine the use of e-resources by the post graduate students and research scholars of Faculty of Arts in the Annamalai University, India found the majority of users aware about the availability of e-resources

and most of them using e-resources. The significant finding was that many of the respondents are unaware and have not used on-line thesis/dissertations, abstracts/indexes, OPAC, on-line databases, which are very relevant for their studies and research. Therefore the study recommended conducting more orientation programmes and user awareness programme on e-resources (Thanuskodi, 2012).

Soyizwapi (2005) carried out a study on use of electronic databases by postgraduate students in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. The study also a number of problems were experienced by postgraduates when using the databases.

Ozoemelem (2009) in a survey of postgraduate students of Library and Information Science (LIS) in Delta State University, Nigeria found that they did not have adequate skills in use of ICT.

Although there are many studies on use of e-resources, there is little evidence of research on use of e-resources of postgraduate students in Sri Lanka. In the Sri Lankan context, only two studies have been reported (Peiris & Peiris, 2012; Millawithanachchi, 2012). The study by Millawithanachchi (2012) to investigate the critical success factors on e-resources identified nine factors which affect e-resources usage.

## 6. Methodology and Procedure for Data Collection

The sample for the study was school teachers who enrolled in follow postgraduate programme in the Department of Education in the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. A structured questionnaire comprising 20 questions was distributed to 340 postgraduate students to collect data. 162 filled-in questionnaires were returned (Figure 1).

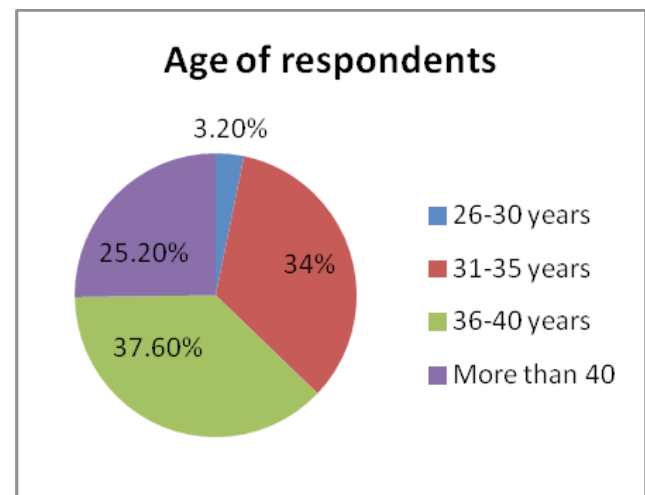


Figure 1. Age of respondents.

## 7. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

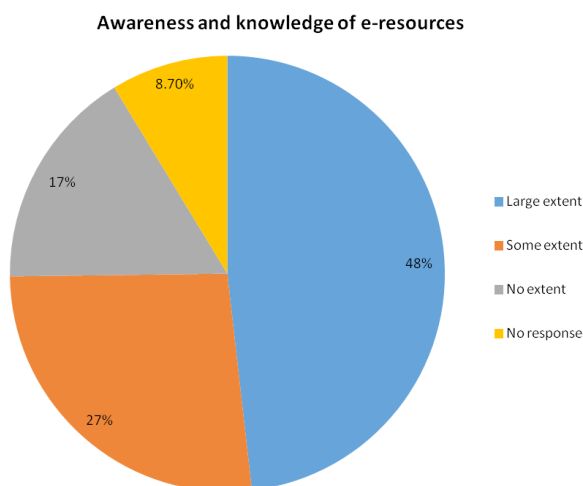


Figure 2. Age of respondents.

## 8. User Awareness and Knowledge on E-Resources

Awareness and knowledge of e-resources are prerequisites for their effective use. The data in the Figure 2, suggests that a good proportion of users either did not respond or were not aware of e-resources. This suggests that the library has to conduct regular user awareness programmes for postgraduate students to promote maximum utilization of e-resources.

### 8.1 Use of Electronic Information Sources

Nearly 80% of the respondents reported using e-resources (Figure 3).

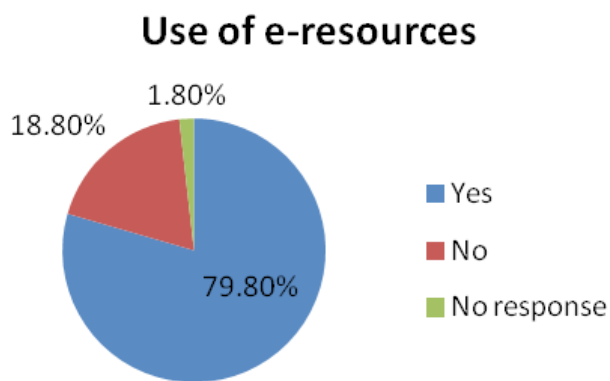


Figure 3. Use of e-resources.

The study also sought to identify the frequently used electronic resources. The data is presented in Figure 4.

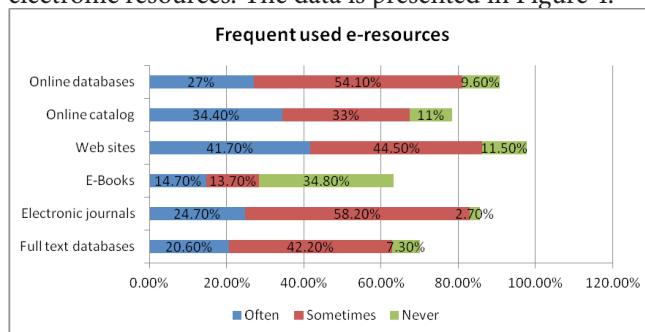


Figure 4. Frequent used e-resources.

### 8.2 Purpose of using E-Resources

The most common purposes of using e-resources related to research work (44.9%), updating subject knowledge (40%) and course work (37%). More often the people sought to get access to full texts of articles.

### 8.3 Frequency of E-Resources Access

Figure 5 depicts the frequency of use of e-resources; more than 25% of the respondents use e-resources on most days while 22% of them access them a few times in a week and 19% of them access at least once a week.

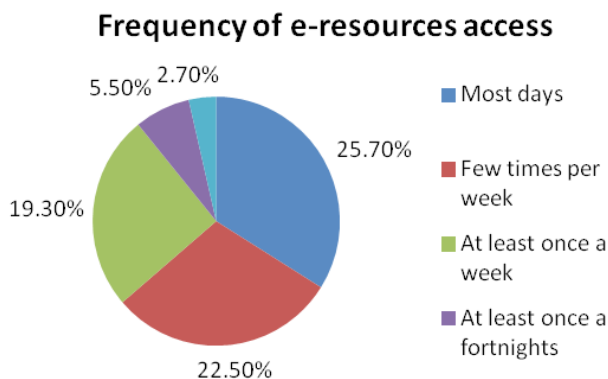


Figure 5. Frequency e-resources access.

### 8.4 Places where E-Resources are Accessed

Figure 6 shows 38.5% of the respondents preferred to access e-resources from the university library while 29% accessed from cyber café and 28% preferred to access from their home computers.

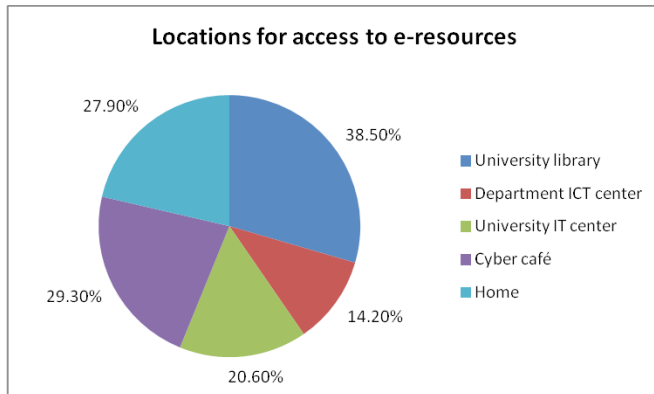


Figure 6. Location of access to e-resources.

### 8.5 Mode of Awareness of E-Resources

Most respondents mentioned that they were made aware of the e-resources by the library – via the library’s homepage (33.9%) through the user awareness programme conducted by the library (23.4%), etc.

### 8.6 User Satisfaction on E-Resources

As indicated in the Figure 7, 29 % of the respondents mentioned the library provides adequate e-resources and in contrast 19% mentioned the e-resources provided by the library are not adequate. Interestingly, more than half of the respondents did not respond to this question.

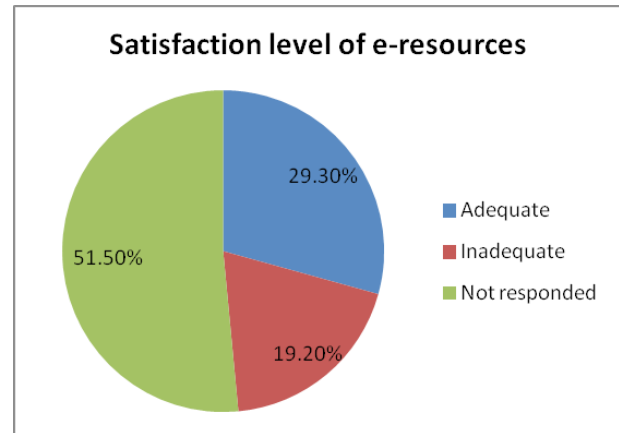


Figure 7. Satisfaction Level on E-Resources.

### 8.7 Problems Encountered when using E-Resources in the Library

One of the objectives of this study was to examine the problems faced by the respondents when using e-resources. The responses are tabulated in Table 1.

It is evident from Table 1, most of the respondents (21%) mentioned that the coverage of e-resources did not match their research area and more than 17% mentioned the lack of IT skills or searching skills as a problem. Of the respondents, Lack of training, lack of reliable Internet connectivity were some of the other problems encountered by users.

Table 1. Problems encountered

Sl. No.	Problem	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Insufficient e-resources available my subject	34	15.6
2.	Coverage of e-resources not suited to my research area	46	21.0
3.	No assistance received from the library	21	9.6
4.	Lack of training	36	16.5
5.	Lack of IT/search skills	39	17.8
6.	Insufficient computers with internet access in the library	24	11.0
7.	Slow internet connectivity	34	15.6
8.	Finding relevant information is problem	32	14.7
9.	Slow downloading	31	14.2
10.	Information overload	29	13.3
11.	Problem with credibility of information	22	10.0
12.	Inaccessibility of some web pages	32	14.7

Note: N = 218

## 9. Conclusion

The results of the survey revealed that most of the respondents used electronic resources available in the library. The study also highlights the need for adequate and well-designed training programmes for end users in the effective use of e-resources available in the library. The technology infrastructure in the library needs to be enhanced for better utilization of available e-resources 2.1.

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