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Information Needs and Information-Seeking Behaviour of Faculty Members at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur

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Introduction

The city of Bahawalpur has always been a seat of higher learning. Uch Sharif (a nearby ancient town) had one of the largest universities in the world where scholars from all over the world used to come for studies. As a continuation of this tradition, a religious university (Jamia Abbasia) was established at Bahawalpur in 1925, following the academic pursuits of Jamia Al-Azhar, Egypt. Jamia Abbasia was declared a general University in 1975, and renamed the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. The University started with ten departments but now this number has increased to 40, with 53 disciplines. (Information from the University's website, http://www.iub.edu.pk)

In any educational or research institution, the library plays a pivotal role. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur has a well-equipped and up-to-date library. It supports all subject areas taught in the university. Academic libraries in educationally advanced countries support the educational, teaching and research needs of the parent organisation they serve. These libraries see their responsibility as ensuring that the use of information sources, resources, and services are maximised to benefit its users – hence the need for assessment of user needs and information-seeking behaviour of the faculty of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

The nature of information is not easy to describe. One definition from the literature defines information as recorded experience that is used in decision-making. Today, information technology has developed rapidly and has had a huge impact on access to information and on information seeking behavior. Librarians and library-staff must understand the criteria of information seeking and information used by users for providing information services, designing new information systems, intervening in the operation of existing systems, or planning service programmes (Anwar, 2007).

The need for changes and improvement in the quality of education has become apparent in Pakistan in the higher education sector during the last two decades. The motivations for such a change have been the explosion and proliferation of information in various formats, and changing patterns of information seeking and retrieving.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find the answers of the following questions:

- What kind of information is needed for teaching and research?

- What sources and channels are used, how and why are they used?
- What kinds of informal methods of acquiring information are used?
- What difficulties and interconnected issues are involved in information seeking?
- What is the users' response towards new information and communication technology, i.e., Internet and computerised catalogue?
- What study places are preferred by faculty members?
- Does the physical environment of the library facilitate active learning?

Research Design and Data Collection

The data for this study was based on literature review, questionnaires, interviews, observation, opinions, perceptions and comments by faculty members at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. A questionnaire containing both open-ended and closed questions was prepared and sent the one hundred and fifty teachers. Faculty members were requested to take part in the survey from the fifteen departments selected randomly for the purpose of collecting the data. The list of the departments is as follows: Urdu, English, Political Science, Economics, History, Geography, Islamic Learning, Arabic, Education, Commerce, Mass Communication, Chemistry, Physics, Pharmacy and Library & Information Science. These were selected from four faculties: Faculty of Arts, Islamic Learning, Education, and Faculty of Science. The responses received from one hundred potential faculty members. The responses received from forty Lecturers, forty Assistant Professors, ten Associate Professors and ten Professors. The data shows that seventy members of academic staff hold Masters Degree, fifteen M.Phil, and ten the doctorate. The questionnaires were distributed by the faculty members of the Department of Library and Information Science and the librarian of the university library. In order to ensure reliability and effectiveness of the instrument, the questionnaire was pilot tested on twenty faculty members from different departments.

Literature Review

Factors that affect information seeking behaviour include personal reasons for seeking information, the kinds of information being sought, and the ways and sources with which needed information is being sought (Leckie, Pettigrew, and Sylvain, 1996). Information- seeking behaviour is expressed in various forms, from reading printed material to research and experimentation. Information users make active and intentional attempts to seek up-to-date information from the library resources, including electronic sources.

Shokeen and Kushik (2002) report on a study about information seeking behaviour of social scientists in the universities of Haryana. The study showed that most of the social scientists visit the library daily. The preferred search tools were indexing and abstracting periodicals and citations in articles. Current journals and books were preferred sources of information.

Al-Shanbari and Meadows (1995) report that 36 percent of the academicians in Saudi universities were spending four hours per week on reading, whereas, almost three-quarters of the respondents were spending the same amount of time on communicating with their colleagues. The study concluded that scholars in developing countries prefer informal channels for acquiring the needed information because of inadequate and irrelevant library collections, lack of information infrastructures, ineffective library services, lack of money to use fee-based information services, inadequately trained and less co-operative library staff.

The information-seeking activities of 31 faculty at Stanford University were studied by Reneker (1992). Using a naturalistic approach and qualitative techniques for the data collection, mainly personal interviews, the study found a close relationship between knowledge of the information environment and the sources used. Sethi (1990) used a questionnaire to study the information-seeking behaviour of 256 social science faculty members in Indian universities. It was found that respondents preferred journals,

books, government documents, and reference sources for meeting their information needs. Hart (1993) reported faculty made about seven visits each semester to the library and looked at how scholars in different disciplines vary in their use of library resources.

Some studies investigating the information-seeking behaviour of scholars and academics have examined the role of the library in relation to other information providers. Smith (1987) reported that about one-half of the respondents from Pennsylvania State University relied more on their personal collections and borrowing materials from other libraries. Guest (1987) noted that 85 percent of the respondents relied on their personal collection as a major source for information for teaching and research. The author also found that librarians were rated lowest as a source for getting information.

Information-seeking behaviour of faculty members from Government Arts Colleges in Cuddalore District was studied by Suriya, Sangeetha, and Nambi in 2004, to evaluate information-seeking pattern of faculty members in the library. Most of the respondents visited the library several times a week to meet their information needs.

The advent of information technology has revolutionized the field of library and information services and has brought considerable changes in the information-seeking behaviour of users (Adedibu and Adio, 1997). Rlectronic communication facilities such as e-mail, discussion groups, bulletin boards, electronic conferencing, and chat groups have opened new channels for communication (Abdullah, 1995).

In Pakistan, the evaluation of information needs and information-seeking behaviour has gained interest during the last two decades. Anwar (2007) reports on different research studies of different groups of people in Pakistan. Bhatti (2008) carried out a survey on student needs in the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Shahzad (2007) conducted a survey to find out the information-seeking behavior of faculty members from all three faculties, i.e., science and technology, social sciences, and humanities of Government College University, Lahore. The information needs of humanities teachers at the University of the Punjab were studied by Anjum in 1978.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Educational and Information Needs of Faculty members and Current Provision by the Library

This study elicited data on the educational and information needs of the teachers and their information-seeking behaviour. It covers issues regarding users' knowledge about tools, preferences for sources, purposes for using the library, informal channels of acquiring information, language preference, current journals, satisfaction, and problems. Seventy percent of teachers use the main library and 17 percent their subject library services. There is a lack of departmental libraries in the university. The university administration are not in favour of establishing such libraries, perhaps because of the financial and human resources need. In the interviews, a strong desire for departmental libraries was expressed.

Information Sources Preferences by Teachers

A considerable majority of teachers (56 percent) are not satisfied with the current stock of books related to their fields as they find them inadequate for meeting their educational and research needs.

Forty percent think that the current periodicals give the required information to some extent and 32 percent want more journals for supplementing their research programmes. Demand for more databases and internet facilities, is also increasing as 40 percent of teachers find the current provision inadequate.

Table 1: Types of reading material for academic and research needs			
Types of material	Adequately	To some extent	Inadequately
Books	44%	24%	56%
Periodical	28%	40%	32%
Indexes	11%	43%	
Abstracts	27%	38%	
Bibliographies	19%	07%	
Yearbooks	16%	11%	
Encyclopedias	34%	37%	29%
Other reference material	29%	31%	34%
Non book material	09%	16%	36%
Internet	76%	34%	40%
Other (Please specify)			

Informal Channels

Twenty-seven percent of the faculty members consulted a knowledgeable person in the field. Fifty-four percent discussed with colleagues, eight percent discussed with librarian or reference staff of the library, and twenty-two percent consider seminars, workshops and conferences as useful sources for seeking the information.

Table 2: Informal channels	**Responses**
Consult a subject specialist and expert in the field	27%
Discussion with seniors and colleagues	54%
Discussion with librarian or reference staff of the library	8%
Seminars	22%
Conferences	22%
Workshops	22%

Academic staff consider seminars, workshops, and conferences important sources of information. Users need such events for gathering current information.

Purpose

Respondents indicated the purpose of seeking information. Eighty-eight percent sought information for teaching purpose (preparing class lectures), 68 percent for literature searcher, 43 percent to borrow books or journal articles. Fifty-four percent of faculty members consult the library for research, and 43 percent for keeping their knowledge up-to-date, and 27 percent visit the library for reading newspapers and magazines (recreational purpose).

Table 3: Purposes of library use	Responses
Teaching	88%
Research	54%
Writing and presenting papers	8%
Literature search/reference collection	68%
Borrow books or journal articles	43%
Guiding students and researchers	22%
M.Phil and Ph.D.	37%
Renewing their knowledge	43%
Reading library material	18%
Study your own material	29%
Recreational purposes	27%
Social purposes	07%
Other (Please specify)	0.00%

Difficulties and Problems

The study looked at problems faced by faculty members while seeking information. The following table reveals the difficulties in detail. This data is useful for library management.

Table 4: Difficulties and problems	Responses
Material is not available on the shelf	64%
Outdated reading materials	52%
Lack of awareness of the availability of material	44%
English language material	29%
Shortage of latest journals	61%
Information sources are so far located	55%
Information scattered in too many sources	55%
Lack of time (Overworked)	73%
Lack of knowledge about information retrieving techniques	30%
Non-supportive behaviour of library staff	45%
Unavailability of internet facility in the departments	47%
Shortage of computers	76%
HEC digital library services are limited to the library and campus	60%
Others (Please specify)	0.00%

Available Languages

Seventy-five percent of the library material is in English, along with Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and others. Students have expressed a demand for more Urdu language material, perhaps because that has been the language of their textbooks and guides in schools and colleges.

Current Journals

Journals and periodicals provide the latest information. Users were asked whether their university library subscribes to journals relating to your field of interest. Eighty-one said that their library does not. Responses show dissatisfaction with the inadequate provision of journals and expressed their demands for foreign journals.

User Awareness of Library Services

Users were asked about the provision of services. The responses do not show a positive picture. Ninety percent complained about the lack of indexing and abstracting services. The library does not offer interlibrary loan. Thirty seven percent of teachers and a small minority of students had a positive view of library services. Fifty-five percent of teachers and 42 percent of students appreciated the library book bank services.

Library services			
Services	Yes	No	To some extent
Indexing and abstracting services		90%	0.00%
Bibliographic services			17%
Reference services			37%
Reprographic services			52%
Interlibrary loan services		90%	0.00%
Book bank services			55%

Asked what needed material the library does not supply, many teachers, researchers, and PhD students asked for more up-to-date material, especially international books, journals, and other reference material. E-books were also a popular suggestion, as was the provision of Internet access, which is currently inadequate for the population it serves. Teachers recommended indexing and abstracting services in all fields, so that they could save time doing research. Interlibrary loan was also a strongly-expressed need.

Reliability of Information Sources and Services

Users were asked in both the questionnaires and interviews whether the information provided by the library was valid and reliable. The response was positive, but they also suggested that a selective dissemination of information service should be introduced. Asked whether their university library meets their educational and information needs in timely and effectively if they request urgent services, most answered that they face difficulties in this regard.

The majority of senior teaching staff members showed satisfaction with the library services by saying that the standard of services and facilities is beginning to improve. In the interviews 75 percent of teachers said that the material the library provides is valid and accurate. At the same time, respondents felt that the library should purchase up-to-date material to replace older and less useful titles.

Places to Study

The vast majority of respondents spend between eleven and thirty hours working from home. Use of the library for study is not as common.

Table 6: Preferences of study places by the teachers					
Hours	Home	Departmental Library	University main library	Public library	Office staff room or other place
31-40	69%	02%	12%	0.00%	42%
21 - 30	37%	16%	23%	0.00%	63%
11 - 20	42%	11%	27%	0.00%	51%
6 - 10	05%	07%	14%	0.00%	0.00%
5 -1	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
1 or less	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Satisfaction with the Library Services

Thirty-six percent of respondents expressed total satisfaction, with a larger number saying that they are satisfied to some extent, and more than one quarter feeling dissatisfied.

Summary of Findings

- Nearly all respondents use library resources for teaching, more than half for research, and a smaller number for various other purposes.
- University lecturers make great use of books, while assistant, associate, and full professors also use periodicals, indexes, abstracts, encyclopedias and other reference materials. Use of the Internet high among all categories of faculty members.
- More than half of respondents regard colleagues as their primary informal information channel. More than one quarter consult with subject specialists, and about one fifth consider seminars, conferences and workshops useful for acquiring up-to-date information.
- Three quarters of the reading material in the library is in English.
- Journal subscriptions are inadequate to meet faculty information needs in their discipline.
- Nearly all respondents complained about the lack of indexing and abstracting services. Reference service is found to be useful to some extent.
- There is a strong demand for interlibrary loan service.
- While library resources were judged to be valid and accurate, they are also out-of-date.
- A majority of teachers prefer their office and home rather than library for their academic and research work.
- The preference for a place to study may depend on factors other than the purely educational. Among the university community there is a preference for off-campus study places. The reason might be cultural or climatic. Bahawalpur is very hot during the summer, with the temperature reaching 50 degrees centigrade. The city is also facing problems of electricity load shedding.
- Not finding required material on the shelves was a problem for respondents. Three fifths complained of the shortage of material, especially current journals. An equal number face difficulty as the HEC Digital Library services are limited to the library and university campus.
- The shortage of computers and lack of Internet access is a problem for a majority of respondents.
- Use of the Internet is high, especially among younger faculty. HEC Digital Library resources are found to be useful for conducting research.
- A variety of different search engines are used by respondents.
- A considerable number of users suggested that a liaison officer be appointed for better communication between the library and the faculty.

- Faculty and library staff have a generally cooperative working relationship, that is encouraging for stimulating the use of library resources and becoming life-long learners. Some examples are reported on a small scale about a lack of cooperation.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that information seeking may be motivated by a wide variety of needs, including personal, professional, entertainment, etc. The successful operation of a library depends to a large extent on the choice of library collections. The collection should meet the needs and requirements of users. Consequently, librarians must be aware of how faculty seek information. Knowledge of faculty information needs and information-seeking behaviour is imperative for developing valuable collections, and improving facilities and services. It is recommended that library staff or reference librarians focus on assisting users to develop a better image for the library. Reference librarians should help teachers improve their information-seeking and find the types of information they need.

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