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## Exploring the information needs of competition inclined university students

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# **Exploring the information needs of competition inclined university students**

## **Abstract**

The present study investigates the information needs of university students engaged in preparing for competitive examinations. Investigating the format and kinds of information sources highly considered by competition inclined students the study identifies the factors the library should consider while selecting information sources from the perspective of competition inclined students. Collecting data using a structured questionnaire, the study reveal that the majority of the respondents consider both print and electronic format of information sources. The competition inclined students use books the most, followed by newspapers, magazines and scholarly journals, Similarly, the most considerable challenges emerged to be ‘relevant information scattered in several information sources’, ‘unavailability of required material in the library’ and ‘expensive cost of information sources’ by respondents. The study has implications for the academic librarians involved in designing the collection development policy and helps them in improving the understanding about the challenges faced by the competition inclined students.

**Keywords:** Information needs, University students, Competitive exams, Information sources

**Paper type:** Research paper

## **Introduction**

According to employment exchange statistics, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India, 424.4 lakh job seekers were registered on the live register of employment exchanges in the country at the end of December 2017(GOI, 2018). Out of which 155.2 lakh job seekers registered were women. This data clearly shows that the rate of unemployment in the country is increasing rapidly. This increasing growth in unemployment raises various challenges for the aspirants engaged in the preparation of competitive examinations. Due to a boom of unemployment, the level of complexity to qualify for the competitive examination has increased manifold. It may be attributed to the existence of a huge difference in the ratio of aspirants to the available vacant seats in every sector. There are many commissions and governing bodies across the country conducting competitive examinations to recruit aspirants in various departments. The

Staff Selection Commission (SSC) is one of the largest recruiting agencies of the government of India, which conducted ten all India open competitive examinations during the year 2018-19, and a total of 70,87,490 candidates were registered for different stages of various examinations. Out of which 52,36,810 candidates appeared in examination while the commission recommended only 16,160 candidates for an appointment, just 0.30% of the total appeared aspirants in examinations. Similarly, The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) conducted a total of 14 examinations, out of which 10 for civil services/posts and 4 for defence services across the country during 2018-19. UPSC received a total of 30,35,783 applications, but after preliminary, the mains and interview commission recommended only 3889 aspirants, just 0.12% of the total registered candidates for the exam. This data represents the level of competitive examinations conducted in India.

To gain success in the competitive examinations, aspirants acquire in-depth knowledge in their specific fields and better understand their subjects. The aspirants have varieties of information needs. But the information needs of the students of science, arts, management, and law discipline engaged in the preparation of competitive examinations are different from each other. Wilson (2000) and Nwagwu and Oshiname (2009), as cited in Emmanuel and Jegede (2011) noted that several factors influenced the information needs of users as available information sources, individual characteristics of users, socio-political, economic and legal and regulatory systems surrounding the users. It is observed that competitive exam aspirants started their preparation to achieve the career goal either during their graduation or after graduation. Most university students require only academic information to complete their assignments and projects and pass the examination.

However, some students are engaged in preparing for various competitive exams along with their regular studies to take admission in higher education, for a job and to qualify for the national level tests. To fulfil the information needs related to competitive examination, students consult various information sources in their university library or on the internet. The present study is based on a public-funded central university of North India, namely Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow, established in 1996 and has 31 departments under 15 schools and enrolled students in various programs ranging from undergraduate, postgraduate, MPhil and PhD. Since the university offers courses in different disciplines, several students prepare for various competitive examinations and their regular academic degree course. To fulfil their competition inclined information needs students require various information sources, and it is a challenge for

the library to provide all kinds of competition inclined information sources to students of all disciplines. Hence, there is a high need to understand the information needs of the competition inclined university students to help them in achieving their goals. This paper mainly highlights university students' information needs who are engaged in preparing any competitive examinations.

## **Review of Literature**

There were many studies conducted regarding the evaluation of information needs of users, such as information needs of medical students (Hugar and Kannappanavar, 2019), engineering students (Ramaiah and Shimray, 2018), management students (Natarajan, 2010), arts and humanities students (Padma, Ramasamy and Renugadevi, 2013) and law students (Anyago, 2014). However, it is also important to highlight that together with vocational courses, the students of every discipline are also engaged in some kind of competitive examinations, and they require various information sources to fulfil their competitive information needs. Therefore, there is a high need to focus on the information needs of competition inclined university students.

### ***Information needs of students of various disciplines***

It is observed from the literature that the information needs of different streams of students are quite unlike each other. Oluwaseye, Akanni and Busuyi (2017) surveyed the medical students' information needs and established that most medical students(72.9%) responded to the need for specific medical information. Similarly, Emmanuel and Jegede (2011) conducted a study to analyse the information needs of management students and found that 99.7% of MBA students of university required information on business/ management. Whereas 39.2% of law students also identified academic information need followed by legal information (24.5%) in fulfilling their queries (Anyago, 2014). The findings of the study of Das (2014) expressed that the primary information need of engineering students lies in academic assignments (46.70%), and 20.30% of users need information to prepare for competitions. The information needs of the students of arts and humanities move around their academic semester needs (Howlader and Islam, 2019). A survey conducted by Kumar and Pandey (2018) revealed that for preparing study notes, a majority of UG and PG students prefer books (98%), and very few students (2%) prefer journal articles.

### ***Preferred format of information source***

Numerous studies were reporting the preferred format of information sources by the users of several disciplines. Latif et al. (2017) examined users' preferences regarding the format of the information source. They found that out of the total sample, 93.86% of respondents prefer the print version and 90.79% used the electronic medium to access the required information. Similarly, Isebe, Ejedafiru and Okpidi (2017) reported that 75.23% of law students prefer print format to seek their required information, on the other hand, only 24.76% of users choose an electronic version of an information source. In another study of the arts and humanities discipline, 32.20% of undergraduate university students favour electronic media as their information source, and 28.30% prefer print media. (Howlader and Islam, 2019)

### ***Highly used printed information source***

Isebe, Ejedafiru and Okpidi (2017) in their study seek out that 100% of Nigerian law students of Delta state prefer law textbooks to assess their required information. Similarly, Oluwaseye, Akanni and Busuyi (2017) conducted a study on medical students and reported that the most commonly used information source by medical students was textbooks (84.2%). Apart from textbooks, more than half of the respondents (57.35%) of engineering students select lecture notes as a highly significant printed source of information (Oyadeyi, 2014).

### ***Mostly preferred electronic information source***

To identify the most preferred electronic information sources, research was conducted by Emmanuel and Jegede (2011), and the result shows that 90% of students used the internet to fulfil their academic needs. Likewise, Isebe, Ejedafiru and Okpidi (2017) also examined the preferred electronic information source and found that most respondents (96.2%) used E-database as their preferred information source. Additionally, Howlader and Islam (2019) searched that electronic books (44.80%) are highly preferable electronic information source by the students of arts and humanities discipline.

### ***Purpose of seeking information sources***

The purpose of seeking any information from students ranges from academics, projects and seminars; keep up with current developments and for general knowledge. A study conducted by Natarajan (2010) pointed out the information-seeking behaviour of management students and

revealed that 92.3% of users searched information to keep up with current developments. Coursework and assignments (62.2%) are also identified as the factor for searching for information sources (Oyadeyi, 2014). A similar finding also seems in the survey of Oluwaseye, Akanni and Busuyi (2017), which expressed that 68.4 % of students seek information sources for completing their assignments and academic projects.

### ***Preferred place for study***

The atmosphere of the reading place is one of the significant factors motivating the students to spend much time on reading. Latif et al. (2017) surveyed the most preferred location of reading by university medical students. They observed that most respondents choose both the library and computer lab (98.78%) as their favourite place to study.

### ***Problems in using information sources***

In seeking the appropriate information from different information, sources students faced several challenges. Isebe, Ejedafiru and Okpidi (2017) identified the barriers encountered by the law students in meeting their information needs and stated that inadequate relevant and up-to-date information (100%) is a highly faced obstacle followed by poor internet skills (94.6%). Lack of ICT knowledge is also considered a hurdle by 38.8% of undergraduate students at Dhaka University (Howlader and Islam, 2019). Likewise, to know the significant constraints in fulfilment of information needs, Oluwaseye, Akanni and Busuyi (2017) carried out a survey and found an impressive result that irregular power supply (69.5%) and inability to subscribe to online databases (57.1%) are also the factors that respondents strongly agreed as a challenge in searching their information needs. Pandey and Kumar (2019) identified the various obstacles faced by UG and PG students while fulfilling their academic needs, such as the unavailability of reading lists (83.87%), followed by a scatter of relevant information over several books.

### ***Information needs of Civil service aspirants***

Victor (2013), in his study, examined the preferred resources in competitive examinations by students of coaching centres and observed that class attending (41.3%) is the highly preferred component followed by material gathering (35.5%), group discussion (16.3%) and mock test (5.2%). The study also disclosed that the majority of students (88.45) developed competitive exam skills by practices, instructor (86.6%) class attending 77.9%, own self 74.4%, friends 70.9% and

information literacy program 52.9%. Kalyani and Thanuskodi (2019) researched that self-interest is one of the primary motivating factors agreed by aspirants of the urban area (51.76%), semi-urban (37.16%), rural (35%) and metropolitan city (19%) among civil services aspirants at Chennai. Similarly, in the study of Kumar (2016), it is identified that 60.1% of the total respondents are self-motivated for the preparation of competitive examinations. The results show that coaching centres 74.3% is a highly preferable source regarding the source of information.

Apart from all above discussed studies some studies also found in the literature which imparts the information needs of international students (Singh, Kumar and Khanchandani,2015), information needs of research scholars (Srikala, 2018), information needs of scientists (Nirmala, 2018), information needs of faculty members (Thilagavathi and Thirunavukkarasu, 2015), information needs of chemists (Gordon et al. 2018) and information needs of farmers (Singh, 2017).

### **Objectives of the study**

The primary objective of this study is to assess the information needs of competition inclined students of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University. The study attempts to:

- investigate the format and kinds of information sources highly preferred by students and their considerations on the usage of print and electronic information sources;
- assess the factors the library should consider for selection of information source in the library from the perspective of competition inclined students;
- examine the challenges faced by students in using information sources and
- ascertain the important considerations for choosing a library as a place by university students in the preparation of competitive exams.

### **Methodology:**

The study presents original research designed to explore the information needs of the competition inclined university students. The study adopts a structured questionnaire as a data collection instrument to collect data from students enrolled in the Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow. The first phase of the study involved data collection using the Google Forms web application to make the analysis more comfortable and faster. In the second phase, the collected data were analysed using Google Sheets, and the authors presented the findings of the study in the form of table and graphs.

### About the respondents

The present study involves the responses of 116 students enrolled in the university in various disciplines. Out of which, 60.30% (70) were males and 39.70% (46) females. In the survey, respondents were asked for their engagement in the preparation of any competitive examination, and it is observed that 63.80% (74) of the respondents were preparing for a competitive exam, while 36.20% (42) were not interested in competitive exam preparation. Further, it was analysed that out of 74 respondents, 63.51% (47) students engaged in the preparation were male and the rest, 36.49% (27) were female. The majority of the students who lie between the age group of 21-25 and above were highly interested in the preparation of competitive exams. It is also found in the study that most of the respondents were self preparing for their competitive examinations rather than coaching centres and group discussion. It is noted that the majority of students spent 2-4 hour per day on their preparation.

### Data Analysis

Figure 1: Preference for information sources

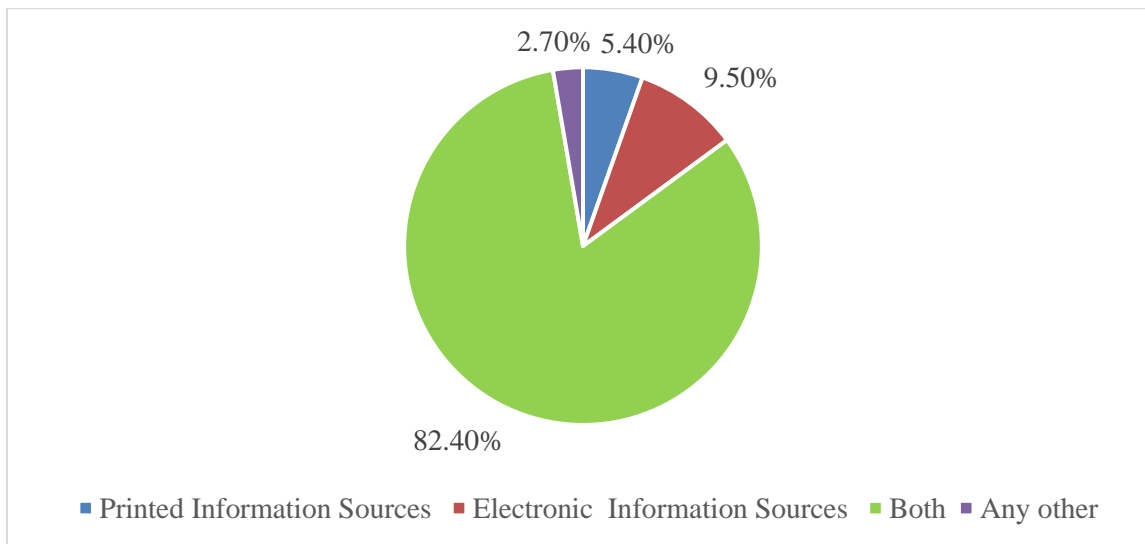


Figure 1 portrays the preferred format of an information source by university students. It is noted that the majority of respondents (61) prefer both print and electronic format followed by only electronic format (7) and only print format (4). The figure also depicts that only two students prefer other than the above-discussed format, and they prefer online learning platforms such as Byju's, Gradeup and Unacademy.



### *Considerations towards information sources*

To understand the preferences of the competitive exam inclined students towards the different types of information sources, a question was asked wherein the respondents were asked to provide their considerations on using the information sources for their preparation of competitive exams. The considerations were recorded in the scale of 1-10 where the score of 10 equals high consideration and 1 indicates least consideration.

Table 1: Considerations on the types of information sources

Information Sources	Considerations				
	Total Score	Mean Score	Median Score	Mode Score	% score
Books	509	6.70	8	10	67%
Competitive Magazines	403	5.30	5	2	53%
Newspaper	402	5.29	5	1	53%
Encyclopedia	313	4.12	3.5	2	41%
Directories	297	3.91	3	1	39%
Gazetteers	280	3.68	3	1	37%
Atlas & Maps	322	4.24	3	1	42%
Scholarly Journals	387	5.09	5	1	51%

Table 1 indicates the considerations of competition inclined students towards the different types of information sources. The percentage scores indicate that the students consider Books the most(67% score) followed by Competitive magazines and Newspapers(53% score). The Scholarly journals are also considered(51% score) followed by Atlas & Maps(42%), Encyclopedia(41%), Directories(39%) and Gazetteers(37%). Comparing the median scores, one can say that 50 percentile respondents gave consideration score of 8 out of maximum 10 to Books followed by a score of 5 to Competitive magazines, Newspapers and Scholarly journals while Encyclopedia received a median score of 3.5 followed by a score of 3 each for Directories, Gazetteers and Atlas & Maps.

### *Social media as a source of information*

When asked whether the respondents consider social media as a source of information, a majority (57.89%) stated that they might or might not view social media as a source of information, followed by 31.58 % respondents said that they definitely consider social media as an information source. In comparison, only 10.53% of respondents answered that they would not consider social media as a source of information(Table 2).

Table 2: Social media as a source of information

<b>Social Media as Information Source</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>% share</b>
Definitely consider	24	31.58%
Might or might not consider	44	57.89%
Would not consider	8	10.53%

The findings indicate that most of the competition-inclined students might or might not consider social media as a source of information and very few do not consider social media as an information source. The findings also indicate that the students receive a lot of information from social media channels and most of the students get confused on the information received from such channels.

***Factors library should consider for collection development***

When asked about the factors the library should consider for the collection development that might help the competition inclined students, the respondents were given a list of factors and they were asked to provide their considerations in a scale of 1 to 10. A score of 1 equals to least considerable and a score of 10 equals the significant factor.

Table 3: Factors library should consider for collection development

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Considerations</b>				
	<b>Total Score</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>Median Score</b>	<b>Mode Score</b>	<b>% score</b>
Expensive documents	390	5.13	5	1	51.32%

Rare documents	354	4.66	4	1	46.58%
Competition focused documents	391	5.14	5	1	51.45%
General documents(newspapers, general magazines)	419	5.51	5	1	55.13%

The considerations of respondents revealed that the library should acquire more documents of general nature(55.13% score) followed by competition focused documents(51.45%), expensive documents(51.32%) and rare documents(46.58%). The findings indicate that the competition inclined students want more general and competition focused documents in the library.

When asked about any other resources that the respondents would like to have in the library, in response to an open ended question, several respondents asked to have documents such as, question banks(books having objective type questions for practice), solved answers to previous year question papers, standard books prescribed for preparation of civil services, resources covering information on current awareness, latest issues of competitive magazines, newspapers, and notes from reputed coaching institutes. A respondent stated, “online solution to queries” and another for organising seminars or training sessions for students preparing for competitive examinations.

### ***Challenges in using information sources***

To find out the challenges that the competition inclined students face in effective utilisation of information sources, a list of probable challenges was prepared based on experience and available literature. The respondents were asked to provide their considerations for each challenge on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 equals least considerable challenge while 10 equals highly significant challenge.

Table 4: Problems in using information sources

Challenges	Considerations*				
	Total Score	Mean Score	Median Score	Mode Score	% score
Information is scattered in many sources	395	5.20	5	1	51.97%

Lack of awareness of e-resources	307	4.04	3	1	40.39%
Information sources are expensive	390	5.13	4.5	1	51.32%
Lack of knowledge about search strategies	350	4.61	4	1	46.05%
Latest information is not available	376	4.95	5	1	49.47%
Required material is not available	395	5.20	5	2	51.97%
Lack of technical knowledge	363	4.78	5	1	47.76%
Language of the document as a barrier	299	3.93	3	1	39.34%
*1=Least considerable, 10=Highly considerable					

The mean scores of the listed challenges revealed that the challenge of ‘relevant information scattered in several information sources’ and ‘unavailability of required material in the library’ is the most considerable challenge. Additionally, the ‘expensive cost of information sources’ was also listed among the top three challenges by respondents. The findings also revealed that the ‘language of the information resources’ and ‘lack of awareness about the e-resources’ are not considerable challenges for most respondents. In contrast, ‘unavailability of latest information’, ‘lack of technical knowledge’ and lack of knowledge about search strategies’ are a considerable level of challenge.

### ***Reasons for choosing library as a place for preparation of competitive examinations***

It was interesting to ascertain the reasons that motivate competition inclined students to choose the central library as a place for their preparation of competitive examinations. A probable list of reasons was prepared based on experience and review of the literature, and the respondents were asked to provide their considerations for each reason on a scale of 1-10. Where 1 equals least motivating reason and 10 for a highly motivating reason.

Table 5: Reasons for choosing library as a place for preparation of competitive exams

Reasons	Considerations*				
	Total Score	Mean Score	Median Score	Mode Score	% score

Academic ambience of the library	474	6.24	7	10	62.37%
Personalised assistance from the library	376	4.95	4	1	49.47%
Availability of required document at single place	419	5.51	5.5	1	55.13%
Availability of carrel seats	456	6.00	6.5	10	60.00%
High-speed internet connectivity	457	6.01	7	10	60.13%
Xerox facility	455	5.99	6	10	59.87%
Availability of electrical charging points	465	6.12	7	10	61.18%
Availability of discussion room	370	4.87	4	1	48.68%
Air conditioning	495	6.51	8	10	65.13%
Central location of the library	495	6.51	8	10	65.13%
Can sit till late hours	498	6.55	8	10	65.53%

Among the listed reasons, the respondents gave the maximum scores for ‘can sit till late hours’, followed by ‘Air conditioning’, ‘central location of the library in the campus’, and the ‘academic ambience of the library’. Other highly considerable reasons were the ‘availability of carrel seats’, ‘high-speed internet connectivity’, ‘Xerox facility’, and ‘availability of electrical charging points’. Whereas, reasons such as ‘availability of discussion rooms’, ‘availability of required documents at a single place’, and ‘personalised assistance from library’ were the least considerable reasons for choosing the library as a place for preparation of competitive examinations.

## Findings and Discussion

The present study attempts to identify the information needs of competition inclined university students. The findings of the study revealed the level of consideration regarding types of information sources of relevance to such students, reasons for choosing a library as a place for preparation and the constraints faced by such students while utilising information sources. It is noted that 63.80% of students are engaged in preparing competitive examinations, out of which male respondents are more interested in competitions and their university studies. After analysis, an interesting finding seems that 86.49% of the university students prefer self-coaching rather than coaching centre, peer group, parents as their training person. It might be possible because they all

are busy taking lectures of their regular courses in university, and after that, they give time to their competitive exam preparation. In the opinion of preferred media of information sources, it is viewed from results that the majority (82.40%) of the respondents consider both print and electronic format of information sources. Similarly, the study of Howlader and Islam (2019) also depicts that the majority (39.50%) of the Dhaka University undergraduate students selected both print and electronic media of information sources. It is also revealed from the results that some university students are also using online learning platforms such as Byju's, Gradeup and Unacademy for their preparation.

Further, the considerations towards information sources indicate that the competition inclined students use books the most, followed by newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals. In contrast, directories, gazetteers and atlas & maps are not of much value for university students. It might be possible because most university students are engaged in the preparation to take admission in higher education in their discipline or qualify the national level tests in their specific field. This finding is supported by the study of Latif et al. (2017) that most (94.94%) of the medical college students in Pakistan also prefer books to satisfy their seeking demand. On the contrary, e-resources are the highly preferred electronic information source by university students in their preparation. In terms of information received from social media, the study revealed that most students might or might not consider social media as a source of information. However, a good number of respondents stated that they definitely consider social media as a source of information. The reasons could be that these days several coaching institutes have their facebook pages, and YouTube channels from where they release highly relevant and filtered content useful for preparation of competitive examinations.

While framing the collection development policy to serve the competition inclined students most effectively, the library should consider the factors such as acquiring more general documents and competition focused documents in the library. Further, the study results suggest that the cost and rarity of the document are the significant factors that affect their availability in the library. This may be due to the fact that respondents of the survey are university students, and all of them cannot purchase expensive information sources.

The competition inclined university students face several obstacles in fulfilling their information needs as we assess from the results of the study, the most considerable challenges emerged to be 'relevant information scattered in several information sources', 'unavailability of required material

in the library' and 'expensive cost of information sources' by respondents. The findings are in line with Lone, Mir and Ganie (2017), which analysed that the majority (46.2%) of the students of Kashmir university also faced the problem of scattered information in too many sources. The respondents of the study seem to be more impressed to choose the library as a place for the preparation of competitive exams because of its central location and the facility to sit or read in the library till late hours. The possible reasons for choosing these factors are students' engagement in their classes during working hours, and they do not get time during their lecture timings. This is why they prefer to go to the library after their classes and sit till late hours.

On the other hand, there are students of different disciplines in university who are engaged in the preparation of competitive exams, and their departments are situated in separate blocks of the campus. However, the library is located centrally in university, that is why they prefer the library for their competitive exams preparation. Other considerable reasons were, 'Air conditioning', the 'academic ambience of the library', the 'availability of carrel seats', 'high-speed internet connectivity', 'Xerox facility', and 'availability of electrical charging points'.

## **Suggestions**

Based on the study's results, it is suggested that libraries should involve the acquisition policy of competition inclined information sources in their collection development policy that will help the students qualify the exams to take admission in higher education and to pass the national level tests. It is also recommended to the library authorities that they provide highly valuable documents to the students in electronic format because of their less number of copies in the library. The respondents of the study also faced problems in acquiring their required information because it is scattered in several sources. To overcome this problem, libraries might provide a reading list of the significant information resources available in different disciplines. The provision of facilities such as air conditioning, availability of carrels, enough electric charging points, good internet connectivity, and the library's academic ambience would also help attract students to the library. The libraries can organise counselling sessions for such students inviting career counsellors and experts from well-known institutions to support the competition inclined students to achieve their targets.

## **Conclusion**

The present study is one of the very few studies that pay attention to the information needs of the competition inclined university students. It would be beneficial for the library staff in framing apt collection development policy of their libraries as the results of the study highlight the highly considerable information sources, significant factors the library should consider for acquiring library materials in the library and the significant barriers faced by the students engaged in the preparation of any competitive examination. One of the limitations of the study is that it was conducted in India, taking a case of only one university. To generalise the impact, interested researchers may replicate similar studies by taking several universities across the country to gain a complete perspective of the competition inclined university students. The findings of the study have implications for the librarians involved in the collection development policy of their libraries, the university library administration to provide facilities that motivate the students to use libraries and the librarians to understand the challenges faced by the competition inclined students. By understanding all these aspects, library authorities can improvise their collection accessibility and enhance the satisfaction level of their users.

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