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A Study of Using Informal Learning Spaces at Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

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Abstract:

Purpose- Present paper is an attempt to explore the students' opinion of Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, regarding the use of Informal Learning Spaces.

Design/methodology/approach- A survey was conducted through a well structured and precise questionnaire and circulated personally among 180 students studying at Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

Findings- The study reveals the fact that majority of the students' use informal learning spaces for academic purpose and feels that library plays an important role in making them to use of informal learning spaces for academic purpose.

Research limitations/implications- The geographical area of study was confined to the students of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi purely regarding the use and their opinion of Informal Learning Space. The research results are limited to this environment only.

Originality/value- In India, limited studies have been conducted on informal learning space but as it is an emerging concept in librarianship, it is imperative to know the users' behavior and attitude towards it. The study highlights the students' opinion of Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi regarding use of Informal Learning Spaces and its role in academic environment. The study also opens the path for some more studies to be conducted on this area.

Keywords: Informal Learning Space; Learning Environment; Informal Learning; Academic Libraries; and Informal Space.

0   Introduction

As India is marching towards becoming the knowledge based society, the role of learning is growing rapidly as an important component of life. Every person in daily life passes through learning at every moment weather it comes formally or informally, doesn't matter. Now, the new generation is having bent of mind to use the each and every moment for learning or academic purpose and the role of librarianship becoming important in this environment. Librarianship in today's era is not meant for issue-return the documents but it is beyond this. Libraries are now moving ahead from boundaries because keeping in view the requirements of new generation libraries trying to be with them all the time whether at home, in campus or any other place.

Since libraries are providing their services 24x7 with multiple dimensions as intranet, Internet and web-OPAC etc that have forced the patrons to make use of informal space for learning or academic purpose also. Now, informal learning spaces have become equally important as formal learning space in human life as Brown and Lippincott (2003) claim that "more learning is taking place outside of class time than ever before". So, it is imperative to find out the use of new emerging concept i.e. informal learning space at broad level.

1 Informal Learning Space

Before discussing the Informal learning spaces we need to understand learning and informal learning first, learning is the process whereby knowledge is acquired and informal learning is often treated as a residual category to describe any kind of learning which does not take place within, or follow from, a formally organized learning programme or event (Eraut, 2000). In other words it can be defined as the result of learning from our routine work or leisure time. Richardson (2004) defines informal learning as "which happens outside the formal education system or structured training and does not lead to a qualification." Conlon (2003) believes that "informal learning tends to be the outcome of incidental learning through everyday experience. And as far as informal learning space is concerned, it is the space used in leisure time includes gardens, cafeteria, and outside of class or library etc.

2 Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi is one of the prime institutions in India comes under the national importance institutions. The concept of IIT was introduced first on the recommendation of Sh. N. M. Sircar, then member of Education on Viceroy's Executive Council in 1945. The first Indian Institute of Technology was established in the year 1950 in Kharagpur. Then after the college of Engineering & Technology established in 1961 was declared an institution of National Importance under the "Institute of Technology (Amendment) Act 1963" and was renamed "Indian Institute of Technology Delhi". It was then accorded the status of a university with powers to decide its own academic policy, to conduct own examinations, and to award its own degrees (http://www.iitd.ac.in/content/history-institute).

3 Review of Related Literature

With the advent of ICT in 21st century learning is changing rapidly. Users' attitude, behavior and requirements have changed and libraries are trying to cope up with all those for their survival and to retain their value. Now Libraries, instead of waiting for the patrons to come, have started reaching to their patrons resulting mode of learning and use of spaces have been drastically and dramatically changed. Now, students have started using the formal and informal spaces for learning. Use of informal learning space is still untouched in India but numerous studies have been conducted on informal learning space in abroad. For instance, Riddle and Souter (2012) describe the design of informal learning space at an Australian University and demonstrate the ways in which evidence based on students perspectives and principles developed through applied research in teaching and learning can inform real world learning space design projects in a higher education context. Bodnar (2009) argues that although information and learning commons are designed primarily to benefit college and university students, these spaces can, with little modification, benefit faculty as well. Matthews, Andrews and Adams (2011) discuss the role of social learning spaces on the student experience using the student engagement framework within a qualitative research design and also reveal in their findings that social learning spaces can contribute to enhanced student engagement by fostering active learning, social interaction and

belonging amongst tertiary students. And further, also suggest that design is a contributing factor to students' perceptions of social learning spaces. Sullivan (2010) discusses about the role of libraries and initiatives in giving the emphasis on social dimensions of learning. Walton and Matthews (2013) discuss and evaluate the role of university library in informal learning spaces. Brooks (2010) discusses the relationship between formal learning space and student learning outcomes and finds that technologically enhanced learning environments, independent of all other factors, have a significant and positive impact on student learning. Harrop and Turpin (n.d.) explore learners' behaviors, attitude and preferences towards informal learning spaces in higher education, within and outside the academic library. Hunter and Cox (2013) analyze and find that the background atmosphere greatly influences the students' choice of study location and students adapted their study habits to fit the learning spaces that they liked. Lippincott and Brown (2003) highlight that the students often "inhabiting more than one virtual space at a time" by using the virtual space. Kio and Negreiros J (2013) analyses in their study "how online communication platforms are changing the internal nature of education." Hall (2009) discuss in study that within educational contexts web 2.0 tools enable spaces for learners to extend their own formal learning into more informal places through the fusion of web-based tools into a task-oriented personal learning environments and further the author highlights "how the read/write web can be used proactively by educators, using specific tasks to enable learners to fuse their informal and formal learning spaces, and thereby enhance their decision-making confidence." Eraut (2000) discuss the "conceptual and methodological problems arising from several empirical investigations of professional education and learning in the workplace". Berth (n.d.) describes the "progression of a learning experiment with high school students producing moblogs out of the school environments and focuses especially on the reflective aspects of the moblogs as an expression of the reflective practice." Park and et. al. (2011) discuss blog as a contemporary web-based environment that can make a difference in adult informal learning practice and further more the study implies that the blog can be a meaningful learning environment and the blogging can be a significant factor in having the informal learning for adults more enriched and fulfilled.

4 Objectives of the Study and Methodology

In order to examine the research aspects involved in the present study, following objectives were set for the study.

- To know the students opinion about the space regarding their visit, time spent, and worth;
- To know the purpose of visit;
- To know merits and demerits of using informal learning spaces in academic environment;
- To find out the factors making the students to use the informal learning spaces for academic purpose;
- And further, the last objective was set as open-ended question to know the suggestions/comments.

In order to accomplish the above set of research objectives a survey was conducted through a well-structured and precise questionnaire for the students and during the time of January 2012 to March 2014, only those students who were found sitting in garden, cafeteria and outside the library, were personally contacted and given a questionnaire with a letter explaining the purpose and objectives of the study and asked for their co-operation in the study and most of the students returned filled-in questionnaire on the spot. For study, it was decided that the questionnaire will be distributed to a sample population of the students for the purpose of the study, 180 students were randomly selected and given a questionnaire, and out of them 160 students responded of the

questionnaire. All the respondents in responding showed great enthusiasm and on the basis of the responses received data is presented in the form of tables and analyzed by using a simple method of calculation.

5   Data Analysis and Discussion

Note: Figures shown in the parentheses are the percentage.

Table 1: Response Rate of the Students (gender-wise and in total)

	Total no. of Questionnaires	Male	Female
Distributed	180 (100)	90 (50)	90 (50)
Received	160 (88.89)	81 (90)	79 (87.78)

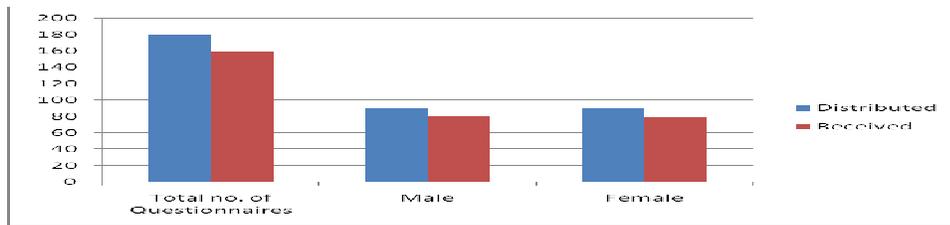**Figure 1: Response Rate of the Students (gender-wise and in total)**

Table 1 indicates that out of 180 questionnaire circulated among the students, 160 (88.89%) filled in questionnaires were collected back from the respondents. Further, the table reflects that response rate of male and female is 90% and 87.78% respectively that shows both male and female showed great enthusiasm in responding.

Table 2: Currently using the space for academic work or not (gender-wise and in total)

	Male (N=81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Yes	27 (33.33)	39 (49.36)	66 (41.25)
No	54 (66.66)	40 (50.63)	94 (58.75)

Figure 2: Currently using the space for academic work or not (gender-wise and in total)
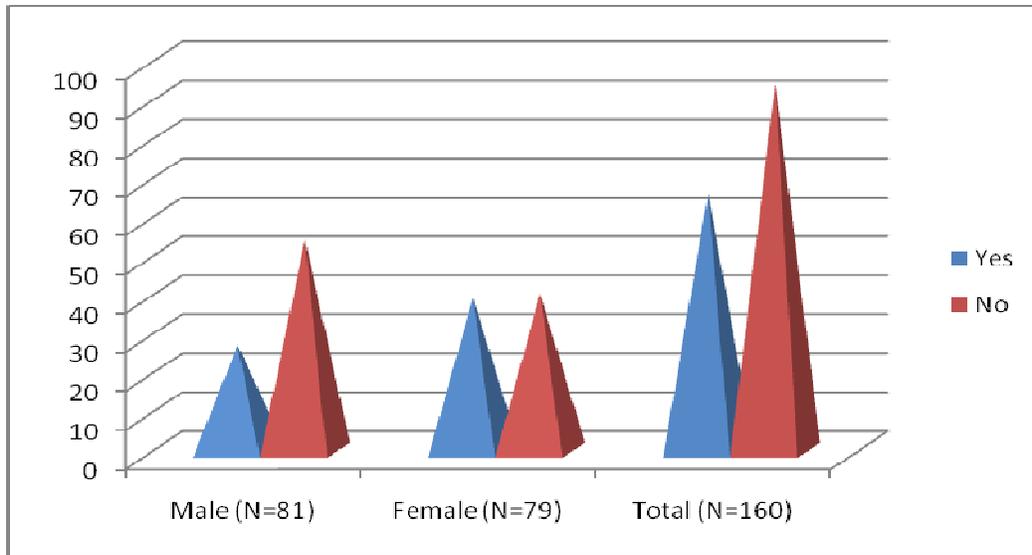
Table 2 shows that majority of the students i.e. 58.75% (66.66% male and 50.63% female) were found not using the space for learning/academic purpose at the time of survey Whereas on the other hand 41.25% students (33.33% male and 49.36% female) were found using the space for learning/academic purpose.

Table 3: Opinion about the space (gender-wise and in total) for learning/academic purpose

	Male (N=54)	Female (N=40)	Total (N=94)
Yes	23 (42.59)	22 (55)	45 (47.87)
No	31 (57.40)	18 (45)	49 (52.13)

Figure 3: Opinion about the space (gender-wise and in total) for learning/academic purpose
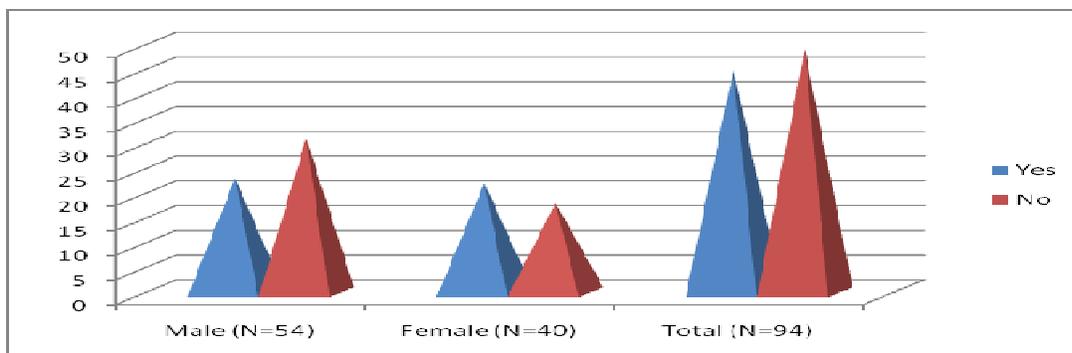

5

Table 3 is the part of the above table 2 that reflects the opinion of those found not using the space for learning i.e. 47.87% (42.59% male and 55% female) opined that although currently they are not using it for learning but they use informal learning space for academic purpose.

Table 4: Opinion regarding best description of this space

description of this space	Male (N=81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Space for individual study	04 (4.94)	02 (2.53)	06 (3.75)
Space for unwinding by myself	07 (8.64)	05 (6.33)	12 (7.5)
Space for group study	17 (20.99)	14 (17.72)	31 (19.38)
Space for group debate/discussion	28 (34.57)	32 (40.51)	60 (37.5)
Space for socializing with people	10 (12.34)	05 (6.33)	15 (9.38)
Space for eating & drinking	15 (18.52)	21 (26.58)	36 (22.5)
Any other (please specify)	-	-	-

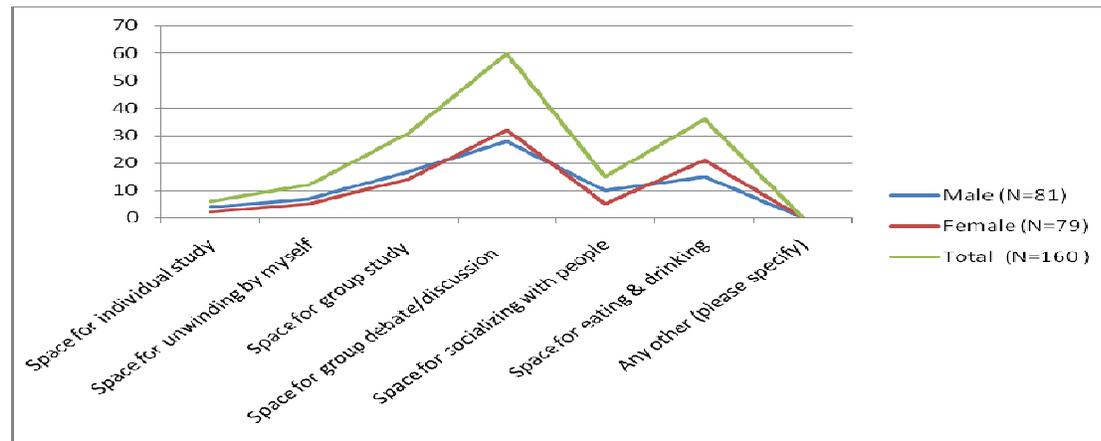**Figure 4: Opinion regarding best description of this space**

Table 4 reveals the fact that 37.5% students (34.57 male and 40.51% female) describe the informal space as space for group debate/discussion and 22.5% students (18.52% male and 26.58% female) opined about the space as space for eating and drinking. And furthermore, only 3.75% students (4.94% male and 2.53% female) opined it as the space for individual study.

Table 5: Opinion regarding the frequent use of space

	Male (N=81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Daily/Regularly	57 (70.37)	43 (54.43)	100 (62.5)
Twice a week	04 (4.94)	07 (8.86)	11 (6.88)

Thrice a week	15 (18.52)	13 (16.46)	28 (17.5)
Once a week	03 (3.70)	11 (13.92)	14 (8.75)
Monthly	02 (1.25)	05 (6.33)	07 (4.38)
rarely	-	-	-
Never	-	-	-

Figure 5: Opinion regarding the frequent use of space
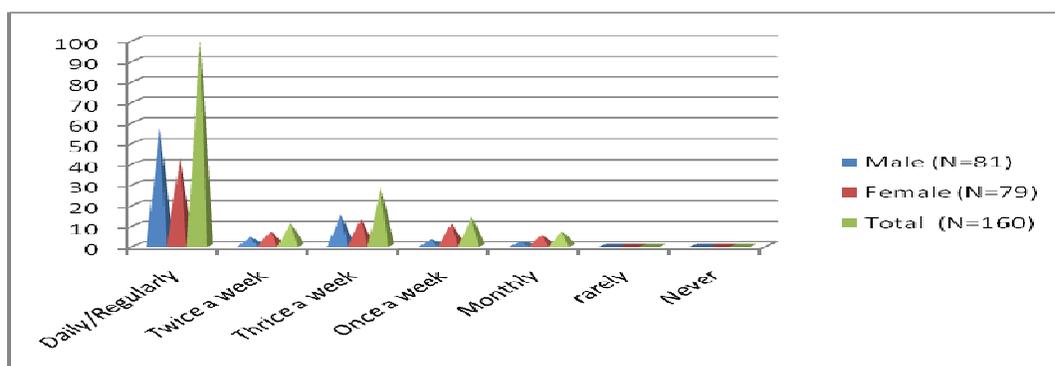

Table 5 shows the frequency of visit/use the space by students' that reflects majority of the students i.e. 62.5% students (70.37% male and 54.43% female) opined that they visit the space daily whereas very less no. of students i.e. 4.38% (1.25% male and 6.33% female) only visit the space monthly. It is apparent from the study that informal learning spaces are popular among the students.

Table 6: Time spent to visit this space at a time

	Male (N= 81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Less than half an hour	04 (4.94)	02 (2.53)	06 (3.75)
Less than one hour	10 (12.35)	08 (10.13)	18 (11.25)
One to two hours	49 (60.49)	59 (74.68)	108 (67.5)
Three to four hours	10 (12.35)	09 (11.39)	19 (11.88)
More than four hours	06 (7.41)	07 (8.86)	13 (8.13)
Depends on work or mood	02 (2.47)	04 (5.06)	06 (3.75)
Any other (Pl. specify)	-	-	-

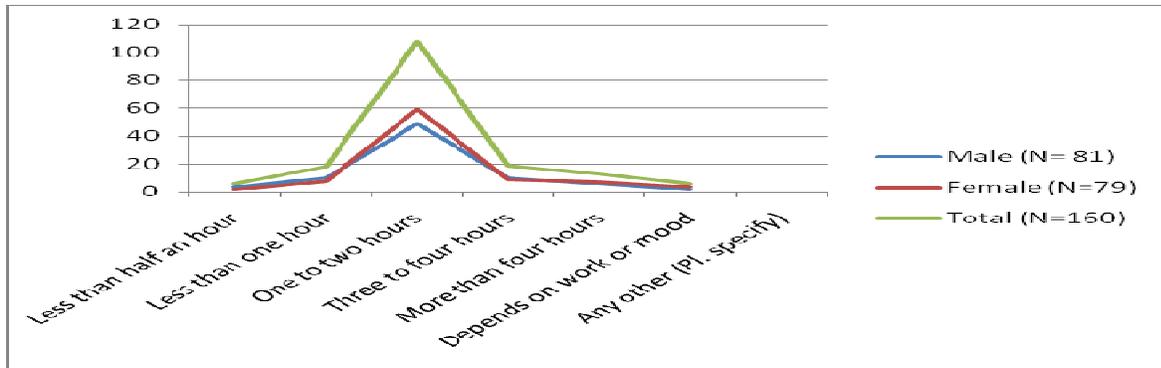**Figure 6: Time spent to visit this space at a time**

Table 6 highlights the fact that majority of the students i.e. 67.5% (60.49% male and 74.68% female) spend one to two hours at a time at the place and further very less no. of students i.e. 3.75 opined that they spend less than half an hour and depend on work & mood. It clearly shows the popularity of the informal learning spaces among the students.

Table 7: opinion about the space equivalent to library for learning

	Male (N= 81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Yes	43 (53.09)	32 (40.51)	74 (46.25)
No	38 (46.91)	47 (59.49)	85 (53.13)

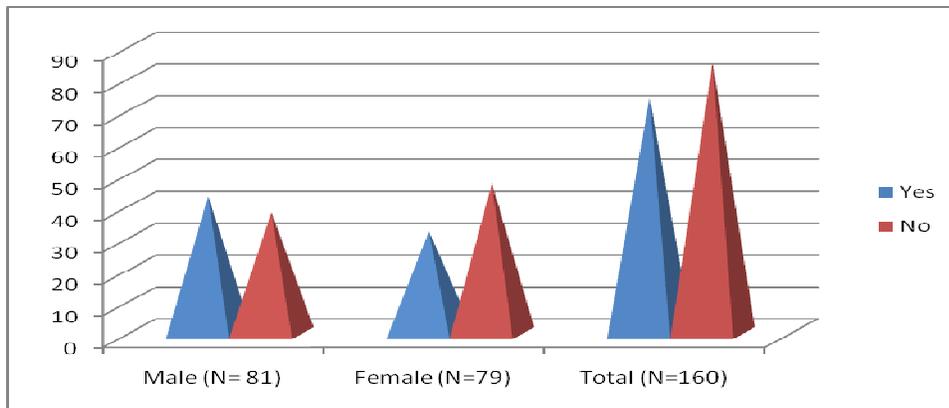**Figure 7: opinion about the space equivalent to library for learning**

Table 7 highlights the fact that 46.25% students (53.09% male and 40.15% female) believe and 53.13% students (46.91% male and 59.49% female) don't believe that the informal learning space are equivalent to library. It shows the importance of library for the students.

Table 8: opinion regarding the space used for learning/academic purpose

	Male (N=81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Yes	59 (72.84)	49 (62.03)	108 (67.5)
No	22 (27.16)	30 (37.97)	52 (32.5)

Figure 8: opinion regarding the space used for learning/academic purpose

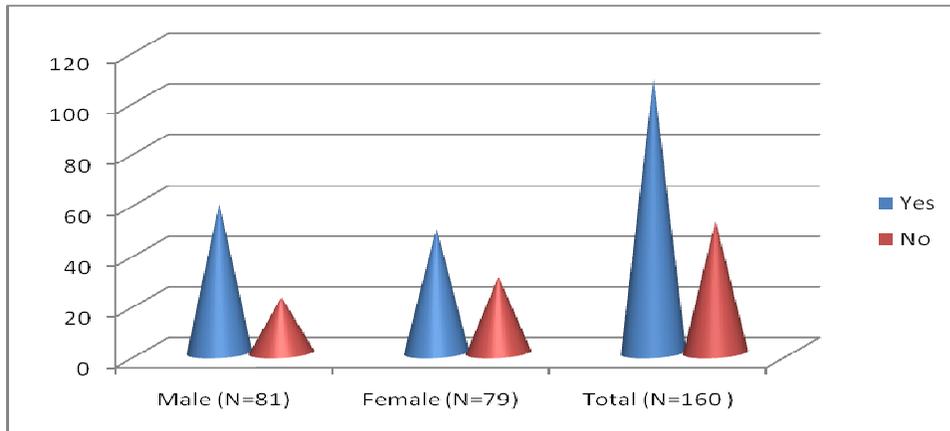Table 8 finds that majority of the students i.e. 67.5% (72.84% male and 62.03% female opined that they use the informal space for learning or academic purpose whereas only 32.5% students (27.16% male and 37.97% female) opined that they don't use space for learning and academic purpose. It clearly reflects the importance of informal learning space also and it is supported by Lippincott and Brown (2003) with statement that coffee bars can also be considered as a place for social learning, especially in libraries."

Table 9: space tend to make you feel

	Male (N=81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Relaxed	13 (16.05)	17 (21.52)	30 (18.75)
Productive	01 (1.23)	03 (3.80)	04 (2.5)
Happy	02 (2.46)	-	02 (1.25)
Refreshed	39 (48.15)	33 (41.77)	72 (45)
Social	15 (18.52)	11 (13.92)	26 (16.25)
Influenced	01 (1.23)	02 (2.53)	03 (1.88)
Energetic	07 (8.64)	09 (11.39)	16 (10)
Don't know	03 (3.70)	04 (5.06)	07 (4.38)
Any other (please specify)	-	-	-

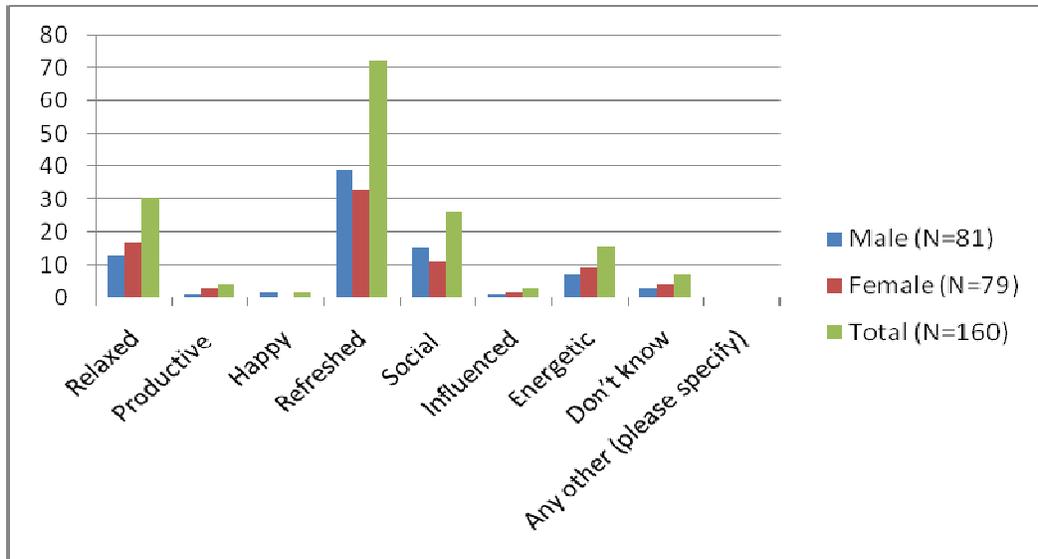**Figure 9: space tend to make you feel**

9

Table 9 clearly shows that 45% students (48.15% male and 41.77 % female) opined that using the informal learning space make them feel refreshed and some students i.e. 1.25% (only males) opined that using the informal learning space make them feel happy.

Table 10: Factors forced to use informal space for learning/academic purpose.

	Male (N=81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Advent of Internet	11 (13.58)	15 (18.99)	26 (16.25)
Availability of Information in E-Form	9 (11.11)	7 (8.86)	16 (10)
Intranet	3 (3.70)	7 (8.86)	10 (6.25)
Availability of Library 24x7	5 (6.17)	3 (3.78)	8 (5)
All Above	53 (65.43)	47 (59.49)	100 (62.5)
Any other (please specify)	-	-	-

Figure 10: Factors forced to use informal space for learning/academic purpose.
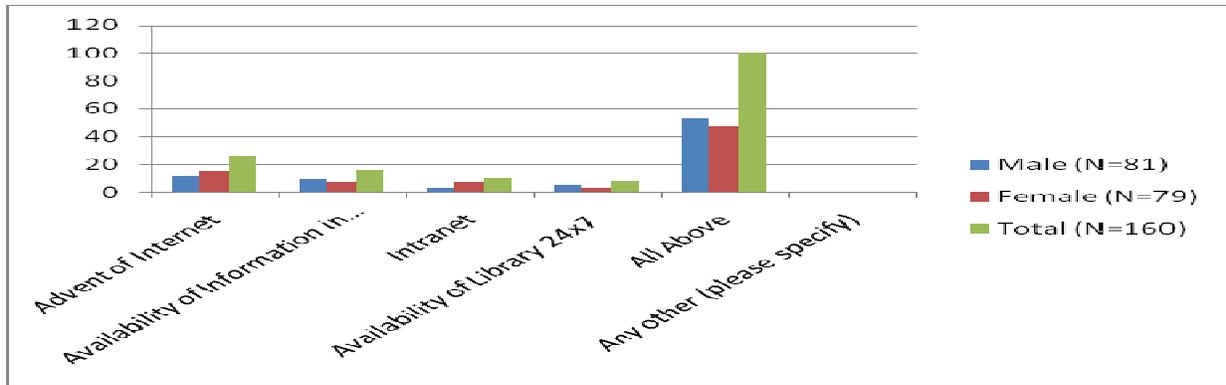
Table 10 finds that majority of the students i.e. 62.5% (65.43% male and 59.49% female) opined that all the factors, advent of internet, availability of information in e-form, intranet, availability of library 24x7 have forced them to use the informal learning space for learning or academic purpose. It shows the worth of library and LIS professionals.

Table 11: Advantages/positive impact of studying at this space (Multiple answers are permitted)

	Male (N=81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Informality	47 (58.02)	51 (64.56)	98 (61.25)
Food and Drink	29 (35.80)	32 (40.51)	61 (38.13)
Design of Space	31 (38.27)	19 (24.05)	50 (31.25)
Convenience	41 (50.62)	49 (62.03)	90 (56.25)
Comfortable sitting	23 (28.40)	17 (21.52)	40 (25)
Sense of escapism	39 (48.15)	29 (36.71)	68 (42.15)
Any other (Please Specify)	-	-	-

Figure 11: Advantages/positive impact of studying at this space (Multiple answers are permitted)
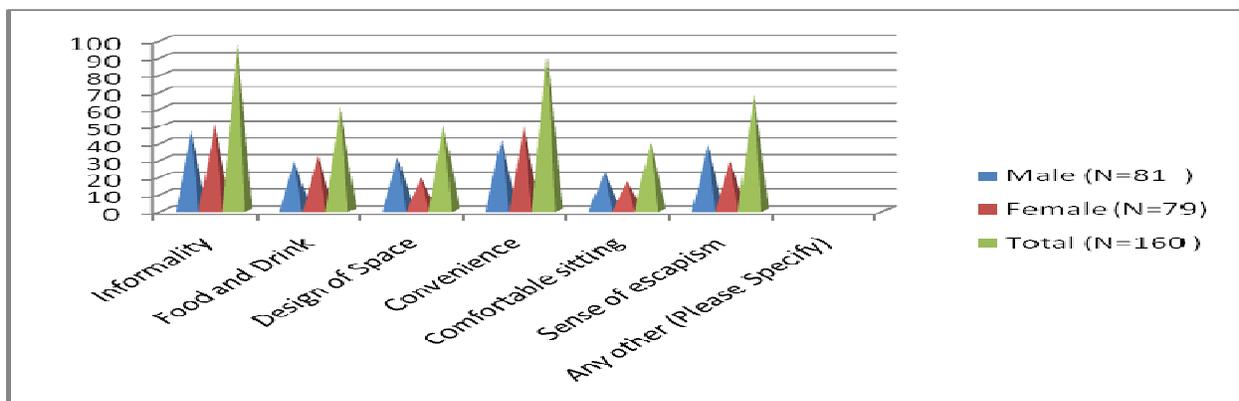

11

Table 11 clearly shows that majority of the students i.e. 61.25% (58.02% male and 64.56% female) opined informality as the best advantage of the informal learning space whereas very less no. of students i.e. 25% (28.40% male and 21.52% female) opined comfortable sitting as the best advantage. It shows that the students love to learn in an informal environment.

Table 12: disadvantages/negative impact of studying at this space (Multiple answers are permitted)

	Male (N=81)	Female (N=79)	Total (N=160)
Busyness of space	39 (48.15	61 (77.22)	100 (62.5)
Distractions	23 (28.40)	59 (74.68)	82 (51.25)
Study material not available	56 (69.14)	57 (72.15)	113 (70.63)
Impractical for studying	47 (58.02)	51 (64.56)	98 (61.25)
Uninspiring location	21 (25.93)	13 (16.46)	34 (23.13)
Inconvenient location	09 (11.11)	17 (21.52)	26 (16.25)
Any other (Please Specify)	02 (2.46)	05 (6.33)	07 (4.38)

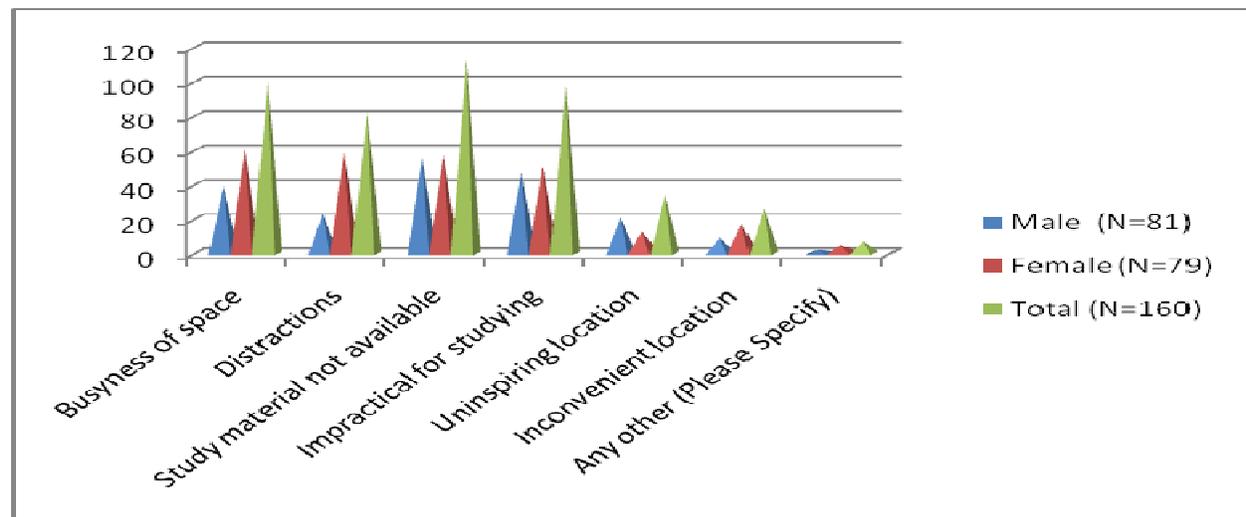**Figure 12: disadvantages/negative impact of studying at this space (Multiple answers are permitted)**

Table 12 clearly shows that majority of the students i.e. 70.63% (69.14% male and 72.15% female) opined that non-availability of study material is the biggest disadvantage of informal learning space which shows the worth of library and LIS professionals. And further, good no. of students i.e. 62.5% (48.15% male and 77.22% female), 61.25% (58.02% male and 64.56% female) 51.25% (28.40% male and 74.68% female) feel busyness of space, impractical for studying and distractions respectively are the biggest disadvantages of informal learning spaces. And less no. of students i.e. 16.25% (11.11% male and 21.52% female), opined inconvenient location of the space as the biggest disadvantage of informal learning spaces.

6   Discussion and Conclusion

Introducing the latest technology and offering multiple types of study spaces are seen as important features of modern academic libraries (Lippincott, 2006 & Hunter and Cox, 2013) which have opened the multidimensional ways of learning for patrons. Now the patrons not only access the information within library but from outside also, resulted into the emergence of the concept of informal learning space. The study investigates the student opinion about the use of informal learning space. The findings indicate that the majority of the students of IIT, Delhi use the informal learning space. And the study finds that majority of the students use informal learning space regularly and good number of students feels informal learning spaces equivalent to library. Furthermore, the study also reveals the fact that 67.5% students opined that they use informal learning spaces for academic purpose. And furthermore, majority of students feel that library plays an important role in making them to use informal learning spaces for academic purpose.

Since, the study is confined to the students of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi to explore the students' opinion on the use of informal learning space by students the research results are limited to this environment only and should not be generalized. However, considering the worth of informal learning spaces in academic environment, it is suggested that there must be some more comprehensive studies especially be conducted in a comparative nature covering some more academic institutions together to know the students' opinion and behavior regarding informal learning spaces. Though several scholars have talked positive and negative both about the informal learning spaces for instance Lippincott and Brown (2003) claim that Coffee bars can be considered as a place for social learning, especially in libraries." But on the other hand, Bryant, Matthews and Walton (2009) disagree and believe that coffee bars don't promote "conducive learning atmosphere." But at last, it can be concluded that due consideration is required on how generation use the informal learning spaces as the concept of informal learning space is evolving as an important phenomena in academic environment.

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Appendix

A Study of Using Informal Learning Spaces at Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

Note:- (i) Please put a tick mark (√) in an appropriate box or fill the information in blank space;

(ii) Separate sheet may kindly use if space provided is insufficient; (iii) The information

supplied by you will be kept confidential.

User's Profile

Name (optional): _____   *Gender:*   *Male*   *( )*   *Female*   *( )*

Student Category: *PG ( ) RS ( ) Visitor ( ) Nationality:* _____

Q–1 Are you currently using this space for your Academic work/studies?   Yes ( ) No ( )

If no,

Do you feel that you use this space for learning/academic purpose also?   Yes ( ) No ( )

Q-2 Which of these would you says best describes the function of this space?

a) Space for individual study ( ) (b) Space for unwinding by myself ( )

(c) Space for group study ( ) (d) Space for group debate/discussion ( )

(e) Space for socializing ( ) (f) Space for fooding & drinking ( )

(g) Any other (Pls. specify) _____

Q-3 How regularly do you sit/visit in this space?

(a) Daily ( ) (b) Twice a week ( ) (c) Thrice a week ( )

(d) Once a week ( ) (e) Monthly ( ) (f) Rarely ( )

(g) Never` ( )

Q-4 How long do you visits to this space tend to be?

(a) Less than half an hour ( ) (b) Less than one hour ( )

(c) One to two hours ( ) (d) three to four hours ( )

(e) More than four hours ( ) (f) depends on work or mood ( )

Q-5 Do you feel it as an important space equivalent to library for learning? Yes ( ) No ( )

Q-6 Do you feel that knowingly/unknowingly you use this space for learning/academic purpose also? Yes ( ) No ( )

Q-7 How does using this space tend to make you feel?

(a) Relaxed ( ) (b) Productive ( ) (c) happy ( )

(d) Refreshed ( ) (e) Social ( ) (f) Influenced ( )

(g) Energetic ( ) (i) Don't know ( )

Q-8 Please tick the appropriate reason that forced you to use the informal space for learning or academic purpose.

a) Advent of Internet ( )

b) Availability of Information in E-Form ( )

c) Intranet ( )

d) Availability of Library 24x7 ( )

e) All above ( )

f) Any other (Pl. specify) ( )

Q-9 Please tick the best suitable positive and negative impact of studying at this space you feel.

Positive Impact		Negative Impact	
a) Informality	( )	a) Busyness of Space	( )
b) Food and Drink	( )	b) Distractions	( )
c) Design of Space	( )	c) Study material not available	( )
d) Convenience	( )	d) Impractical for studying	( )
e) Comfortable sitting	( )	e) Uninspiring location	( )
f) Sense of Escapism	( )	f) Inconvenient Location	( )

Q-10 Further comments/suggestions if any _____

_____

_____

_____

Signature

Thanks for your kind co-operation and time sparing

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