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# Iranian Young Adults' Perceptions and Use of Public Library Services

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## **Abstract**

The main objective of this survey was to know young adults' perceptions and use of public libraries in Sabzevar, Iran. Research population included students aged 12 to 15 who were public library members and were using public library services several times in a year. According to Cochran sampling size formula, the sample size was calculated 180 persons that were chosen by random cluster sampling technique. Required data was gathered by a researcher made questionnaire and analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS 20. The findings showed that the necessity of public library use was more than moderate extent from the young adults' perspective. The use of loan services, reference services, and information services was more than moderate extent, while use of extension services was less than moderate extent. The main reason for public library use was use of library non-text books and educational aid books, and the main obstacle to use public library was huge amount of home work and lack of time. Further, there was a direct significant relationship between the use of public library services and socioeconomic and cultural status.

**Keywords:** Public libraries, young adults, Sabzevar, Iran.

## **Introduction**

One of the public library missions is helping young adults in accomplishing an effective transition from childhood to adulthood through offering access to information resources, as well as making an environment that satisfies the specific needs of young adults for intellectual, emotional, and social development (IFLA, 2009). Clark and Hawkins (2010) opine that in addition of public library role in reading patterns of pupils using them, it has a special role in supplying opportunities to sustain learning outside of the classroom. On the other hand, new education systems unlike conventional systems desire creative, and research students and teachers who research and study, use different educational aid books and tools, and do not rely on text books as reliable sources (Achak, 2005). In this way, library is the best and most useful educational tools, which can step by step assist the student in understanding and developing curriculums and let him/her be free from the scope of curriculum concepts (Majidi, 2012). However, today, the condition of libraries and the per capita of school books in Iran have no desirable status to the national and international standards and even the regulations approved by the Ministry of Education. Even, in academic year of (2010-2011), the elimination of librarian post was observed in Iran (Sarparast, 2010). Therefore, the rule of public libraries services is most important in supporting the educational curriculums.

However, the extent of public library use by the Iranian young adults is not obvious. Whether or not the demographic variables such as gender, and socioeconomic and cultural status have effect on the use of public libraries? So, the aim of this study was to answer these questions. The results of this study can be used by librarians to offer better library services. Also, it can provide many strategies to increase the use of public libraries and to help the authorities and

librarians of public libraries to promote the services meanwhile eliminating the possible defects.

## **Literature Review**

Studies on young adults' public library use indicate that young adults use public libraries for different reasons and extent. For example, high school students aged 14 to 18 in the U.S. were infrequent public library users and had limited perceptions of public library resources and services. Also, they used library for social interaction more than for information access (Agosto, Magee, Forte, and Dickard, 2015). Using structural equation modeling, Sin (2012) found that 67% of the U.S. high school students were public library users. The main affecting factors on public library use were school information environment, frequency of school library use, race/ethnicity, and home computer availability which were used for schoolwork, leisure, and Internet access. A survey conducted by Haras (2011) revealed that Latinos high school students in East Los Angeles used public libraries moderately for borrowing books and videos, working on group projects, browsing the web, checking e-mail and visiting friends. While, in Clark and Hawkins' study (2010), the most common reasons for using public libraries cited by students aged 8 to 16 from 112 schools in England, were the existence of interesting materials, friendly space, and existence of computers. Further, the students believed that public libraries helped them to do better at school. However, more than half of nonusers opined that the most common reason for not using public libraries was that their family did not go. Teenagers in Isfahan, Iran utilized public libraries for meeting their information needs and school projects (Shokouhian, 2011). Whereas, Omidkhoda and Sepehr (2009) concluded that most young adults in Tehran, Iran used public libraries to spend leisure time. The findings of Vavrek 's study (2004)

revealed that fifty-eight percent of surveyed young adults in the U.S. used public library services mainly to borrow books and other materials.

Some researchers investigated the demographics factors may be influencing on public library use. For example, a study by Agosto, Paon and Ipock (2007) showed that gender was not a factor influencing the frequency of public library use. However, girls rated public libraries as more useful to help them to meet their information needs. However, through an online survey, Clark and Hawkins (2010) found that gender, age, ethnicity and socioeconomic background were predictors of frequency of public library use among the students in England.

Several researchers have explored barriers to public library use among young people. For example, Luo and Weak (2013) found that lack of awareness of available services was a barrier to library use. Motameni, Hemati and Moradi (2012) reported the lack of required books, lack of updated resources, lack of motivation, lack of time to study, and the physical conditions of public libraries hindered the public library use among young adults in Semnan, Iran. However, the identified main obstacles for using public library among teenagers in Canada by Howard (2011) were absence of relationship with library staff, absence of relevant and attracting programs, absence of promotion of programs and services, absence of a teen Web site and other Web 2.0 technologies, insufficient library space, and a general absence of teens inclusion and participation. Zal Zadeh (2000) found that more than 75% of Iranian high school students in Shiraz did not use public libraries and lack of time was the most important reason.

From the above literature it can be concluded that the percentage of young people who are the public library users is different in each study. Especially some local studies in Iran have been devoted to large cities such as Tehran, Shiraz and Isfahan. There is a lack of research on public library use among young adults in a

town like Sabzevar. Therefore, regarding the importance of public library usage for young adult population, this survey attempted to fill this research gap and make a clear picture of young adults perceptions and use of public libraries' in a town i.e. Sabzevar, Razavi Khorasan province, Iran.

## **Objectives**

The main objective of this study was to know the young adults' perceptions and use of public libraries. So, the study aimed to answer the following questions and verify the following hypotheses:

Q<sub>1</sub>: To what extent is the use of public library services necessary from the young adults' perspective?

Q<sub>2</sub>: To what extent do young adults use public library services?

Q<sub>3</sub>: What are the main reasons for public library use among young adults?

Q<sub>4</sub>: What are the main barriers to public library use among young adults?

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference between boys and girls regarding the public library use.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between public library use and socioeconomic status.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between public library use and cultural status.

## **Methods**

This research was an applied study that has been conducted through survey. The target population included students aged 12 to 15 who were a member of one of seven public libraries in Sabzevar affiliated to Iranian Public Libraries Foundation, and were using public library services several times in a year. Whereas the total number of the research population could not be obtained, it was considered

as unlimited population. According to Cochran sampling size formula for unlimited population, the sample size was calculated 180 persons that were chosen by random cluster sampling technique. Seven public libraries were considered as clusters and the sample members were selected randomly in each cluster.

To collect data, a self-made questionnaire was used. The questions relating public library services were designed using five-point Likert scale (1=very low to 5=very much), while two-point scale (yes/no) was used for the questions assessing socioeconomic status (13 questions) and cultural status (14 questions). Before finalizing the questionnaire, its content validity was established by review of faculty members of Library and Information Sciences, and Social Sciences at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. Further, the reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed via Cronbach's Alpha in the pilot test with twenty young adults (0.89). Out of the 180 questionnaires distributed, 170 useable questionnaires were obtained giving a response rate of 94%. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data using the SPSS<sub>20</sub>. The significance values that fell below the 0.05 level were accepted.

## **Findings**

Regarding gender, girl respondents (55%) were more than the boy respondents. most respondents were 13 years old and 14 years old.

## **Necessity of Use of Public Library Services**

In order to assess the necessity of public library use, public library services were grouped into four categories i.e., loan services, reference services, information services and extension services. The respondents were asked to state the necessity of each service on a five-point scale. As Table 1 indicates, among the public library services, loan services (such as loan and reserving books, book review, etc.) as well

as reference services (such as users' education and guidance to use library, help to do research, etc.) had the highest necessity. However, extension services (such as holding different exhibitions and lectures) had the lowest necessity. The results of one sample parametric t-test showed that there was a significant difference between the mean of necessity of public library use and the moderate extent (mean=3). Further, it can be said to 95% confidences that according to the young adults the necessity of use of four categories of public library services and total services were more than moderate extent, and the respondents had a perfect understanding of the necessity of public library use.

**Table 1. The comparison of the necessity of public library use with moderate extent (n=170)**

Library Services	Mean	SD	One-Sample Test	
			t-value	Sig.
Loan services (such as book loan and book reserve, book review, etc.)	4.13	0.76	19.42	0.001*
Reference services (such as users' education and guidance to use library, help to do research, etc.)	4.05	0.93	14.70	0.001*
Information services (such as declaring conferences related to young adults' needs, declaring new programs and services, access to Internet, etc.)	3.81	0.96	10.93	0.001*
Extension services (such as holding exhibitions and lectures, etc.)	3.73	1.03	9.22	0.001*
Total	3.93	0.92	17.56	0.001*

Note: \*=p<0.05

### **The Extent of Using Public Library Services**

It was found that among the library services which were offered by Sabzevar public libraries to the young adults, "loan of books and other resources" from loan services had the highest use (mean=3.99) and "story telling" from the extension services had the lowest use (mean=2.05) (Table 2).



**Table 2. The extent of using public library services (n=170)**

<b>Library Services</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Loan services</b>		
Loan of books and other resources	3.99	0.99
Book and other resources' reservation	2.83	1.50
Introduction of books and other resources	3.00	1.20
Reading room	3.62	1.18
<b>Reference services</b>		
Users' education and guidance to use library	3.36	1.03
Educating Internet search method, familiarity with useful and relevant Websites, etc.	3.12	1.15
Help to do student research	3.95	1.49
Providing access to periodicals	2.92	1.22
Advisory services to clients	3.62	1.13
<b>Information services</b>		
Declaring conferences related to young adults' needs	2.73	1.13
Information for the new library programs and services	2.84	1.21
Searching the information and resources using computer by librarian	3.68	1.12
Access to Internet	3.39	1.11
<b>Extension services</b>		
Holding exhibitions such as book exhibition	2.62	1.08
Story telling	2.05	1.24
Book reading competitions	2.99	1.06
Total	3.11	1.23

From the Table 3, it is observed that among the four categories of library services, "reference services" had the highest use (mean=3.39) and "extension services" (mean=2.55) had the lowest use. Further, the results of one sample t-test showed that the use of loan services, reference services, and information services was more than moderate extent, while use of extension services was less than moderate extent by the respondents. However, in all, the young adults' use of library services was more than moderate extent (Table 3).

**Table 3. The comparison of extent of public library use with moderate extent (n=170)**

Library Services	Mean	SD	One-Sample Test	
			t-value	Sig.
Loan services	3.35	0.77	5.80	0.001*
Reference services	3.39	0.86	5.92	0.001*
Information services	3.15	0.77	2.63	0.009*
Extension services	2.55	0.90	-6.39	0.001*
Total	3.11	0.65	2.26	0.025*

Note: \*=p<0.05

### **The Reasons for Public Library Use**

The ranked reasons for using public libraries by the young adults are presented in Table 4. The respondents could tick as many options as they felt appropriate. The most important reasons for public library use were use of non-text books and educational aid books, spending leisure time, use of reading room, and doing homework, respectively. However, use of audio visual resources, lack of school librarian and lack of school library were the least important reasons for public library use.

**Table 4. The Ranked Reasons for Public Library Use (n=170)**

Reasons	Frequency	Percent	Rank
Use of library non-text books and educational aid books	119	11.9	1
Spending leisure time	101	10.1	2
Use of reading room	95	9.5	3
Doing homework	83	8.3	4
Visiting friends and classmates	77	7.7	5
Use of Internet	76	7.3	6

Easy access to books	62	6.2	7
High cost of books	61	6.1	8
Awareness of new books and magazines	57	5.7	9
Desirability to study in a scientific and cultural space	52	5.2	10
Use of reference books	44	4.4	11
Use of library extension services	38	3.8	12
Not suitable conditions for study at home	38	3.8	13
Teachers' encouragement to use the library	31	3.1	14
Lack of school librarian	26	2.6	15
Lack of school library	21	2.1	16
Use of library audio visual resources	17	1.7	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>998</b>	<b>100</b>	

### Barriers to Public Library Use

Data analysis from Table 5 indicates that the most important barriers to public library use were high amount of homework and lack of time, Insufficiency of library books and other resources, lack of adequate equipments and high distance of public libraries from place of residence, respectively. Also, young adults' physical and mental problems were the least important barrier to public library use.

**Table 5. Barriers to Public Library Use (n=170)**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Rank</b>
High amount of homework	125	14.81	1
Insufficiency of library books and other resources	56	6.63	2
Lack of adequate equipments	55	6.51	3
High distance of public libraries from place of residence	53	6.27	4
Out of date public library resources	50	5.92	5
Inconvenient working hours of the library	44	5.21	6
Fear of penalty for library services	39	4.62	7

No reading habit from childhood	39	4.62	8
Inappropriate library services	38	4.50	9
Access to Internet at home	37	4.38	10
Inappropriateness of library management	34	4.02	11
Lack of encouragement by teachers and family	30	3.55	12
Unfamiliarity by library services	30	3.55	13
Lack of proper transportation to the library	29	3.43	14
No need to library services	28	3.31	15
Easy access to papers and books and the like on the Internet	27	3.19	16
Limited time for borrowing resources	26	3.08	17
Low skill and expertise of librarians and library staff	22	2.60	18
Library membership conditions	20	2.36	19
Inappropriate communication of librarians with clients	20	2.36	20
Suitability of library for adults but not for children	18	2.13	21
Inappropriate Library shelving	18	2.13	22
Physical and mental problems	6	0.71	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>844</b>	<b>100</b>	

## Analysis of Hypotheses

**H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference between boys and girls regarding the public library use.**

In order to test the above mentioned hypothesis, Independent-Samples t-test was done. The results showed that boys (mean=16.09) and girls (mean=15.07) differed significantly regarding the public library use at the 0.05 level of significance ( $t=2.04$ ,  $p=0.04 < 0.05$ ). Thus, this hypothesis was supported.

**Table 6. Comparison of public library use between girls and boys (n=170)**

gender	frequency	Mean	SD	Independent-Samples t-test	
				t-value	Sig.

Female	94	15.07	3.09	2.04	0.043
Male	76	16.09	3.39		

**H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between public library use and socioeconomic status.**

Socioeconomic status was computed by summing the young adult responses to thirteen questions including income level, academic education, and permanent job of parents, owning a personal computer, owning a cell phone, having a personal room at home, etc.). The results of Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between the use of public library services and socioeconomic status. Thus, this hypothesis was supported i.e., increases in socioeconomic status were correlated with increases in using public library services by young adults ( $r=0.16$ ,  $p=0.03$ ).

**H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between public library use and cultural status**

Cultural status of each respondent was calculated by summing the young adult responses to fourteen questions– whether they were member of any other library except public library, whether they read books for family members or friends, whether their family were member of public library, whether their family encouraged young adult for reading books or going to the library, whether their family subscribed some newspapers, etc.). The results of a Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between the use of public library services and cultural status. Increases in cultural status were correlated with increases in using public library services by young adults ( $r=0.29$ ,  $p=0.001$ ).

**Discussion**

In this part, the research findings of the research questions and hypotheses are being discussed.

### **Necessity of Public Library Use from the Young Adults' Perspective**

Data analysis revealed that the necessity of use of each four categories and in general public library services were more than moderate extent from the young adults' point of view which represents the recognition that the young adults have gained on the need for public library use. In addition to this recognition, perhaps one can add created changes in Iranian educational system, and new teaching methods. Indeed inappropriate situation of school libraries in many schools of the country and also attention to children and teenagers in public libraries exacerbate the necessity of using public libraries services. Loan services and reference services were assigned the highest necessity and extension services were assigned the lowest necessity. This is probably due to the fact that there are not enough extension services in some public libraries of Sabzevar, so in comparison to other library services, they are less perceptible. It shouldn't be forgotten that appropriate teaching methods and also school's teaching programs have been effective in necessity of using loan and reference services.

### **The Extent of Using Public Library Services by the Young Adults**

It was found that the young adults used loan services, reference services, and information services more than moderate extent, whereas they used extension services less than moderate extent. However, in all the use of library services was more than moderate extent by the young adults. Regarding the high necessity of public library use assigned by the young adults, this result was expectable. Sin (2012) also concluded that whatever school library information resources were less, using of public libraries was more. In other words, when there were not many

information resources in school libraries, the students searched another place like public libraries for fulfilling their information needs. Therefore, perhaps, we can justify the extent of using Sabzevar public libraries by young adults due to inappropriate situation of school libraries.

Reference services were used more than the other public library services by the respondents. Reference services in public libraries are provided in order to responding better and faster to different questions of every age group. Students need resources more than their textbook for doing their homework which usually are found in public libraries reference section. Public libraries can help students of every age group in finding answers of their questions, especially in the field of student research by preparing reference resources. Based upon the results, perhaps we can say that the public libraries in Sabzevar can do their job in reference section. However, perhaps, cause of having less use of extension services has been the lack of providing enough information about these services or inadequate offering of these services in the public libraries.

### **The Young Adults' Reasons for Public Library Use**

Data analysis revealed that some of the most important reasons for public library use were personal reasons such as spending leisure time, doing homework, visiting friends and classmates, while some reasons such as use of library non-text books and educational aid books, use of library reading room, and use of Internet can be considered library reasons. The identified most important reasons to use public library have been found in several studies. For example, use of library resources (Vavrek, 2004), spending leisure time (Sin, 2012; Omidkhoda and Sepehr, 2009), use of library reading room (Zal Zadeh, 2000), doing homework (Sin, 2012; Clark and Hawkin, 2010; Shokouhian, 2011), visiting friends and

classmates (Haras, 2011; Agosto, Paon and Ipock, 2007), and use of Internet (Sin, 2012; Haras, 2011).

In regard to the findings, it can be concluded that library facilities such as library resources, reading room and access to Internet are the factors for attracting the young people toward public libraries so the managers and librarians of the public libraries should pay more attention to optimum preparation of this facilities.

### **The Young Adults' Barriers to Public Library Use**

From the young adults' perspective, the most important barrier to public library use was the high volume of homework and lack of time, which can be considered as a barrier relating to educational system. Based on the respondents when filling the questionnaire, volume of homework especially writing assignments are too much to find free time to come to the public library. Some of the other important barriers such as lack of books and other library resources, lack of library facilities and the like can be considered as barriers related to the library which indicates insufficient attention to the young adults' needs in the collection building, library facilities and the like. The identified barriers to public library use were confirmed by several researchers i.e., Motameni et al. (2012) (lack of required books and lack of updated resources); Nicholas (2001), Zal Zadeh (2000), and Motameni et al. (2012) (lack of time).

### **Influence of Gender on the Use of Public Library Services**

The findings demonstrated that boys used public libraries significantly more than girls. This result contradicts with the result of study by Clark and Hawkin (2010) and Clark (2010). The probable reason for this difference may be due to different country and society that these studies have been done. As in some of



Iranian families especially in small towns, girls have more restrictions for leaving home than boys.

### **Relationship between Public Library Use and Socioeconomic Status**

According to the findings, a positive and significant relationship between use of public library services and socioeconomic status was confirmed. This result is in accordance with the findings of Soria, Nackerud, and Peterson (2015). They found that first-year college students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds used academic libraries less than the other students. However, in Clark and Hawkins's study (2010), young people from lower socioeconomic background used public libraries more than the young people from the upper socioeconomic background. The reason for this contradiction may be related to the difference between the indicator of socioeconomic status in Clark and Hawkins's study (2010) and in the present study. They just considered receiving free school meal (FSM) as a crude indicator of socio-economic background, while in present study the computed score from thirteen questions including factors such as parents' education and income level, owning a personal computer, owning a cell phone and the like was considered as indicator of socio-economic status.

With respect to the hypothesis testing result, it can be said that the extent of using library services is influenced by the socioeconomic status of the family. It seems that families that have a better socioeconomic status in comparison to the other families have less economic problems and have more capability for paying attention other educational issues such as using libraries. On the other hand, perhaps the ability to buy books from childhood in these families is effective in the habit of study and tendency toward libraries.

### **Relationship between Public Library Use and Cultural Status**

The findings revealed that there was a direct and significant relationship between use of public library services and cultural status. In other words, by improving family cultural status, the use of public library services increased by the young adults. According to Ball (1994), parents have the most important impact on children's life. In Stone's study (1999) the main reason for joining the library was that some members of the children's family were library members. Furthermore, Clark and Hawkins (2010) claim that family plays a key role in encouraging young people to use the library. Therefore it can be said that the extent of young adults' use of books and libraries is the reflection of their parents' behavior which is a pattern for their children. The higher the family cultural level, the more tendency the young adults have to use libraries. So, if a family tends to read books, this culture would be internalized in the children and young adults of the family. In this regard, Clark and Hawkins (2010) found that the other family members' lack of public library use was the main reason for not using the public library by the students.

## **Conclusion**

This research investigated necessity and use of public libraries from the Sabzevar young adults' point of view. It found that the young adults well understand the necessity of public libraries, therefore, the public libraries can play an important role in the young adults' life and it is necessary that they improve their services. On the other hand, regarding the young peoples' little use of library extension services, it is necessary for the public libraries' managers and authorities to use strategies for information, diversification and innovations in these services and provide extension services according to the age of members in addition to increasing these services.

Moreover, the result indicated that the socioeconomic and cultural status have some effect on the use of libraries by young people, meaning that with the improvement of the socioeconomic and cultural status of family increases the use of public libraries services and vice versa. Therefore, it is necessary for the public libraries to regard special facilities for the socioeconomically and culturally disadvantaged students so that through which the library can attract these young people to the library, for example, to provide facilities for borrowing more books (especially aid books in longer term) and also their membership in such libraries be happened freely. As well as, the marketing of public libraries services especially in these areas seems necessary.

Regarding the impact of cultural status of families on using the public libraries, schools and other social institutions must institutionalize the culture of studying and reading books altogether to young adults and families do not know the public library as the only place for borrowing the books. In addition, it is essential for mass media to have purposeful and continuous activities to improve the families' knowledge level and the culture of study and to provide the programs for achieving these purposes.

Since the related reasons to library were the most important reasons for using public libraries by the young people, these factors must be improved in the libraries to both increase the service level of libraries and encourage the young people to attend the libraries. Considering the existence of abundant educational resources and their high cost, and the families' problem for buying these resources, public libraries are considered as a suitable place to providing the resources. Furthermore, more cooperation between libraries and schools is essentials. Librarians can select the appropriate books and resources with the help of teachers. Also, creating a suitable environment for studying in library and other facilities such as computers

and Internet would cause that more young people come and use public libraries. On the other hand, the most important reasons for using public libraries, i.e. spending free time, visiting friends and so on attract the library managers and authorities to prepare programs appropriate to young adults' interests and needs, so that they can use well their free time for their personal development. Also, considering the most important reason of public library use i.e., doing homework, the librarians and administrators should try to be informed on educational methods through communicating with teachers and authorities in the field of education and prepare a collaboration document; and provide proper facilities and services based on their audience's needs.

But young people in Sabzevar, encounter some obstacles for using public library services. In order to overcome the obstacles related to the educational system, young adults should be guided in such a way with proper planning to have enough time for homework and other activities. This task is on the shoulder of young adults' school and family, so that homework would not be an impediment to the library use. Appointing assignments which are in the nature of research is likewise effective in removing this obstacle.

To remove public library use barriers which are related to library, the librarians and authorities should take steps towards tackling these obstacles. It is required to pay attention to provide the young people needed resources and library equipments. Further, through some projects such as nationwide membership scheme in public libraries, interlibrary loan and document delivery services, decision makers can reduce somewhat barriers to the use of public libraries.

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