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10-14-2020

Use of electronic resources by the academics: a case study from University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Pradeepa Wijetunge Dr.

University of Colombo, librarian@lib.cmb.ac.lk

Abhirami Sivasanthiran Ms.

University of Colombo, abhi@lib.cmb.ac.lk

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Wijetunge, Pradeepa Dr. and Sivasanthiran, Abhirami Ms., "Use of electronic resources by the academics: a case study from University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4512.

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Introduction

There was a dearth of scholarly e-resources available for the academics and researchers in the Sri Lankan State universities and to address this issue, in 2014, University Grants Commission (UGC) implemented the Consortium of Sri Lankan Academic Libraries (CONSAL), which provided five databases for the 15 public universities under its purview (Wijetunge 2019). After the completion of phase one from 2014-2016, a cross-university survey was conducted with the financial support of the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), UK to identify the usage trends and attitudes of academics towards the e-resources provided through CONSAL as well as the other e-resources available for them. This paper discusses the findings related to University of Jaffna (UJ), which is one of the 15 universities which is provided CONSAL facility through the UGC.

In 1974, Jaffna Campus of University of Sri Lanka was established with the Faculties of Science and Humanities, and in 1979, it was elevated to be a fully-fledged, autonomous university. Today, University of Jaffna consists of a campus, ten faculties, sixty academic departments and an affiliated Academy of Fine Arts. It caters to nearly 10,000 undergraduate and 625 postgraduate students. Teaching staff consist of 27 Professors, 263 Senior Lecturers and 191 Lecturers (UGC 2019). The University managed to withstand the traumas of the 30+ years of civil war and continued its academic activities with significant progress catering to the higher education needs of the youth of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Its Library Network consists of six libraries and despite the lack of space, infrastructure, and modern ICT equipment, it is a tower of support for the university's teaching, learning and research. The findings of this study are expected to improve the access to e-resources by the academics and other researchers of UJ

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to investigate the e-resource usage of the academics of the University of Jaffna, their perceptions towards them and the factors affecting the usage. To support this objective following research questions were formulated:

- RQ1 What are the frequencies and the purposes of using e-resource by the academics?
- RQ2 How do the academics become aware of the availability of the e-resources?
- RQ3 What are their sources of training on using e-resources and how confident are they about their e-resource searching skills?
- RQ4 To what extent their information needs are fulfilled by the available e-resources?
- RQ5 What are the factors that affect their e-resource usage?

Significance of the study

This was the first detailed study undertaken to establish the use of e-resources by the academics of UJ. The findings establish the types, frequencies and purposes, the e-resources are used by the academics and the barriers they encounter in using the e-resources, especially the ones provided by CONSAL. It is expected that the findings of the study will fill the knowledge gap and contribute to the body of literatures on the discourse of the usage of e-resources by academics in

the UJ. Further, the findings will also help improve the access to e-resources considering the needs of the academics.

Scope and limitations

Only the academics of UJ were included in the study because they were considered as the major user group which can provide necessary guidance and motivation to the others researchers like undergraduate and postgraduate researchers. The term “*academic staff*” or “*academics*” is used within this paper to denote Professors, Senior Lecturers and Lecturers all categories of teaching staff.

Review of literature

Review of literature in the international context, reveal that Internet is the key source of information (Alison, Kiyangi & Baziraake 2012; Azadeh & Ghasemi 2016). Academics are well familiar with available e-resources (Agaba, Bukenya & Nyumba 2004; Bhat, Ganaie & Rather 2015) but the usage is poor (Agaba, Bukenya & Nyumba 2004). Therefore, they together with Alison, Kiyangi & Baziraake (2012) and Curtis, Weller & Hurd (1997) insist on training on using those e-resources. In addition to the above general findings, Agaba, Bukenya & Nyumba (2004) illustrate some benefits of using e-resources, i.e. they provide better access of information for research, teaching and publications, and enable easy scholarly communications among academics (Curtis, Weller and Hwerd 1997).

Researchers have identified that in general, types of e-resources, nature of digital libraries and the academic environments (Isah et. al. 2014), level of awareness and perceptions on usefulness (Isah et. al. 2014, and Korobili, Tilikidou & Delistavrou 2006), convenience of access to the sources and their academic productivity (Korobili, Tilikidou & Delistavrou 2006) affect the use of e-resources. Readiness to adapt to change, availability of computers and ICT skills, good Internet access, management support, and awareness of the electronic databases by the academics (Farouk & Yusuf 2016), Individual skills and training (Alison, Kiyangi & Baziraake 2012), the academics’ field of study and the highest educational qualifications (Korobili, Tilikidou & Delistavrou 2006) have been identified as positive factors that affect the usage of e-resources. Nevertheless, the cost of access to online databases and lack of awareness campaigns (Farouk & Yusuf (2016), too many passwords that are difficult to remember (Alison, Kiyangi & Baziraake 2012; Farouk & Yusuf 2016), inadequacy of facilities (eg. ICT), poor Internet access, and unreliable or irregular power supply (Agaba, Bukenya & Nyumba 2004; Alison, Kiyangi & Baziraake 2012; Farouk & Yusuf 2016) have been identified as negative factors that affect the use of e-resources. Further, lack of suitable databases and lack of time to use (Agaba, Bukenya & Nyumba 2004) are also deterring the use of e-resources.

Most of the literature related to Sri Lanka focus on the e-resource usage of undergraduates (Dayarathna & Munasinghe 2016; Dehigama & Dharmarathne 2015; Premarathne 2017; Wijetunge 2014) and postgraduates (Millawithanachchi 2012; Punchihewa, Kumara & Kiriella 2013; Sritharan 2018) of different disciplines, while few have concentrated on that of the academic staff of the universities (Ileperuma 2002; Karunarathne 2008; Perera 2014; Sivathaasan & Velnampy 2013).

Karunaratne (2008) reveals that the majority of university teachers prefer e-resources in addition to printed resources, while Perera (2014) identifies that the Internet, e-journals and web-based information are mainly used. Ileperuma (2002) concludes that usage has strong positive association with academic performance while Sivathaasan & Velnampy (2013) points out that the usage exerts remarkable influence on the information gathering behaviour. The Sri Lankan studies on the e-resource usage by the academics, tend to focus only on one aspect of the respondents such as academics performance (Sivathaasan & Velnampy 2013); or general resources used (Karunaratne 2008; Perera 2014; Punchihewa, Kumara & Kiriella 2013).

Review of literature indicates that there are gaps in the knowledge of the academics' purpose and frequency of using e-resources, their level of awareness and satisfaction of contents, training and skills of searching and the factors affecting the usage in the Sri Lankan context and this study is an attempt to fill these gaps.

Methodology

Survey method was adopted and the data collection instrument was a detailed self-completing questionnaire. As this is part of a major study that includes fourteen state universities of Sri Lanka, out of the 481 faculty members of the University of Jaffna, about 10% were invited for a discussion session on newly introduced databases by the UGC, and the questionnaires were administered at this session. Convenient sampling technique was used to select the subjects. The questionnaire inquired about their demographic details, teaching experience, research and publications, frequency and purpose of e-resource usage, awareness of the availability, training received and skill levels, their perceptions of available e-resources and satisfaction and the factors affecting the usage. Gathered data were analysed using SPSS (Ver. 23.0) and the findings are presented using descriptive statistics.

The reliability of the questions was tested using the Cronbach's alpha test, which provided 0.718 implying a good internal consistency. With regard to the factors affecting the usage, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .645 and the Significance of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 0.000. To test whether there is a statistically significant positive relationship between several demographic characteristics and usage, Cramer's V tests were conducted. Findings of the study are limited to the comments made by the respondents, therefore care should be taken in generalizing the findings. STEM domains were underrepresented therefore their perceptions are underrepresented.

5. Findings

This section discusses the demographic characteristics, use of information resources, awareness of the availability, training and skills, perceptions towards e-resources by the respondents and the factors affecting the usage.

5.1 Demographic Characteristics

Out of the 36 questionnaires distributed 34 (94.44%) completed responses were received. The demographic characteristics indicated that the majority (68%) were males. Majority (44.1%) in

the age group of 36-40 years, while 14.7% each in 25-30 years and 31-35 years of age groups, 20.6% in 41-45 years and 5.9% in 46-50 years of age groups. Majority were Senior Lecturers (58.8%), while 35.3% were Lecturers and 5.9% were Professors. Majority (47.1%) were from Social Science, followed by Management (23.5%), Science /Engineering and Medical (17.6%) faculties, while 11.8% have not revealed their faculty. Of 97%, primary language is Tamil and of 3% it is English. The highest educational qualification of the majority (38.2%) was PhD, followed by Masters (32.4%), Bachelors (17%) and MPhil (11.8%). Majority (35.3%) had only 1-5 years of experience in teaching, while 32.4% had 6-10 of teaching experience, 20.6% had 11-15 years of experience, and 5.8% had 16-20 years of experience, while 2.9% each had 26-30 and 31-35 years of teaching experience. Of the respondents, 41.2% have published articles in journals indexed by reputed services while 64.7% have published articles in non-indexed journals and 67.6% each have published conference abstracts and papers while 29.4% and 17.6% have respectively published books and reports. Of the respondents, 17.6% have obtained research grants from the university, while 5.9% have obtained grants from a national organisation and 2.9% each have obtained from international or other organizations. The general profile of the respondents are that the majority are male, young and in their mid-career, from social sciences, primary language is Tamil, with about ten years of teaching experience, have published more conference abstracts / papers and articles in journals not indexed by a reputed service eg. SCOPUS or Web of Science.

5.2 Use of information resources

E-resources available through the Internet has the highest usage (Table 1) with the mean value of 5.21 and the standard deviation of 1.048, followed by the usage of databases provided by other sources like WHO (mean and standard deviation of 3.32 and 1.765 respectively). The databases available via CONSAL (Oxford, T & F and Emerald) are the least frequently used.

Further, a set of Chi-square tests revealed that the designation of the academics has a highly significant influence ($p=0.004$) on the usage of e-resources available via the Internet. It was learnt that the everyday usage of these resources decreases with the seniority as: 60% of the Lecturers, 57.1% of the Senior Lecturers Grade II, and 33.3% of the Senior Lecturers Grade I use them daily. Majority (97.1%) use them for teaching, while 47.1% use them for postgraduate studies, 61.8% to support research, 26.5% to write professional material, 11.8% to supervise research and 11.8% to stay up-to-date.

Table 1 - Frequency of usage of e-resources

E-resource	Do not use	Rarely used	Once a month	Once a week	2-3 times a week	Everyday	Total	Mean	Std. Deviation
E-resources through Internet	0.00%	3.40%	3.40%	13.80%	27.60%	51.70%	100.00%	5.21	1.048
Databases provided by other sources (eg. WHO)	26.30%	10.50%	10.50%	15.80%	31.60%	5.30%	100.00%	3.32	1.765
Databases subscribed by their university	21.70%	8.70%	26.10%	21.70%	17.40%	4.30%	100.00%	3.17	1.527

Oxford e-Journals Online	25.00%	12.50%	25.00%	18.80%	12.50%	6.30%	100.00%	3	1.592
Taylor & Francis e-Journal Collection	18.20%	27.30%	22.70%	4.50%	22.70%	4.50%	100.00%	3	1.574
Emerald e-Journal Collection	30.00%	25.00%	10.00%	20.00%	10.00%	5.00%	100.00%	2.7	1.593

5.3 Awareness of the availability

Respondents were asked how they became aware of the availability of the e-resources and they could select more than one option. It was revealed that most popular method (73.5%) was their colleagues followed by the Librarian (35.3%) and the notices displayed on library website (23.5%) (Table 2).

Table 2 – Sources of getting awareness

Source	Frq.	%
Through colleagues	25	73.5
Librarian informed me	12	35.3
From the notice on library website	8	23.5
Through announcements at Faculty Board	6	17.4
Through posters/leaflets/notices by the library	4	11.8
Through faculty library committee	3	8.7

5.4 Training and skills

The majority (55.9%) has learnt on their own, while 23.5% of them got their training when they went for their postgraduate studies. The library has also contributed (8.8%) to training while 5.9% learned from their friends and colleagues while 2.9% learned from their academic departments. About their information searching skills, majority (44.1%) mentioned that they are confident, but almost an equal percentage (41.2%) have mentioned that they are somewhat confident, unsure or very unsure about their searching skills (Table 3). The Chi-square test proves that unlike awareness of e-resources, the designation or the highest educational qualification exerts no influence on the confidence on their electronic information searching skills.

Table 3 – Level of confidence in the e-resource searching skills

Level of Confidence	Frequency	Percent
Confident	15	44.1

Somewhat confident	11	32.4
Very confident	5	14.7
Very unsure and I need training	2	5.9
Unsure	1	2.9
Total	34	100.0

5.5 Perceptions towards e-resources

The respondents were asked about the level of information needs fulfillment by the e-resources provided by the library, and 47.1% mentioned that 26%-50% of their information needs are fulfilled while 29.4% stated that 51%-75% of their needs are fulfilled, whereas 23.5% mentioned that only 11%-25% of the needs are fulfilled. It was noted that none of them are satisfied more than 75% with the e-resources available to them (Table 4).

Table 4 - Fulfillment of information needs by the available e-resources

Level of Fulfillment	Frequency	%
26%-50%	16	47.1
51%-75%	10	29.4
11%-25%	8	23.5
More than 75%	0	0.0
Totally satisfied	0	0.0
Total	34	100.0

Majority (44.1%) of the respondents commented that they are somewhat satisfied with the coverage of information by the e-resources available, while 29.4% were satisfied, and 26.5% are not satisfied. The Chi-square test proved that the above perception is not influenced (all p-values > 0.05) by any of the demographic factors like age, qualification or the designation.

The Chi-square test indicates a significant influence ($p=0.031$) of the designation on the perception of the e-resources. It is spelled that the perceptions of 50%, 25% and 33.3% of the Professor, Senior Lecturers and Probationary Lecturers respectively are that their information needs are 51% to 75% satiated by the e-resources.

5.6 Factors affecting the usage of e-resources

The most influential factors that affect the e-resource usage among the respondents are the ‘Lack of access to archival issues’ and ‘Absence of full text’ followed by the ‘Inability to access databases from home’ and ‘Lack of training in using e-resources’ (Table 5). Lack of computers in their departments (32.4%) and in the faculty (23.5%) and lack of subject coverage in the available resources (23.5%), lack of computer in the library (20.6%) and lack of Internet in the department (20.6%) were also mentioned. A factor analysis performed on these 9 factors revealed that this study covers 78.16% of all the factors that affect the usage of e-resources provided by the library of the respondents.

Table 5 - Factors affecting the usage of e-resources

Factors	Frq.	%
1. Lack of access to archival material	14	41.2
2. Absence of full text	14	41.2
3. Inability to access databases from home	13	38.2
4. lack of training in using e-resources	13	38.2
5. Lack of computers in the Department	11	32.4
6. Lack of computers in the faculty	8	23.5
7. Lack of coverage of my subjects	8	23.5
8. Lack of computers in the library	7	20.6
9. Lack of Internet in the Department	7	20.6

Table 6 - Cramer's V tests between personal factors and usage

Demographic Factors	Cramer's V Approximate Significance					
	OUP	T & F	Emerald	Databases provided by the university	Databases provided by other sources	E-resources accessed through Internet
Gender	0.355	0.230	0.828	0.429	0.313	0.071
Primary Lang	0.669	0.452	0.783	0.584	0.707	0.915
Age	0.323	0.251	0.164	0.087	0.187	0.999
Faculty	0.337	0.336	0.205	0.330	0.169	0.995
Designation	0.551	0.876	0.847	0.741	0.295	0.004
Highest Edu. Qual	0.346	0.127	0.247	0.688	0.36	0.856
Teaching Exp.	0.206	0.747	0.539	0.422	0.343	0.011
Research Grants from University	0.344	0.113	0.207	0.222	0.683	0.060
Research Grants from national bodies		0.614	0.092	0.706	0.808	0.915
Research Grants from international bodies			0.520	0.584		0.915

The shaded cells of Table 6 illustrates that some personal factors have a positive relationship with the use of databases, i.e. there is a positive relationship with the use of Oxford Journals and designation, teaching experience, faculty affiliation, and the research grants obtained from the university. Use of Emerald has a positive relationship with research grants obtained from international and other bodies and teaching experience. Databases provided by the university has a positive relationship with designation, highest educational qualification and research grants obtained from the university while, databases provided by other sources has a relationship only with obtaining research grants from the university. E-resource via Internet has a positive relationship with several criteria, i.e. primary language, faculty, highest educational qualification and number of research grants obtained from national and international bodies.

6. Discussion and Recommendations

Findings established that Internet resources are the most used conforming to the studies of Perera (2014), Alison, Kiyangi & Baziraake (2012) and Azadeh & Ghasemi (2016) and the databases provided by the consortium are the least used. Majority have gained awareness of the availability of e-resources through colleagues and less from formal methods like library website and posters/leaflets of library, due to this informal nature only 29.40% were confident about their awareness while 70.6% were not confident. This contradicts with the findings of some Agaba, Bukenya & Nyumba (2004) and Bhat, Ganaie & Rather (2015). Majority has learned about the e-resources on their own and as a result only 58.8% are confident about their searching skills. Many studies insist on providing training (Agaba, Bukenya & Nyumba 2004; Alison, Kiyangi & Baziraake 2012; Curtis, Weller & Hurd 1997). Only 29.4% were satisfied with the coverage as 70.6% have mentioned that their information needs are satisfied only about 50% by the resources provided by the library. Factors affecting the usage as reported by the respondents conform to the findings of the other studies i.e. inability to access databases from home conforms with the findings of Korobili, Tilikidou & Delistavrou (2006) who established that convenience of access to the sources has a positive effect on the usage. Respondents have mentioned lack of training in using e-resources which conforms with the findings of Isah et. al. (2014), Korobili, Tilikidou & Delistavrou (2006), Farouk & Yusuf (2016), and Alison, Kiyangi and Baziraake (2012). Availability of computers, Internet and ICT skills also have been established by other researcher (Farouk & Yusuf 2016) as positive factors and poor Internet access as negative factor (Agaba, Bukenya & Nyumba 2004; Alison, Kiyangi & Baziraake 2012), while lack of coverage of the subjects has been established by Agaba, Bukenya & Nyumba (2004) as negatively affecting the use of e-resources.

Based on the findings it is recommended to increase resources relevant to the faculty members, raise awareness vigorously among them and provide good training to improve their e-resource searching skills. A significant facility to be provided is remote access to the subscribed e-resources. It is also imperative to provide adequate computers and Internet connections with good bandwidth that the academic staff is free to search from anywhere anytime.

7. Conclusion

The importance of the electronic information resources for teaching and research of the university academics is widely known for securing timely and reliable information from any part

of the world. In that sense, the academics focused by this study mainly use e-resources via Internet to fulfill their teaching and research needs almost daily. Their main sources of getting aware of the e-resources are their colleagues and the librarians. Further, they not only get themselves trained on using e-resources on their own or when they went to read for their postgraduate degrees, but also seem quite confident on their e-resource searching skills. However, majority of these academics do not find more than half of their information needs fulfilled by the available e-resources, though coverage of information by those resources is fairly satisfactory. This study also could deduce that the key factors affecting the usage of e-resources by the academics of the University of Jaffna are the lack of access to archival materials, the absence of full text, inability to access databases from home and lack of training in using e-resources.

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