

# The Utilization of Library Services by Students in a Medical College

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To find out the extent of use and to identify the utilization of facilities other than books in the library, to discover the problems which are faced by the students and to suggest ways to improve the resources in the library.

**Methods:** All the students studying for the 5<sup>th</sup> semester in the Department of Pharmacology were administered a pre-tested, structured questionnaire and the responses were obtained.

**Results:** This study did not show any statistically significant gender difference, either in the mean number of visits per week [ $p = 0.968$ ] or in the number of hours spent per visit [ $p = 0.77$ ]. As majority of the students stayed in hostels, restrictions in the hostel timings, particularly among the female students could have been a deterrent for studying late in the library.

The observation that a large number of students either carried their own books to the library or supplemented the study with their own books and the indication by about 53% of the respondents that they did not always get the current editions of the books, suggests that there is a need to increase the availability of the commonly read text books.

**Conclusion:** Though most of the students in this semester did utilize the library services, most of them seemed to be using the standard text books only, without making use of the other available facilities like medical journals and electronic media databases. There is also a need to improve the stock of commonly read books and to pay some more attention to the conveniences and the comforts in the library.

**Key Words:** Libraries, Students, Utilization, Periodicals

## KEY MESSAGE

- Large number of students prefer to read their own books in the library or to supplement the study with their own books.
- There is a need to increase the number of copies of the books which are favoured by the students.
- The students do not fully utilize other facilities like electronic databases and journals which are available in the library.

## INTRODUCTION

The major purpose of the library is to provide information [1]. In addition to the traditional function of collecting, organizing and providing access to information in print, modern libraries include many other databases.[2] Information resources exist in electronic formats like online databases, journals [periodicals], books, etc[3]. As medical science is a rapidly advancing discipline, the use of the medical library by students is a very important means for updating their knowledge and competence [4]. Medical students may not be able to learn all that they have to know only from formal classroom lectures. They also must learn to collect information by their own efforts, to develop adequate professional competence. The role of well equipped medical libraries in order to meet the needs of the medical students cannot be over emphasized. Though an institution may have the best stocked libraries, the utilization of the libraries by the students need not simply depend on the number of books and

journals in the library. Many factors like personal preferences, the general environment in the library, inconveniences of the working hours, distance from the place of residence etc may influence the use of the library.

Any large institution with thousands of students should make an effort to find out the pattern of the utilization of the library, time to time. The feedback which is thus collected may help in formulating new policies and improving services and it will also give information about what is expected as against what is available.

“The effectiveness of a library as an instrument of learning, is determined by the success with which it is able to provide the user with the information that he/she seeks. The library can fulfill its function best by pursuing a policy of constant self-evaluation in order to be alert to the changing needs of its users” [5] [6].

## OBJECTIVES

- To study the use of the library by the students .
- To find out the extent of use of the library .
- To identify the utilization of facilities other than books in the library.
- To discover the problems which are faced by the students .
- To suggest ways to improve the resources in the library.

## SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Students studying for the 5<sup>th</sup> semester in a medical college in South India and all the postgraduate students of Pharmacology were administered a pretested, structured questionnaire after obtaining individual consent. This study was approved by the institutional ethics committee. The student questionnaire had the following details-demographic data, utilization parameters and personal opinion. The response rate was hundred percent.

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data was tabulated and analyzed with the help of the SPSS, version 10.0 and the findings were presented in the form of appropriate tables. The data was expressed by calculating the percentages. The Chi-square test was applied wherever appropriate.

## RESULTS

Almost an equal proportion of male [43.2%] and female students [46%] visited the library 1.5 hours to 4 hours per visit. Forty six percent of the female students and 43.2% of the male students visited the library 2-4 times a week. The mean number of visits/week of the PG and UG students was 2.45 and 2.69 respectively. Most of the students [78%] did not use personal vehicles for conveyance to the college. However, owning a vehicle made no difference in the visits to the library, as compared to those who did not own one. [Table/Fig-1]

Characteristics	Males n=125 ( % )	Females n=124 ( % )
Post Graduate	14 [11.2]	13 [10.5]
Under Graduate	111 [88.8]	111 [89.5]
Own a vehicle or not	Yes	45 [36]
	No	86 [64]
Access to internet at residence	Yes	110 [88]
	No	15 [12]
Stay	Hostel	94 [75.2]
	With family	13 [10.4]
	Private accommodation	18 [14.4]
No. of hours spent/visit in library	1 or less	23 [18.4]
	1.5-3.5	68 [54.4]
	More than 4	34 [27.2]
No. of visits/week	1 or less	35 [28]
	2-4	54 [43.2]
	5 or more	36 [28.8]
Visits to hostel library/week by students residing in hostel (n=190)	No response	13
	Every day	12
	3-4 times	14
	1-2 times	20
	Never	41

**[Table/Fig-1]:** Baseline characteristics of the study subjects  
Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

PG students visited the journal section more frequently than the UG students. They visited the library at least once a week, whereas there were 87 undergraduate students who never visited the journal section of the library. The difference was found to be statistically significant [ $p=0.000$ ]. The male students read newspapers more frequently than the female students on a daily basis. This difference was also found to be statistically significant. [ $p=0.006$ ]. Most of the students used the internet for academic purposes. However, most of the students hardly made use of the audiovisual aids which were available in the library. Even though most of the students admitted that the required titles of the text books were available most of the time, more than 50% of the students responded that they did not always get the current editions of the text books. Fifty two [20.9%] students carried their own books for use in the library and 62.7% [156] of the students supplemented their own books to the books which were available in the library. [Table/Fig-2]

Most of the students [88.8%] were satisfied with the general environment in the library. More than 50% of the students were not satisfied with the drinking water and the toilet facilities which were available in the library. More than 80% of the students felt that refreshment facilities must be made available in the library premises. About 25% of the respondents wanted the closing hours of the library to be extended beyond 12 o'clock in the night. [Table/Fig-3]

## DISCUSSION

Demographic data: Among the 249 students who returned questionnaire, there were 222[89.2%] under graduate [UG] students and 27[10.8%] PG [post graduate] students. Though the PG students were less in number, except for the "utilization of the journal section", all other parameters were comparable in both the UGs and PGs. The gender was (males -125 and females-124) equally distributed. Most of the students [190 (76.3%)] stayed in the hostel. The rest either stayed with the family or in private rooms. Among the 125 male students, 36% owned a vehicle, whereas only 7.3% of the female students owned a vehicle. Most of the students [89.6%] had access to the internet at the place of their stay.

Utilization	Frequency of use	Male [%]	Female [%]
Use of internet for academic purpose*	Yes	105 [84]	107 [86.3]
	No	16 [12.8]	10 [8.1]
Use of audio visual aids in library*	Very often	3 [2.4]	2 [1.6]
	Occasionally	29 [23.2]	20 [16.1]
	Never	87 [69.6]	98 [79]
Visits to News+ paper section	No response	5 [4]	4 [3.2]
	Occasionally	69 [55.2]	79 [63.7]
	Daily	35 [28.0]	14 [11.3]
	Never	16 [12.8]	27 [21.8]
Availability of textbooks	No response	6 [4.8]	4 [3.2]
	Always	49 [39.2]	50 [40.3]
	Usually	54 [43.2]	58 [46.8]
	Occasionally do not	16 [12.8]	12 [9.7]
Availability of recent edition of textbooks	No response	6 [4.8]	4 [3.2]
	Always	61 [48.8]	45 [36.3]
	Not always	58 [46.4]	75 [60.5]

**[Table/Fig-2]:** Utilization of Internet, AV aids and periodicals

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages.

\*Some students did not respond to the question.

+ $p=0.006$ , Chi-square=12.59.

	Opinion	Males n = 125 (%)	Females n = 124 (%)
General environment in the library	No response	6 [4.8]	4 [3.2]
	Good	79 [63.2]	82 [66.1]
	Adequate	33 [26.4]	27 [21.8]
	Not adequate	7 [5.6]	11 [8.9]
Drinking water and toilet facilities	No response	6 [4.8]	3 [2.4]
	Adequate	63 [50.4]	52 [41.9]
	Not adequate	56 [44.8]	69 [55.6]
Refreshment facility	No response	6 [4.8]	3 [2.4]
	Required	101 [80.8]	107 [86.3]
	Not required	18 [14.4]	14 [11.3]
Closing hours of the library	No response	8 [6.4]	3 [2.4]
	Adequate	63 [50.4]	111 [89.5]
	Extend upto 12 midnight	36 [28.8]	8 [6.5]
	Extend beyond 12 midnight	18 [14.4]	2 [1.6]

**[Table/Fig-3]:** Opinion about General environment, Personal conveniences, Refreshment facilities and Closing hours  
Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

## LIBRARY VISITS

Almost an equal proportion of male [43.2%] and female students [46%] visited the library 2-4 times a week. 54.4% of the male students and 61.3% of the female students stayed in the library for 1.5-4 hours at every visit. The mean no. of visits/week of the PG and UG students were 2.45 and 2.69 respectively. None of these differences between the various categories were found to be statistically significant. The students who made more visits per week also spent more time in the library at every visit. This observation was found to be statistically significant. In a study which was conducted in two medical colleges in Kolkata, it was observed that 46.3% of the students visited the library daily and 2.1% visited once a week [4]. Owning a vehicle by the students made no difference in the frequency of the visits or in the duration of the time which was spent in the library per each visit. 36.8% of the students who stayed in the hostels never visited the library in the hostel and only 16% of the students visited daily. Some of the students who stayed in the hostel complained about the poor facilities in the hostel library. This could have been the reason why the libraries in the hostel were not frequented more often by the students. The reasons for this were not looked into specifically in the present study. One of the reasons for the under utilization of the library could have been the traditional curriculum [as against problem based learning] which was followed in the medical colleges in India. The data which was collected by the faculty of Library and Information Science, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, suggested that more medical students in the problem-based curriculum than in the more traditional programs used the library and that when the Problem Based Learning (PBL) students used the library, they did so more frequently, for longer periods of time and as a source of a greater proportion of their study materials [7].

## AVAILABILITY OF REQUIRED BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY

Though only 11.2% of the students conveyed that only occasionally they did not get the required titles of the text books, more than 53% of the students said that the current editions of

the text books were not available every time that they were asked for. Probably, this could have been the reason why more than 80% of the students either used their own books in the library or supplemented the library books with their own books. However, this fact requires further examination. Similar studies [4, 8, 9] have shown that more than 70% of the students found the availability of the text books to be inadequate. It is also possible that most of the students had preferred to read one particular text book on any given subject and this could have led to the shortage of text books at the peak hours.

## UTILIZATION OF JOURNALS AND NEWS PAPERS

It looked as if the journals were underutilized by the undergraduate students, [56.3% of the undergraduate students never visited the journal section and 31.5% of the students visited it once a week]. However, if the present teaching curriculum in the medical colleges is taken into account, the figures will be quite encouraging. In a similar study by C Chatterjee et al.[4], only 8.6% of the students were found to visit the journal section in the medical colleges. As compared to the UG students, the PG students visited the journal section more often and the difference was found to be statistically significant [ $p=0.000$ ]. This difference was expected, since research was a part of the curriculum for the PG students. The better news paper reading habits of the male students as compared to the female students was found to be statistically significant [ $p=0.006$ ].

## THE UTILIZATION OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA

The library was well equipped with various educational facilities in electronic media like AV aids, CD ROMs, internet etc. A large no. of students had internet accessibility at their place of residence. More than 85% of the students used the internet for academic purposes. In a similar study which was done in the Health Sciences Library System, Falk Library of the Health Sciences, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, more than half of the students (69%) accessed the website on a daily or weekly basis for academic purposes[10]. Among 26 students who did not have access to the internet at their residences, 19[73.1%] made use of the internet facility in the library. 61.3% of those who had an internet facility at home and 26.9% among those who did not have an internet facility at home, never used the internet facility which was available in the library. But, the educational AV aids which were available in the library were not very popular among the students. Almost 75% of the students never made use of these aids. An in- house search engine to find out the availability of the books in the library, was installed. About 30% of the students did make use of this facility and more than 25% found the programme to be user friendly. Some of the similar studies have found that AV aids were not available at all in the libraries of many medical colleges [4].

## GENERAL ENVIRONMENT AND OTHER FACILITIES

It is important from the point of view of the personal comforts of the library users, to have excellent toilet facilities, arrangements for drinking water and even refreshments in the library premises [9]. Some of the studies have reported dissatisfaction in upto 50% of the library users. The present study has also shown that 50.2% of the students, both males and females, felt that the drinking water and the toilet facilities were not adequate in the library. Most of the students [88.8%] were satisfied with the general environment like

the lighting, the seating arrangements, etc. in the library. More than 80% of the students felt that refreshment facilities may be made available in the library premises.

## LIBRARY TIMINGS

About 70% of the students were satisfied with the present timings [9AM to 11PM] of the library. However, 25% of the students wanted the closing hours to be extended upto 12 o'clock at midnight or beyond.

## CONCLUSION

Though most of the students in this semester do utilize the library services, many of them seem to be using the standard text books only, without making use of the other available facilities like medical journals and electronic media databases. There is also a need to improve the stock of the commonly read books and to pay some more attention to the conveniences and comforts in the library.

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