

Information Seeking Behavior of the Final Year Special Degree Undergraduates: A Case Study at the Department of History and Archaeology in University of Sri Jayewardenepura

Kothalawala, K.L A.¹

Abstract

Information plays an important role in human life today. It plays a vital role in the learning, teaching, and research process of university academic staff and undergraduates. This study examines the information-seeking behavior of the History and Archaeology final year special degree undergraduates of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ). The sample size of ten people was chosen from 40 people, through the purposive sampling method. Interviews were the main qualitative data instrument used to collect data. A thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the data acquired. The findings of the research were that History and Archaeology final year special degree undergraduates prefer field visits for their information requirements. The undergraduates were dependent on their lecturer's recommendations including print and electronic resources, field visits, indirect personal contacts, and libraries. In seeking information, they face several barriers such as languages issues, lack of books, the accuracy of the information and, selfish behaviors of the students. The library should acquire more copies of books on History and Archaeology subject disciplines and emphasize the need for more user awareness programs for the productive use of the library.

Key words: / History and Archaeology/ Information-seeking behavior / Undergraduate students / University Library / University of Sri Jayewardenepura

¹ **Research Assistant, Centre for Gender Equity and Equality, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka**

Email: lochiapeksha6630@gmail.com  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7506-5680>



Received: 31 December 2021, Accepted revised version : 10 March 2022
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Introduction

All people need the information to make decisions, and they need it as much as other natural resources in their day-to-day activities. Information plays an important role in human life today. It has an impact on both our personal and professional lives. Information needs are for university students' career advancement, resolving practical issues, being up to date, or writing an assignment/research paper etc. Many university students, especially, need the information to complete assignments and do research. University students evaluate information based on accuracy, authority, relevancy, currency, and purposes.

Information-seeking behavior is the process by which individuals use information for a specific task (Wilson, 2000). The most common definition of this is given by Sultana and Ayesha (2016) explained the term 'information-seeking behavior' applies to the requirements for information, the search for information, the evaluation and selection of information, and the use of the information. Information-seeking behavior relates to the procedure of gathering, analyzing, and applying information. It's far more important for academicians, researchers, and students because they all want accurate and up-to-date information for their research. There are a large number of studies in the library and information science addressing information-related behavior, such as information needs, information seeking, and the use of information resources.

This study evaluates the seeking behavior of History and Archaeology special degree final year undergraduates at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ), it was expected to understand how was their behavior in terms of the information requirements, information search, information evaluation, selection, and usage of information.

Research Problem

The undergraduate students in the humanities lack knowledge in finding information resources based on web searches (Tibbo, 2003: Zondi, 2002) noted poor information-seeking patterns in undergraduate students in the humanities. Undergraduate students encounter technical problems when trying to locate materials from university libraries (Mellon, 2006: Callinan, 2004) noted that they are unfamiliar with the library classification system,

online public access catalog, and stack arrangement. Hence, undergraduate students in the humanities do not have sufficient knowledge in initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection, use, and presentation of the right information to complete the course assignments, tutorials, class presentations, and write final-year research project report. Therefore, undergraduate students in the humanities encounter many information problems completing their degree programme.

Objectives of the study

- i. To explore the information needs of the selected final year special degree undergraduates.
- ii. To study information-seeking behavior of the final year special degree undergraduates.
- iii. To identify the information-seeking challenges that final-year special degree undergraduate's face.
- iv. To give recommendations for developing information-seeking behavior.

Contribution of the study

The researchers have studied the information-seeking behaviour of various university students. There was a lack of such research conducted so far, especially based on final year special degree undergraduates in the Department of History and Archaeology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Studying the information-seeking behavior of undergraduates in the Department of History and Archaeology will be able to improve the existing information services and products to enhance their information-seeking behavior. Library policy makers will also be able to formulate information-seeking behavior policies. And finally, it is possible to minimize the interruptions and problems faced by the undergraduates.

Methodology of the study

The qualitative methods attempted to explore the experiences of final year special degree undergraduates within the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura to bring out the information-seeking behaviour of the students. The qualitative research

design is highly suitable for this case study as case study is a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon. A case study describes practically every aspect of a person's life and experience in order to find patterns and reasons for behaviour. The aim of it is the knowledge learned from one case can be generalized to many others. To achieve this qualitative research design one can capture real-life experiences in the words of the participants individually. Further, qualitative methods are selected because they are intended to uncover the complexities of situations (Hankivsky & Grace, 2015), and to enable the researcher to produce authoritative and valid knowledge about participants' experiences in their natural setting (Holland, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Moreover, qualitative methods offer a voice to participants because the data consists, mainly, of their perceptions of their experiences in their own words (Bluhm et al., 2010). Within qualitative research, it is also possible to alter some data gathering methods as the process unfolds. Finally, Bluhm et al. (2010) state that, qualitative methods capture social experiences that can be generalized to a larger population, or which provide insights that may be relevant to similar situations.

In this research qualitative methods are most suited to generalize information-seeking behaviour of the History and Archaeology final year special degree undergraduates at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

The population of the study was the students who have been selected for the final year special degree undergraduates in History and Archaeology. The sample was selected from those who completed their research successfully. The purposive sampling technique was provided the opportunity to communicate more effectively with the samples, who have completed the degree program by attending to their studies online while being confined to home due to the pandemic. According to the sample selected 10 respondents from the 40 population of the 2019 batch.

Interviews were the main qualitative data instrument used to collect data. Every in-depth interview was conducted by the researcher with a semi-structured questionnaire to understand their experiences. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. All interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. There were

ten interviews to be transcribed. After each interview, relevant transcripts were prepared. Ultimately, there were ten recordings and their transcripts in Sinhala. Different levels of coding were used to analyze qualitative data by examining common topics, ideas, and patterns of the interview transcripts. As a result of coding, different themes emerged.

Result and Discussion

Results are discussed according to the emerged themes.

1. Type of Information needs of respondents

1.1 Social information

Twenty percent of informants have collected social information from members of the society representing various role in which they act. In their research, they try to get information from people who are related to their research. Their responses are as follows.

“I studied those who are engaged in the gold industry in Sri Lanka”

“I studied the field of road development in Sri Lanka. I got information

from people who engage in buses, three-wheelers, and shops.”

1.2 Cultural information

Collecting cultural information is the most sought type of information in History and Archaeology final year special degree undergraduates Fifty percent of informants have excavated Archaeological sites.

“I studied people who were involved in the cultural industry.”

“Exploration of contemporary socio-religious and political information from pottery found at the Panduwasnuwara Archaeological Premises”

1.3 Written information

Twenty percent of participants seek published information to satisfy their information needs.

“They were asked what information was available regarding the archeological

sites in the Anuradhapura district. I looked at the table of contents of the books they gave me.

2. Information needs of final year undergraduates

According to the results, three respondents have talked about the topics have selected as their interest. Especially they had based on their abilities which relate to the subject. Thus they had different types of information needs as follows.

2.1 Researcher's interest

“I like the planning and Architecture side because I can draw Art, in addition to that, a lot of people helped me with this.”

“It's my Interest. I talked to “K” Sir. “K” Sir introduced Dr. “NC” to me. I built up my topic with Dr. “NC.”

“I have always loved inscriptions. I like to move forward from that side.”

3. Information sources used by respondents

3.1 Printed Sources and None printed Sources

Information sources are used by respondents for their information requirements of learning activities. According to the results show that 06 (60%) of respondents agree with the use of print sources, including books, articles, newspapers, pictures, and arts. Among those print sources, books and journal articles are highly used. Sometimes they may be treating them as up-to-date information. According to the interview responses, this was confirmed. Quoted statements are as follows:

“I found much of the information from books and magazines. I mostly use the print version and found a book written by Prof. Kulatunga.”

“I got both the Print version and E-version articles. Among them, I highly used E-version. Because the tourism industry field (his dissertation topic) is not limited to Sri Lanka. There are very few books written in Sri Lanka, than in foreign countries. Therefore, I got most of the foreigner's articles from Jstor.”

According to the three (30%), respondents who have talked about online sources, and given below are the view of participants. Through the Internet, they believed that they can get more information. In addition, the majority of students visit the university library in order to use the internet. It is a more efficient method for students to gather data for their research activities.

3.2 Participatory observation

Results show that 06 (60%) History and Archaeology students used fields visits for their information requirement. In certain cases, surveys and interviews seem to be the most appropriate mechanism. Most of them have searched traditional knowledge related to Sri Lankan culture by Participatory Observation. Only 06 (60%) Informants also seem to gather information through surveys, interviews, and visits.

“I picked up a few sources, such as cultural goods sellers, Tour Guide, pilgrims,

“There I talked about the art of palm leaf writings and then about Tampita Vihara. I looked at all the palm-leaf manuscripts in those temples and copied them.”

4. Information Seeking Patterns used by Respondents

4.1 Lecturers

The academic staff is willing to support their students in collecting information on students' final year dissertations, As well as they have sound knowledge in their subjects and newer publications. Thus this study shows most students are depending on their lecturers when seeking information for their final year dissertations. Eight (80%) participants have got guidelines of lecturers before using the library or field. Furthermore, they depend on the lecturers when choosing the titles, searching for information, evaluating information gathered and even using books too. Among the comments that show dependence on their lecturers/supervisors, it is clear that expect more from lecturers than guidance.

“K” Sir and “A” Sir said to look at these books here.”

“I found out about it and went to the library because “N” Sir told me that I had information there.”

“H” Sir helped a lot.....I refer to online materials. The books mentioned by “H” Sir were downloaded.”

4.2 Batch mates/ friends

The participants reveal collaboration among the batch mates and the supportiveness of senior students. These friends were mostly their Batch mates and, their seniors, who are currently working at Archaeological Sites. 80% of informants listed friends or seniors as one of their sources of information. Among them, 30% of participants' highlighted collaboration with friends, and three of participants highlighted senior student supports. Their friends have also supported them in overcoming barriers such as language problems, a lack of multiple copies, and a lack of information.

“There I was helped by friends to do translate. Because all the Bel report had from the English language. If there was even one book in the British period it was from the English. So, my

friends gave me their help to translate. And one of my friends at the University of performing and visual arts helped with a book.”

4.3 University library staff

The majority of the participants highly appreciated the University library support staff contribution. According to the results, eight (80%) respondents have talked about university library support staff. They highly appreciate their work experiences, helpfulness, friendliness, and hospitality.

“Often when the name was heard, they (library supportive staff) could find the book quickly. When I say the name of the book, some people (library supportive staff) could say the location from their memory.”

“There is nothing to say about our library (University library). It is really good. When I search for some books, I look for not only that book but also other books. When searching books I found good support from library supportive staff members in numerous ways. And also Ceylon room members helped a lot.”

4.4 Other contacts

The result shows informants get information through direct and indirect personal contacts. 30% of students highlighted personal contacts.

“Someone called Jaliya Sir who married our university lecturer helped me. He was the one who gave the information from the beginning.”

“I contacted Prof. Chandra Wickragamage through Dr. “NC” and got help from him. Sir's Stupa book helped me there. Because he is the one who has drawn so many monuments after Bell.”

5 Using information centers

5.1 University library

According to the result, all the researchers (100%) mainly use the university library as their main information Centre.

“I used the library for search history of the industry”

“I got information from the university library”

5.2 Other libraries

The result shows 80% of students visited other libraries despite university libraries. Among them, some of the students especially used the subject base special library for their advanced searching. Among them, Undergraduates of special degree in Archaeology highly appear than Undergraduates of special degree in History. “In addition to the University Library and the Public Library, I used the dissertations which had been done on the cultural industry at the library of PGIAR (The Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology)”.

“When I was going for institutional training at the Department of Archeology, I used that library..... I got information from the Public Library in Colombo and from the Library of the Archaeological Office in “Paduwas Nuwara”

6. Pattern of information seeking behavior

6.1 Searching online catalog

According to the result, the 1st step of searching library materials, they follow searching online catalog 40% of students highlighted use an online catalog for searching.

“Firstly search from the online catalog.”

“After searching online catalog browsing from shelves.”

6.2 Browsing library shelves

Among them 40% of students have mentioned after searching the online catalogs, browsing the shelves was the second. After searching online catalogs, browsing library shelves was the 2nd step for users. Some students use these steps as 1st steps when they know about the material previously.

“At first, searched from the online catalog and we went to the shelves and found the ones that we could not find.”

“I also went to the shelf and picked out a few books I knew.”

7. Barriers fulfilling information needs

7.1 Language factor

Several factors emerged as barriers to meeting the information needs. The first one is the weakness of the English language. According to the result, there are 30% of students highlighted that there is a lack of Sinhala language information for their related topics. One respondent mentioned the difficulties of finding sources in his field that were published in Sinhala and needed to be translated because he was not fluent in the English language.

“The Bell reports were all in English, and if there was a single book during the British period, it was in English. So friends helped me translate them.”

7.2 Lack of time

Twenty percent of participants are of the view that the process of getting information is not proper and wasting time. Searching for information in the library would be a waste of their time. (Person NL) says,

I wanted only about two pages of the Bell Report. Therefore I had to waste a lot of time.”

“We have a photocopy service but it doesn't work properly. It takes a long time to record information. It was very difficult at that time. ”

7.3 Non –Update information materials

Four of the students 40% were not satisfied with the library collection. Furthermore, they emphasized those are not updated with new subjects. Sometimes they use other libraries because of this reason. And students have mentioned poor maintenance in the library with old books.

“The other one is that the books are not updated to date. Books have not changed when new subjects change. The old ones are still there.”..... “Many books have been written on inscriptions in Sri Lanka. But little attention has been paid to the inscriptions in our library. Those books have not been updated. That means I have not seen any new books except the ones brought from the old days. That is a big shortcoming. There are books in the main library in University of Kelaniya. That's why I brought books from it.”

7.4 Non-accurate information

The result shows that 20% agreed with the accuracy of information. A participant pointed out incorrect facts, non-mentioned references, and copy-right issues.

“Some books do not match the information they contain. If we take in the technology of the gold industry, some information changed in different books. And references were not included. But when I looked at all the information, I realized from which books that information was taken.”

7.5 Lack of multiple copies

20% of respondents felt that the library provides an inadequate level of multiple copies. This is a major barrier to students. One of the respondents says this problem will affect future collection also.

“Those books were not in the lending section. (Some rare books are in Ceylon Room collections ‘only’) It is worth going to the lending section because I didn't even have a

phone to take a photo. There are a lot of such children here. That's a big problem for them. At the very least it would be worth having a photocopy of the lending section.”

7.6 Closed access collection

Some library conditions are not flexible for the respondents. The result shows that 30% of respondents were not satisfied with the collection access. Those were time duration issues, borrowing rules, restricted access for some books, and limited e-pagers.

“We are unable to borrow books from the reference section. But the reference section consisted of the important books which were wanted. Then I have to go after 3.00 p.m. to borrow them. Even after Borrowing; we can't keep it for a long time.

7.7 Non-Responsible behavior of the students

Other significant barriers that were mentioned by several respondents to effective information searching were the poor organization and missing items from the shelves. Some of the participants believe that it should be students' negative behaviors. According to 30% of participants, revealed some negative behaviors were shown, such as hiding books and not putting correct numerical order.

“Some books are not where they should be on the shelf. Those books are at the places where students used them.”

“There are books but the wrong number. There was such a problem. The library catalog shows a lot of copies of the book to each number. But those books were not in the library and even have not taken them away. The reason was students hiding books.”

Conclusion

The study has revealed that undergraduates of final year special degree in History and Archaeology use the university library 100 % to find out their information. They have used variety of information types and sources. Those are social and cultural information, printed and electronic resources and models sources also. So the library should acquire updated information as well as add more copies of books that are related to History and Archaeology subjects.

Furthermore, students have also used a variety of information-seeking patterns. Primarily, their searching patterns are based on their batch mates, lecturers, and library staff. The most notable of these is, based on the recommendations of the lecturers.

History and Archeology Final Year Special Degree undergraduates conduct their Studies in the Sinhala Language as similar as other departments in the faculty of Humanities and social sciences. It could be the reason for causing the barrier of language. When considering the barriers selected groups are primarily faced with difficulties with restrictions on borrowing, an insufficient number of books, obsolete material, and lack of relevant books, closed access for information, and non-responsible behavior of the student. Non-responsible behavior is could be caused by a lack of sensitization.

Recommendations

Final year special degree undergraduate in History and Archaeology has various information needs. So, the library management should allocate funds to purchase current information materials in all areas of study, from both English and Sinhala languages to minimize language barriers. Furthermore, students face many barriers related to searching for information. So, if libraries build an effective way with lectures for giving awareness, it could be a good way to avoid these barriers. Therefore the library should conduct more user education programs, seminars, workshops, and training sessions for educating students. Ensuring appropriate sensitization through awareness will support minimizing the non-responsible behavior of the students. Library management must put an ongoing effort to maintain library services.

Continuous improvement is a much-needed aspect in maintaining and strengthening existing library resources to cater to conceivable needs of library users and library collection of History and Archeology should be continually re-evaluated to meet user requirements of undergraduate of the university.

References

- Bluhm, D., Harman, W., Lee, T., & Mitchell, T. (2010). Qualitative Research in Management: A Decade of Progress. *Journal Of Management Studies*, 48(8), 1866-1891. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00972.x>
- Callinan, J. (2004). Information-seeking behaviour of undergraduate biology students. *Library Review*, 54(2), 86-99. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00242530510583039>
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Hankivsky, O., & Grace, D. (2015). *Understanding and emphasizing difference and intersectionality in multimethod and mixed methods research*. Oxford:Oxford university Press.
- Holland, J. (2007). Emotions and Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 10(03). doi:10.1080/13645570701541894
- Mellon, CA. 2006. Library anxiety: a grounded theory and its development. [Online]. <http://www.library.arizona.edu/users/buchwaln/undergraduate.html>. (Accessed 10 June 2008).
- Sultana, A. (2016). Information seeking behaviour of Academics of Maulana Azad national Urdu University in the Digital Environment. In S. & Dhanavandan, *Transition in librarianship* (pp. 245-252). Delhi: Dominant Publishers and Distributions Pvt Ltd.
- Tibbo, H. (2003). Primarily History in America: How U.S. Historians Search for Primary Materials at the Dawn of the Digital Age. *The American Archivist*, 66(1), 9-50. <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.66.1.b12037011g718n74>

Wilson T.D. (2000). Human Information Behavior, *Informing science*, 3(2):49-55.

Zondi, E. (2002). Library use skills and information seeking patterns of first year students at the University of Zululand ,South Africa. *South-African Journal of Library and information Science*, 60(04), 204-208.