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Influencing Effective Library use and Students Perception in Assam University: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on the user survey to investigate the user perception about library service provided by Rabindra Library, Assam University, Silchar. The factors which influence the library environment have been critically examined by user's feed back through a questionnaire and analysed to understand the users' expectation and to find out the possible solutions to overcome with the problems. 150 students from different courses have been surveyed in Assam University library and the findings revealed that academic libraries are less used because of the poor library environment, inadequate user education programs and gap between the users' expectation and librarians understanding. It is recommended that an academic library must work hard on library environment, user awareness programs and quality of service for increasing the effective library use.

KEYWORDS: *Library usage; User perception; Library service; Assam University; Rabindra Library; Environmental factor.*

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INTRODUCTION

Are there any aspects of the library which can hinder the effective use? Or is there any aspect which is helpful in effective use of library resources? Such questions in library research are not new, but as the modern academic libraries are adopting new technologies in their library for fastening their services, there is need to answer such questions by surveying the users on regular intervals. Academic libraries or University libraries in Indian higher education institutions are facing the challenge of underutilization of its resources available for its stake holders. This issue of underutilization of library resources in University libraries now a day becomes the matter of concern for the library management. In present IT-driven world it is a big challenge for the librarians to justify their role and the huge investment in libraries. The present study aims to find the answers to these questions by student's perception of Assam University Library.

Assam University library was established in the year of 1994 with the establishment of the university as a central facility for meeting the information requirement of the academic community of the university. The university has good number of information resource including books, journals, theses, reference materials etc. available in open access mode. To enhance the better library use the library organizes different awareness programs time to time to aware the students and faculty members about the library services and facilities provided by the library like E-resource facility, Internet access for users, Library Orientation after the admission of new students, Lecture on Plagiarism, Reference management etc. The Central Library of Assam University is devoted to serve the users with its best effort.

What could change user's perception of the University library include, but not limited to, the library environment, library use instruction, and user-librarian collaboration. (Amusa and Iyoro,)[1]. According to Amusa and Iyoro the academic *library-environment* encompasses all the circumstances, people, things, and events around the library and can have potential effects, positive or negative, on the library usage. The design of a library can influence users' behavior and satisfaction in the same way that the physical environment and organization of a library can. Attitudes of library staff also count as they will make users comfortable or uncomfortable in using library services.

Similarly *Library-instruction* is to teach users necessary skills to make good use of library resources. This is necessary to promote full exploitation of library resources and to create awareness for subsequent use of the library resources. Also, it would be hard for users of academic libraries to gain knowledge of library use on their own.

Briden, Burns, and Marshall[2] have stated that library instruction programs conducted in the library have the benefit of introducing students to the library's physical space as well as intangible services. Students can also be convinced that the library is a comfortable and friendly place to work and that can provide convenient help for all their information needs.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of present study is to investigate the factors influencing the library use by Assam University Library users. It includes library environment, library instruction, and user-librarian collaboration on the use of university library by AUS students.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To know how the awareness programs (user awareness about library resources) affects the library use pattern;
- Perceived influence of library environment on the library use,
- Perceived influence of library instructions on the library use,
- To determine the students level of familiarity with the library resources, and
- Influence of user-librarian collaboration on the library use

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Arising from the above objectives, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do students utilize the library resources and services provided to them by Assam University Library?
- What are the respondents perception regarding their library environment to their use of library?
- What is the perceived relevance of library instructions to their use of libraries?
- What are their views on user-librarian collaboration activities in Central Library of Assam University, Silchar?
- What are the variables that constitute impediments to effective user-librarian collaborations?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section author has reviewed some important literature related to utilization of academic library

and factors influencing the users regarding utilization of their library and its resources.

According to Lubans and others[3], the main problem with information seekers remains with users' characteristics of lack of awareness of information source, idea about their organization and the idea about how to access these information. In their study it is suggested to the librarians that they should teach the users how to evaluate and access information themselves.

Goggin[4] defined library orientation as introduction of students and faculty to the library, its resources and the services available to them. He strongly believes that library orientation should be taken as first impression of new users in the library.

Campbell and Shlecter[5] have studied about the effect of environment on the use of library and user perception. They have mentioned in their study that how the environmental factors can influence user behavior and their perception. As per their findings even the design of a library can influence user perception. Their study was more focused on the physical environment, library organization, availability of resource and staff behavior in the library.

Leighton and Weber[6] opined that academic library is not only a book repository but it is more than that. Academic library also provides study space in an environment that is conducive to serious thinking and learning. They believed that the library environment has an important role to play with user learning and thinking innovative idea.

Lombardo and Condic[7] in their study, have revealed about a serious threat that the libraries must be a comfortable place to study, otherwise students will use alternative places to access the required information in this electronic age.

Lushington[8] stated in his study that libraries should be designed with individuals in mind. According to him libraries must be designed in the manner that it should provide maximum assistance to the users in utilizing library resources and fulfilling their needs in easy way.

Jiao and Onwuegbuzie[9] stated that new students who received library instructions at the time of admission in the college are more comfortable with the library. It is important for library instructors to be friendly and approachable. They should address the issue of library anxiety in a candid way so that students understand that they are not alone with this feeling.

Amusa and Iyoro[1] conducted a study on Nigerian undergraduate students and found that the better library environments attract the students towards the library. User-librarian collaboration is important to improve the library service and effective use of resources.

Toner[10] says that libraries in modern age need to market and advertise its services well among the students who are not frequent visitors to the library. She emphasized that if teachers bring their students to the library for instructions or orientation once a semester, the librarians will get a good number of audience for marketing the library services and its advantages.

Vondracek[11] observed that students seek comfort and convenience when searching for a place to study or conduct research. Comfort being the most important factor for studying alone is indicated by such characteristics as the ability to spread out, listen to music, and the level of privacy. Convenience, on the other hand, is the most important for studying in a group.

Marshall, Burns, and Briden[12] asserted that library instruction would help students perceive libraries as a credible resource. Students see faculty as the subject expert and interact with them almost every day. On the other hand, they view librarians as people who work in the library with whom they almost never interact. They do not think of librarians as subject experts, or even research experts, but only people managing library collections.

METHODOLOGY

The survey method is adopted for the study.

Target Population : The population of interest for this study was the students of Assam University who uses Rabindra Library which is also known as the Central Library of Assam University, Silchar, as their main source of information to support their learning and academic activities. The university has total population of 4081 students comprising 3307 UG/PG, 21 Diploma and 753 Research Scholars (PhD M.Phil) (Assam University IQAR Report 2016)

Sample Size and Sample Procedure: Out of 4081 student population, the author used a random sample of 150 which was statistically generated.

Data Collection Method: For the present study survey method was adopted for getting the meaningful data from the students. The instrument used to gather data is a questionnaire. The questionnaire has four sections. Section-A focuses on demographic information of the respondent, Section-B on academic library use and impact, Section-C on library instruction, and Section-D user-librarian collaboration.

Data Analysis Techniques: Data collected from the respondents were tabulated and analysed using percentage method to achieve the objectives of this study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Response rate

The library users, in this case, the respondents were the unit of analysis. 136 completed responses were received which shows 90.67% of the total sample of 150. The participants were also asked to identify their status by the courses they are studying in the Assam University. The category wise distribution of respondents is given in Table -01 and represented in Fig-01 below.

Table-01. Number of respondents by their categories.

CATEGORY OF USERS	UG and PG	RS	DIP/CER	TOTAL
RESPONSE	91	43	2	**136**

*UG= Undergraduate, PG= Postgraduate, RS= Research Scholar, DIP/CER= Diploma/Certificate
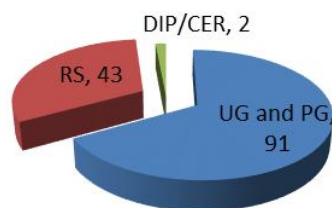

Fig-01. Category wise participation

Visits to the Library

Respondents were asked about the frequency of their library visit to understand the pattern of their library visit. The responses received from the students have been presented in the Table 02 below.

Table-02. Frequency of Visits to the Library

Frequency	UG and PG	RS	DIP/CER	TOTAL
Daily	-	3		**3 (2%)**
Once a week	17	15	2	**34 (25%)**
More than once per week	14	23		**37 (27%)**
Monthly	26	1		**27 (20%)**
More than once in a month	34	1		**35 (26%)**

| Total | 91 | 43 | 2 | 136 (100%) |

From the above table it is clear that most of the students (27%) visit the library more than once per week and this trend is even more among the research scholars. Assam University students have very less tendency of daily visit to the library. The percentage of daily visitors is only 2% in total and that too are only research scholars. Maximum undergraduate students have tendency of visit the library more than once in a month. Diploma/Certificate students used to visit the library on weekly basis.

Preferred place of study

Every individual have their own preferred place of study. The participants were asked to indicate the place where mostly they like to go for their assignments or research. Table 03 shows the category wise distribution of students and their preferred venue of serious study.

Table 03. Venue of serious study

Frequency	UG and PG	RS	DIP/CER	TOTAL
Central Library	34	23	-	**57 (42%)**
Departmental Library	7	-	1	**8 (6%)**
Residence	47	20	1	**68 (50%)**
Internet cafe	3			**3 (2%)**
Total	**91**	**43**	**2**	**136**

The above table shows that most of the undergraduate students prefer to study at home for their assignments whereas most of the research scholars prefer Central library for their research work. Apart from these two places departmental libraries are also consulted by the undergraduates and diploma/certificate students.

LIBRARY SERVICES

Awareness regarding library activities

To understand the awareness level of students of Assam University about library services and resources participants were asked a question that how much they are aware about the activities organised by library and the resources of the library. They were also asked about the library activities time to time conducted for them. The responses of students have been presented in the tables below.

Table 04. Frequency of awareness and participation in library activities

Library activities	Aware and Participated	Aware but Not Participated	Not Aware
Library Orientation program	127 (93 %)	9 (7 %)	-
Awareness program (library use)	105 (77 %)	17 (13 %)	14 (10 %)
E resources awareness	95 (70 %)	24 (18 %)	17 (12 %)
Web OPAC	136 (100 %)	-	-
Exhibition	0	32 (24 %)	104 (76 %)
Extension activity	0	19 (14 %)	117 (86 %)
Ask Reference librarian	29 (21 %)	87 (64 %)	20 (15 %)

Table 04 above reveals that most of the students are well aware about library orientation, awareness program, e-resource awareness and OPAC. Web OPAC is most popular among the users and it is used by them very well. But still there are some library activities like exhibition, extension activity and ask from reference librarian, which are less known to the students and it is strongly needed to make more awareness for better result.

Adequacy of library services

The library services provided to the students must be useful and the size of content to be presented before them also should be adequate. To examine the adequacy of library services and activities provided and presented before the students, a question was asked from the students that the services and programs are how much adequate for them. The responses received from participants have been presented in Table 05 below.

Table 05. Frequency of adequacy of library service

Library service	Adequate	Fairly Adequate	Not Adequate	Total
Library orientation programs	65 (48 %)	57 (42%)	14 (10%)	136 (100%)
Library awareness programs	29 (21 %)	61 (45 %)	46 (34 %)	136 (100%)
Contents on library home page	64 (47 %)	43 (32 %)	29 (21%)	136 (100%)
Instruction on library manual/prospectus	20 (15%)	42 (31%)	74 (54%)	136 (100%)
e-resources access facility	33 (24 %)	57 (42%)	46 (34%)	136 (100%)

Library orientation programmes and Contents on library home page are more or less getting good response but not enough. It needs to make more user oriented. The response regarding Instruction on library manual and prospectus is very poor and needs immediate attention. The awareness programmes also getting bad response which Assam University Library should improve immediately.

Effectiveness of library services for users

To understand the effectiveness of any library service it is important to get feedback from its target users. It helps to improve the quality of service. Hence participants in this survey were asked some feed backs regarding effectiveness of the services and their responses are presented in a table below (Table 06).

Table 06. Rating of library services

Library service	Very effective	Effective	Fairly effective	Not Effective	Dont Know
Library Orientation Service	11 (8%)	52 (38%)	43 (32%)	25 (18%)	05 (04%)
Staff Assistance	-	27 (20%)	82 (60%)	27 (20%)	-
OPAC service	61 (45%)	64 (47%)	11 (08%)	-	-
User Information on Library website	15 (11%)	57 (42%)	39 (29%)	18 (13%)	7 (5%)
E-mail alert service	43 (32%)	49 (36%)	11 (08%)	33 (24%)	-
Periodicals and Magazine	-	31 (23%)	50 (37%)	55 (40%)	-
Reference service	-	40 (29%)	57 (42%)	26 (19%)	13 (10%)

Table 06 shows that most of the respondents found Library Orientation Service effective where as some of the respondents (25%) say it is not effective. Similarly Staff assistance provided to the users are fairly effective for most of the respondents (82%) and equal number of respondents (27 %) reported as effective and also not effective. OPAC services in Assam University library is reported highly effective (45% very effective and 47 % effective) which is a good feedback for library. Very few students (8 %) says it as fairly effective. User Information on library website gets mix response i.e. 11% very effective, 42% effective, 29% fairly effective, 13 % not effective where as 5% of the respondents are confused regarding it. E-mail alert also got good response. Maximum number of users (36%) found it effective followed by 32% reported as very effective. Few students, 8% only says it as fairly effective. Two other services Periodicals & Magazine and Reference service

has received very poor response which alarming situation for Assam University Library authority.

Library environment

Library environment plays a very important role for attracting users towards library. The students were asked to give their feedback on library environment on different indicators. The responses are presented in the table 07 below.

Table 07. Library environment indicators

Library Environment Indicators	Excellent	Good	Poor	Average	Undeided	Total
Library-Building	-	43 (32%)	16 (12%)	71 (52%)	6 (4%)	**136 (100%)**
Library-Furniture	-	53 (39 %)	14 (10%)	69 (51%)	-	**136 (100%)**
Proper lighting	5 (3%)	96 (71%)	11 (8%)	24 (18%)	-	**136 (100%)**
Temperature within the Library (AC condition)	-	12 (9%)	56 (41%)	37 (27%)	31 (23%)	**136 (100%)**
Noise level in reading-rooms	2 (1%)	88 (65%)	9 (7%)	25 (18%)	12 (9%)	**136 (100%)**
Library-Staff	-	65 (48%)	22 (16%)	45 (33%)	4 (3%)	**136 (100%)**
Display of Documents	-	71(52%)	24 (18%)	34 (25%)	7 (5%)	**136 (100%)**
E-resource Lab	-	58 (43%)	30 (22%)	41 (30%)	7 (5 %)	**136 (100%)**

Regarding library building more than 50% students reported it as average building. Same way regarding Library furniture in the reading room more than 50 % finds it as average type of furniture where as 39 % reported as good. Talking about lighting facility maximum respondents agreed it very good and good (71%). The temperature within library is good as maximum users (41%) find it poor and 27% says average. Regarding Noise level inside reading-rooms good number of students (65%) agreed it as good. Staff attitude towards the library users is reported as 48 % good and 33 % average. Display of documents in the library which helps to locate and get access is also reported good by 52% of students' and average by 25% of respondents. The opinion about E-resource lab is 43% good and 30% as average.
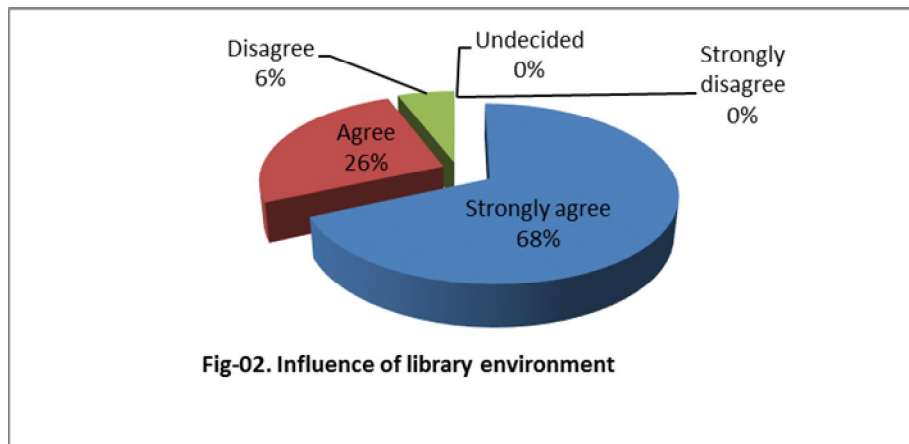
Influence of library environment

After assessment of library environment users were asked that whether the library environment influences the usage of library or not. The responses received from the respondents have been

presented in the table 08 below.

Table 08. Influence of library-environment on library use

Responce to the statement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	93	68 %
Agree	35	26 %
Disagree	8	6 %
Strongly Disagree	0	-
Undecided	0	-
Total	**136**	**100 %**

Fig-02. Influence of library environment

Regarding influence of library-environment on library use maximum respondents (68%) strongly agree followed by 26% agree that library-environment influences the library use. And only 6% are disagreeing that library-environment make any influence on library use.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the above discussion it is analysed that Assam University students have very less tendency of daily visit to the library but they mostly visit the library once in a week. This is also found that over all preferred place of study is residence but research scholars like central library more convenient than their home or any other place. Regarding awareness of library activities among the users it is found that the students are well aware about most of the library activities like Orientation programmes, E-resource awareness programmes and OPAC service. But still there are some library activities like exhibition, extension activity and ask from reference librarian, which are less known to the students and it is strongly needed to make more advertisement for better result. Some of the library services like Orientation programs, OPAC, E-mail alert service and user

information on library web portal are more effective where as some of the services like Current periodical service, Staff assistance and Reference service are less effective and needs more attention of library management to make it more effective for the users. Over all reading environment in Rabindra Library is average which requires a little effective initiative to be taken like air-conditioning of reading room and arrangement of comfortable furniture to make the reading environment more suitable for the users. Rabindra Library also needs to improve their services and library staffs should be easily approachable and more helpful to the students.

CONCLUSION

Libraries now a day are losing their credibility and trend of library use is decreasing day by day in India because of whatever the reason, librarians must understand the situation and work hard for retaining its importance in the present electronic age. Librarians have to be prepared for every expectation of users in this rapidly changing environment. The most important thing is to make the library environment more comfortable in every aspect so that users will be attracted towards the library. Meyer[13] has argued that libraries must broaden their understanding of what they should do and must align their personnel policy to take the technologically adapt. His vision is that librarians who were "once cataloguers, book buyers and reference searchers, will become network managers, database integrators, fuzzy logic applicators and artificial intelligence experts, and graphical interface designers". *User-librarian collaboration can take place during the library instruction sessions or when users seek information during the search process. Kulthau[14] referred to this process as "Information Mediaion Process", which is a process where a particular question determines the establishment of dialogue between the user and the librarian.*

Off course all these adaptation are not possible in a single day, but step by step initiative will be effective in long run.

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