

Information seeking behaviour in Academic Libraries of Iran : the experience of an Inter library loan project

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Abstract

Ghadir is the name of a project that started sometime in July 1999 in Iranian Information & Documentation Center (IRANDOC) of the Ministry of Sciences, Research and Technology. Its aim is to provide access and resource sharing services to member libraries for the faculty members and postgraduate students of Iranian academic libraries. What follows is a brief account of information seeking behaviour of Iranian faculty members and postgraduate students through the performance of the project during the period February 2001 to January 2004.

Introduction

Ghadir project is a project initiated by the Iranian Information & Documentation (IRANDOC) of the Ministry of Sciences, Research and Technology (MSRT) from July 1999. The aim of the project is to provide resource sharing services among academic libraries. 234 libraries from 66 universities and research institutes covered by the MSRT provide voluntarily resource sharing services members and postgraduate students. These libraries have held more than six million volumes of books, 52000 titles of current periodicals and 117000 theses by the year 2000 (Beyrami Tarouni & Alidousti, 2001).

What follows is to study the information seeking behaviour of faculty members and postgraduate students in Iranian universities. The statistics has been collected from consequent numbers of a monthly leaflet called Ittifaq(unity) which is published by IRANDOC. The duration of the study begins from February 2001 to January 2004 (approximately 30 months).

The following table that compares in-library use rate of the materials and services through Ghadir Project comprises the proportion of cases of use on the number of current members. The reason for selecting in-library use of materials for comparison is: in Iran, all materials and services except books must be used in library. In this way, all materials and services compared in an equal situation and therefore, the pattern of use will be better illustrated. The rate of use then, is much more than what has been presented in the table, since the figures indicate that the use rate resulted from in library and interlibrary use of materials are not the ones that are made by users in their institutions' libraries. The latter is logically much more than the former, since people prefer to use libraries and their holdings that are more easily

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accessible than the ones that are not. And as mentioned above the users are only faculty members and postgraduate students, excluding undergraduate students. Consultation in the table means asking the librarians and other experts in the library for help. The months missing in the table are the ones in which no issue of Ittifaq has been published.

Analysis of the collected data

Analysis of the collected data is done through figs. 1-7. Figs. 1 through 6 indicate the use rate on individual materials and fig. 7 compares the use rate of materials. Interpretation of each figure is given under the same figure.

Month	Book	Periodical	AV	Thesis	Consultation	Database
02/01	.312	.218	.023	.203	.120	.074
03/01	.321	.252	.024	.208	.137	.079
05/01	.414	.542	.028	.236	.199	.106
06/01	.422	.345	.029	.258	.215	.109
07/01	.449	.386	.030	.282	.226	.114
08/01	.485	.375	.030	.291	.236	.118
10-11/01	.584	.515	.037	.359	.185	.124
12/01	.593	.533	.036	.357	.272	.134
01/02	.580	.533	.035	.353	.258	.133
02/02	.577	.528	.034	.350	.252	.131
04/02	.592	.367	.035	.365	.258	.133
05/02	.613	.604	.038	.398	.262	.141
06/02	.629	.633	.038	.414	.268	.143
07/02	.632	.646	.039	.422	.267	.143
08/02	.646	.663	.037	.440	.268	.142
10/02	.705	.722	.039	.479	.283	.152
11/02	.734	.754	.042	.496	.294	.155
12/02	.735	.776	.042	.526	.293	.154
01/03	.670	.715	.038	.488	.267	.138
02/03	.685	.736	.038	.506	.268	.150
03/03	.693	.755	.038	.515	.270	.152
05/03	.697	.773	.038	.527	.268	.151
06/03	.711	.782	.038	.539	.271	.154
07/03	.705	.779	.039	.549	.268	.153
08/03	.731	.807	.042	.595	.280	.172
09/03	.731	.807	.042	.595	.280	.172
11/03	.766	.854	.043	.617	.292	.177
12/03	.775	.865	.043	.628	.292	.191
01/04	.744	.826	.042	.697	.282	.183

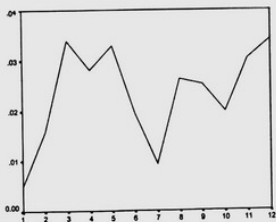
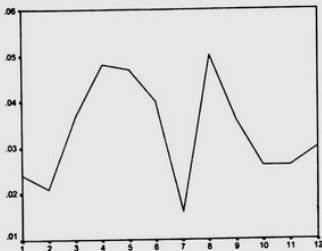


Fig. 1: Status of books used during the period studied

Fig. 1 indicates the status of in-library book use during the period studied. The graph indicates that the rate of use gradually increases. The reason the line does not have an even growth is that during April and March, Nowrouz holidays begins and causes libraries' activities decrease drastically. The same happens in summer holidays that start from July to September.

Fig. 2 indicates in-library use of periodicals during the period studied. As is seen, the line is not as even as that of books although it also shows a gradual growth. The reason for this unevenness is probably the irregularity in receiving the current periodicals from abroad. Nowrouz and summer holidays are also effective on the growth of use.

Fig. 2: Status of periodicals used during the period studied



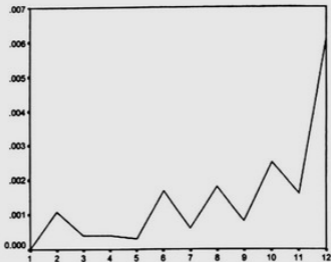


Fig.3: Status of AV materials used during the period studied

Fig.3 indicates in-library use of audio-visual materials. The growth rate does not seem as increasing as those of books and periodicals.

Fig.4 indicates the growth rate of these in libraries, it also indicates that the growth is much similar to those of books and periodicals.

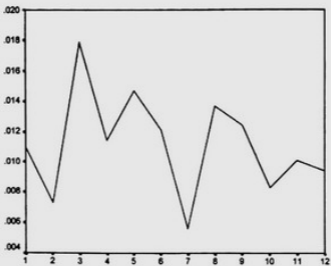


Fig.4: Status of theses used during the period studied

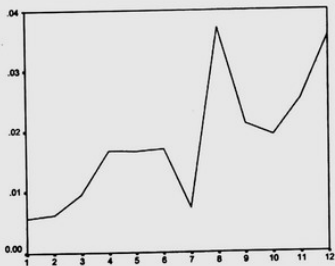


Fig.5: Status of consultations done with librarians during the period studied

Fig.5 shows a primary increase in consultation cases with librarians and a secondary horizontal movement to the end. This probably indicates that users have needed to consult the librarians at the beginning and have become almost independent gradually.

Fig.6 shows the in-library use rate of databases in the period studied. The line is similar to that of consultation with librarians and indicates that users have started with some eagerness to use databases, but for some reasons have stopped using databases. This

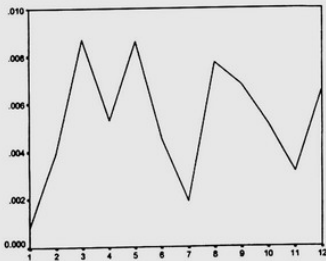


Fig.6: Status of databases used during the period studied

might be due to the Fact that online databases have their own problems because the information infrastructure is not still very powerful in Iran, and off-line databases have also their own problems.

The comparison of means also indicate the higher use rate of periodicals, books, and theses compared to AV materials, consultation, and databases. Comparing the standard deviation of book that is 0.12994

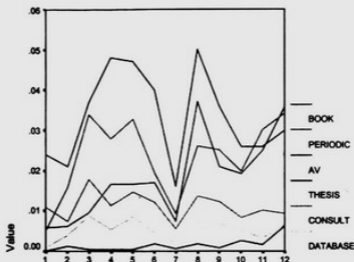


Fig.7: Comparison of different services used during the period studied.

Fig.7 compares the use rate of six different kinds of materials and services. It indicates that the first three kinds of materials used, are: books, periodicals, and theses. Lines belonging to books and theses are more similar than that of periodicals which is not much even. Lines belonging to audio-visual materials, databases, and consultation with librarians constitute the last three materials and services. Line belonging to AV materials is almost horizontal, indicating a growth rate not much considerable. Lines belonging to database use and consultation with librarians show a high rate of use, but still indicate a very slow growth up to the end. The following table that compares the means of each material and service used, might illustrate the issue:

with that of periodicals that is 0.18805 interprets the fact the book use has been more even than periodicals. If we consider the fact

Material or service	Means
Periodical	0.62383
Book	0.61831
Thesis	0.43769
AV	0.36448
Consultation	0.25279
Database	0.14062

that some 49367 books have been loaned to some 8754 members of Ghadir Project during the period studied, means each member has borrowed about 6 books through this project: we then understand the importance of books in pattern of Iranian faculty members and postgraduate students' information seeking behavior.

Conclusion and some suggestions

The findings of this research almost prove the findings of the other researches performed on information seeking behavior in Iran.

Dilmaqani (1996) also found that the faculty members of mechanical engineering colleges of five universities in Tehran mostly use books and periodicals as their primary sources of information and about 30% of them use databases.

Hakimi (1997) in a research on the study of information seeking behavior of researchers in Natural Resources center of Iran indicated that books with 95.9%, research results (projects, reports, and theses with 86.9% periodicals with 85.1%) have the highest rate of use. Database use has some 31.5%.

Mihandoust (1997) in her study on information seeking behavior of faculty members of Medical College of Medical Sciences University of Tehran found that only 30.4% of them refer to librarians as a means of information seeking.

Nourmohammadi (1997) also found that books with some 58.5% and periodicals with some 39.2% are the primary sources of information for the experts in the engineering research centers of the Jihad Sazandegi in finding scientific and technical information.

Haydari (1998) found that the researchers of the Revolutionary Guards Navy rely mostly on printed materials (some 90/99%) of which Farsi specialized books with the some of 29/15% and foreign books with the some

of 20/68% constitute the primary sources for information seeking. Compact discs are the primary non-printed materials to be used (some 33.34%).

Niayesh (1999) found that 88.3% of head nurses of Tehran hospitals use books, as their primary source of information and 80% of them are not familiar with CD-ROM databases.

Kazimi (2000) in her study on the information seeking behavior of faculty members, assistants, and residents in hospitals of Ahwaz Medical Sciences University found that primary sources of information for these three groups are books, monographs and periodicals respectively.

Fathi Jalali (2001) in her study on the information seeking behavior of faculty members of electricity and electronics colleges of governmental universities in Tehran found that they mostly use printed materials due to the lack of non-printed materials.

The present and other researches mentioned in this article indicate, books, periodicals, and theses are the primary sources in information seeking behavior of people involved in teaching and research in Iranian universities. Although the present study relies on findings of statistics gained from an interlibrary loan project, but since the comparison is done in relation to in-library use of materials and services, the materials and services have been studied in an equal situation. One reason why printed materials are of more importance in information seeking behaviour of faculty members and postgraduate students is that information infrastructure for electronic means of information seeking is not as powerful as it should be. Although computers are gaining more and more importance and use in Iranian academic libraries, but the problems involved in using them, especially access to Internet is still a problem that hinders the use of these

electronic media. The availability of more books than other materials in Iranian libraries might be another reason why books are used more than other media. Use is for the most part dependent on availability.

It is suggested that library move towards providing more access to online and offline databases, especially Internet and World Wide Web for their users. Books have a traditional respect in Iranian and Islamic culture. Periodicals and theses, probably due to the physical similarity to books have found this traditional respect. But it is strongly suggested the replacement of these media by new electronic ones must be done so slow and gradual as not to damage the traditional media before the final replacement by the electronic ones.

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Note: All the references are in Farsi

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