

Information seeking behavior among public library users: Understanding nature of information searching

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Abstract

Aim: The information user's perception of a need drives their pursuit of information, which in turn causes their demands for formal and informal information sources and services, with the latter ultimately leading to success or failure. People actively seek out information and use it to complete their tasks. The public library's goal as a piece of information is to serve the community's information needs. As a result, the public library's primary function is to meet the informational and cultural requirements of the community at large through the information of materials and services applicable to a wide range of audiences and formats. In most cases, the local, regional, or national community, or the national government, is responsible for establishing, promoting, and funding the Public Library.

Methodology: The purpose of the research is to gain insight into the habits of library users in Kalutara, Horana, Sri Lanka. The study population comprises users who frequent the main library and three satellite locations. Non-probability sampling through the convenience sampling strategy was used to select participants in this survey-based study. There was an 87% participation rate ($n = 348$).

Findings: The results of this study show that many public library users are part of younger demographics and are students by profession. Most students in the study also regularly used the Horana metropolitan area public library. Therefore, most of their internet research is focused on school-related topics, such as those covered in class. Thus, library programs can be tailored to different demographics of young people.

Implications/Novel Contribution: This research shows that the way information is discovered and the public library's accessibility are negatively impacted by the library's lack of resources. Current research indicates that public library administrations will put in place mechanisms to improve patrons' access to information by modernizing reading services, updating books, expanding existing capacity, recruiting new service members, and providing electronic learning resources. Staff members must be educated appropriately to create a pleasant customer service environment. As a result of this study, we will have a much better grasp of what public library patrons are doing when looking for information. This would be useful for researchers in pinpointing methodological holes they can fill with future investigations.

Keywords: Information seeking behavior, Public library, Users, Information search, User satisfaction, Information

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INTRODUCTION

Information-seeking behavior is the most important topic of study in information management and library science. No one can do a better job of serving the library's users without first gaining an understanding of and appreciation for their information-seeking habits. This knowledge is essential for developing and delivering information systems and software with the user in mind. An important contribution to the library and information science studies field is that it delves into information needs, information search, and the utilization of information resources (Pareek & Rana, 2013; Rinante, Genuba, Gaudencio, & Abellanos, 2018.). In today's interconnected world, information is essential to survival.

Libraries are often viewed as information marketplaces, with library users acting as information buyers. Information is essential as a foundation for any nation's scientific and technological progress. Customers are seen through users' information-seeking behavior, so it is important to conduct surveys that probe this topic. Generally speaking, "information seeking" refers to the actions taken by individuals or groups to demonstrate a need for information, locate relevant information, evaluate that information, and decide what information to use to fulfill those requirements or needs. (Wilson, 2000) coined the term "finding information" to describe the information by which individuals locate, appraise, select, and put a body of data to use. When gathering information, the public library is king in places where most people can read and write. Therefore, user surveys based on the

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information-seeking behavior of the users are crucial to our understanding of the customers. While proclaiming UNESCO's faith in the public library as a vital force of education, culture, and information, the Manifesto argues that the public library itself is the public library. A hub for city data and information, available to the information. Users in the community should first look to publicly accessible libraries. Libraries that want to be taken seriously as information resources must use their staff members' knowledge, experience, and training (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994; Wu, 2017).

There has been some progress in the public library's efforts to connect with the general populace. The primary goal of a public library is to maximize the library and patron's use of its resources. For those interested in our society's history and traditions, libraries are essential gathering users. In a culture of lifelong learning, public libraries will serve as a hub connecting members of the local learning community with formal and informal resources for gathering information and knowledge from around the world. As a result, public libraries should seriously consider the role they can play in developing opportunities for lifelong learning in this area. Information advancement has also paved the way for the growth of information networks, which provide public library patrons with access to information sources worldwide. Collection and services to meet the community's information, instruction, and leisure time needs (Jegan & Jayaprakash, 2018). The horana public library is the main source of information for the surrounding metropolitan area. The town of Horana is quite sizable and is located in the Kalutara district's divisional region. The city of Horana is home to a wide variety of prestigious educational institutions, including Taxila Central College, Sri Palee College, Royal College of Horana, Don Pedric M.V., Medankara M.V., Taxila M.V., Vidyarthana University College, Prajapathi Balika Vidyalaya and Ealla Kanda Thamil Maha Vidyalayam, Ashoka College, and Sussex College. The Sri Palee campus of the University of Colombo (formerly the Western campus) is also located in the city. For this reason, the Horana public library is a major source of local information. Therefore, studying how users use public libraries to find information is crucial. As a result, this research aims to investigate how users of the public library in Horana Municipal Council, Sri Lanka, go about finding the information they need.

Objectives of the Research

Main objective

- To understand the Nature of Information Searching of library users.

Specific objectives

- To understand the demographic characteristics of library users.
- To investigate public library users' awareness and use of library resources.
- To study issues faced by them when using a library.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A brief overview of key literature exploring information-seeking behavior in the public library will be given in this section. The value of reviewing literature allowed the researcher to increase her study sensitivity to the subject area without limiting any specific concept to understanding. Pareek and Rana (2013) researched the information-seeking behavior and library use patterns of researchers at the University of Banasthal. This research was undertaken to determine the behavioural evidence and the use of scholars of the library. This study was carried out to determine behavior facts and the use of library scientists. They also stressed that while researchers agreed that they provide them with reliable and helpful resources, information-seeking behavior varies from one discipline to another. Therefore the library must be capable of managing the researchers' complete knowledge requirements and demands (Pareek & Rana, 2013). Many studies in information science concerning the information behavior of university students have identified the use of library services by students and issues with the use of those services (Mavodza, 2011). The studies indicate that students barely buy books, have difficulty using libraries and use the nearest public library and that library seminars have little effect (Wilson, 2000).

Raja, Selvam, and Poondi (2019) have researched the perception of information needs and information-seeking behavior of public library users. This research aimed to understand the knowledge of information needs and information-seeking behavior of users of public libraries in the district of Thanjavur. Researches have used

questionnaires for data collection and 120 properly completed questionnaires were obtained and have analyzed. The study found that the majority of respondents were male. The workers followed by the students are the majority of users in the public libraries in Thanjavur district. It is concluded that most users depend on the public library for their needs in terms of local knowledge. It regarded libraries as centers of their formal and non-formal education and information repository (Raja et al., 2019).

Parta (2013) has researched the Use of Information Resources by Senior Citizens in Public Library: A Case Study of T.S. Central State Library, Chandigarh. In order to assess the perception that senior citizens had of the adequacy of library facilities and programs used by senior citizens, a questionnaire-based approach was used. The study found that the journal and book collections compared with magazines and general reading materials were sufficient. Further research has concluded that public libraries in western countries provide a range of services such as internet services, CD-ROM and web-based services, etc., while in the developing world in India such services are really unthinkable, but things are slowly improving, so similar types of services and facilities are expected from public libraries at least T.S public library (Parta, 2013).

Yi (2015) has researched the Consumer Health Information Behavior in Public Libraries: A Qualitative Study. This study examined the health information actions of public library users and their understanding of their own ability to identify, analyze, and use health information accessible in public libraries. The study used semi-structured intensive interviews as a follow-up to a quantitative study using the Short Test of Functional Health Literacy Skill to assess health literacy capacity. Conway, Brown, Hollier, and Nicholl (2012) has done a study on the Information-Seeking Behavior of Online Public Library Clients: A Computational Model has been studied in detail. This research presented a computational model of public library customers' dynamics in an online environment. A research published in 2008 explored how users of libraries devise and use methods to meet their information needs. It used observational data. The study included interviews with 24 public library clients based in New South Wales based on naturalistic questioning and using grounded theory. The interviews were conducted in an online environment to gain an understanding of client needs. Three key categories influencing the online information retrieval sector were established in the report. Such categories consist of ease of use, utility, and the cognitive/affective status of the client (Conway et al., 2012).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Horana Public Library is affiliated to the Municipal Council of Horana Metropolitan Area with three branch libraries. Users of the main public library and the other three branch libraries of the main public library are therefore the target population of this study. In the study, the descriptive survey methodology was applied. There were 14900 (*N*) total registered users of these libraries. In order to collect the requisite data relating to the issue of information-seeking behavior, a total number of 400 open and close-ended questionnaires were distributed to respondents. The response rate was 87% (*n* = 348). The non-probability purposive sampling procedure was utilized to select the respondents. The type of nonprobability sampling method utilized in this research is the convenience sample method. Excel was used to analysis of the data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic of the Response

Age of the library users

Most of the respondents in the survey were in the below 18 of age category (35%) and, 24.44% of them were in the 18-25 group category. A considerable number of users were represented 26-35(18.11%) age group category.

There were above 56 age category smaller classes of respondents (4, 3%). Distributions of the respondents by age are shown in Figure 1.

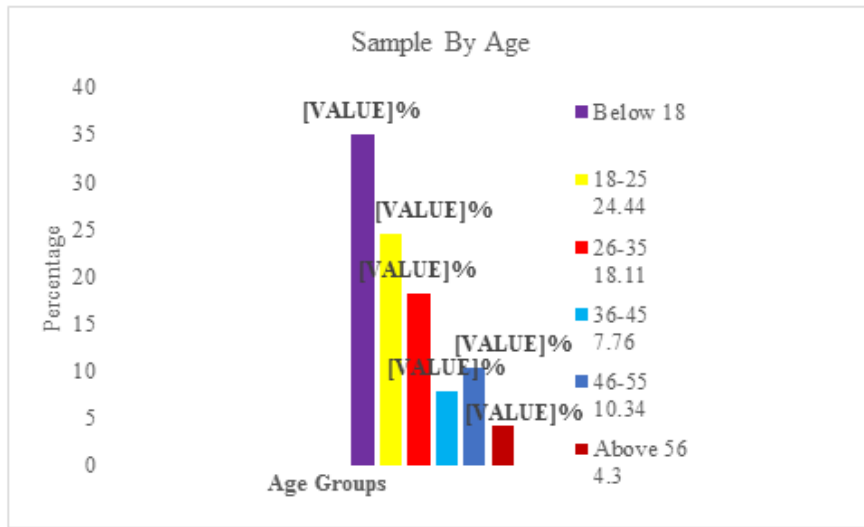


Figure 1. Sample by age

Gender Distribution of the Sample

According to Figure 2, which indicates the gender distribution of respondents, 53% of the participants were male library users and 47% were female library users.

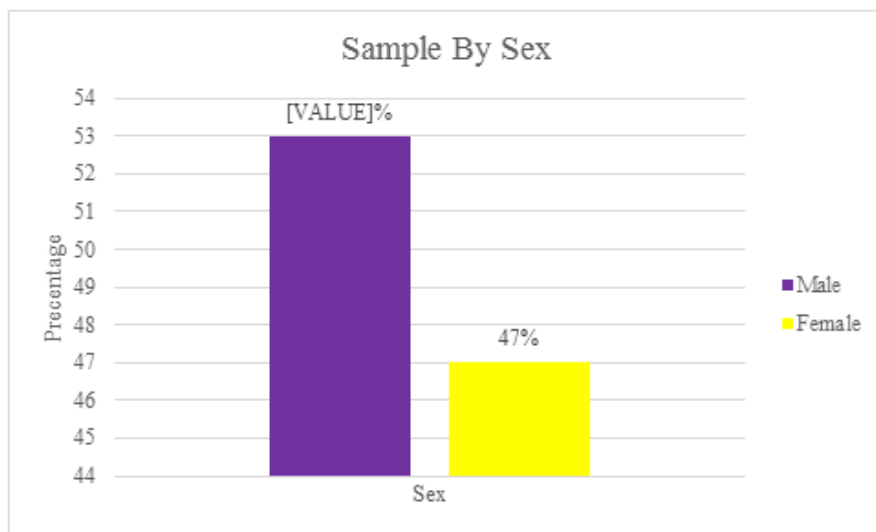


Figure 2. Sample by gender

Professions of the Sample

The full analysis of library users by their job category, questionnaires reveals that 37.94% of respondents were students, while 20.40% were business persons. Retired persons were the smallest group of respondents (2.5%).

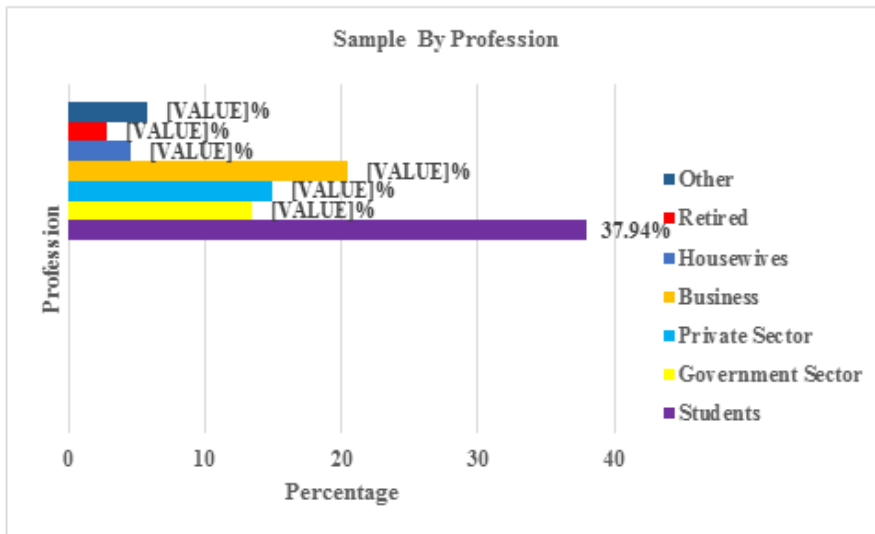


Figure 3. Users by profession

Respondent's Education Qualifications

According to Figure 4 shows the Education Qualifications of the library users. The majority (41.6 6%) belongs to the A/Level Category, the second-highest category had O/L qualifications (23.7%). 2.58% of the respondents had a Postgraduate Qualifications and, 3.7% only had a diploma level education qualifications.

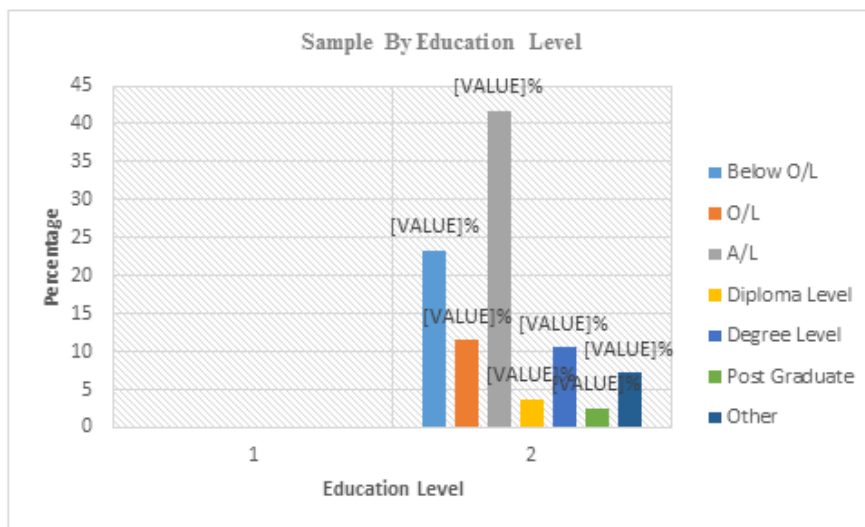


Figure 4. Respondent's education qualifications

Nature of Information Requirement of the Library Users

Reasons for using library

Figure 5 shows, educational purposes (28.44%), borrowing and returning books (15.22%), and reading for newspapers (10.9%) are the three key purposes of users visiting or coming to the library. Searching for current information, followed by 9.19% of users, 8.04% of users come to the library reading for books, and 6.32% visit the library for entertainment requirements.

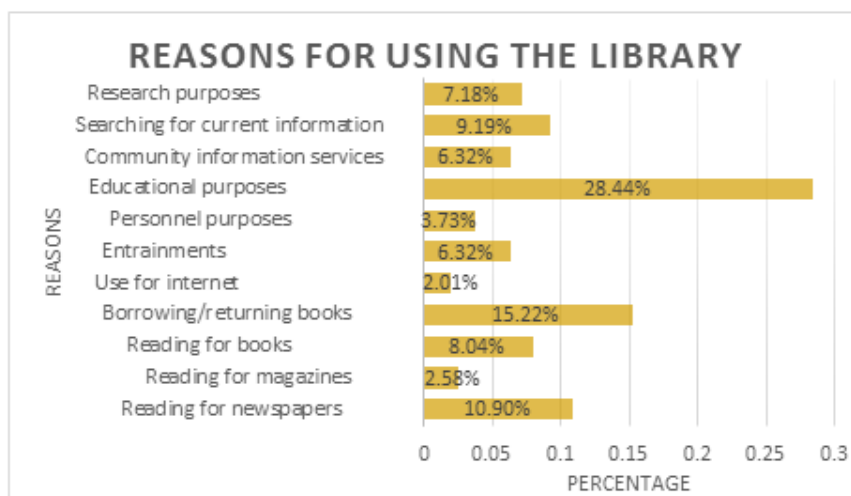


Figure 5. 5 Reasons for using library

Information needs and level of satisfaction of the user

It clearly shows that according to the figure, most library users are satisfied with the information available in the library related to current affairs ($N = 199$). Although second, most users of the study are satisfied ($N = 148$) with the library's educational needs 156 = N is much satisfied. $N = 139$ of the users were satisfied with the information given for personnel development by the public library. The majority of the sample surveyed were not satisfied ($N = 187$) with the library's professional information. Though $N = 178$ was absolutely unhappy with the social health and political information available at the public library.

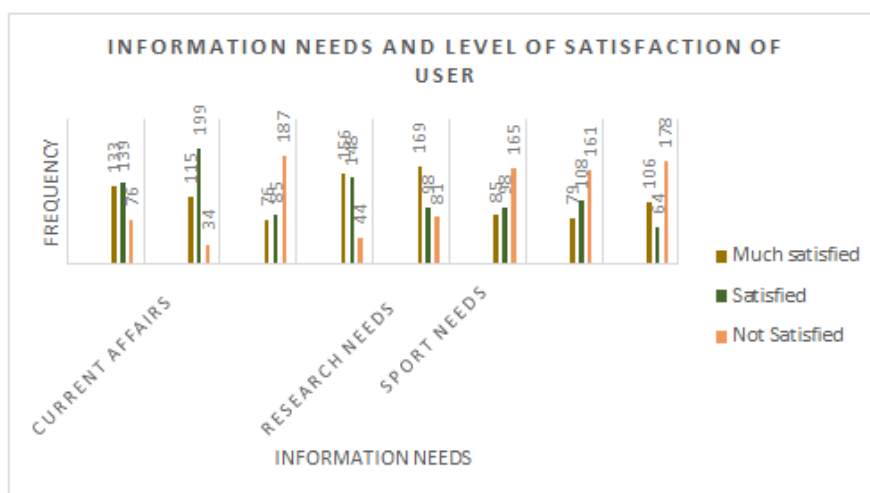


Figure 6. Information needs and level of satisfaction of the user

Issues faced by the users

In this study, researchers collected data on the challenges encountered by users of the public library while looking for information at the library. And several of the users (25.28%) also stated that the library's existing space was not adequate. A significant sample (20.68%) of the study noted that the library only offers restricted resources, so their information needs are not met. Fewer users have suggested that low internet access facilities are badly affected by information seeking behavior. Most of the studied sample (29.02%) noted that the library also has not adequate books available as a concern.

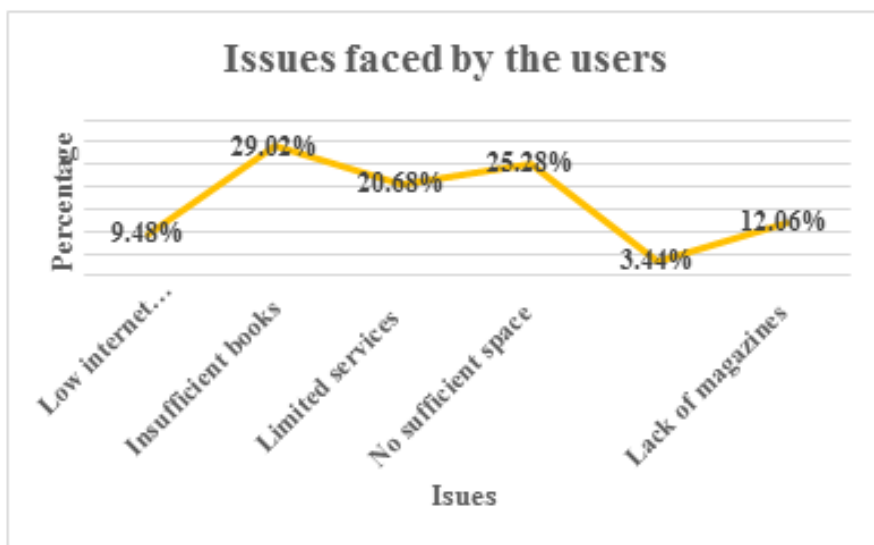


Figure 7. Issues faced by the users

Suggestions to develop the library

It shows that most of the sample of users (23.27%) believed that the library’s reading facility should be increased according to Figure 8. Although 14.65% of the studied sample stressed that more updated materials are required. Since the essence of their data activity was based on discovering updated materials. A significant sample (10.05%) of users are willing to provide an eLearning facility at the library. Also, the implementation of new services is a top priority among the recommendations to be developed in the public library (11.78%).

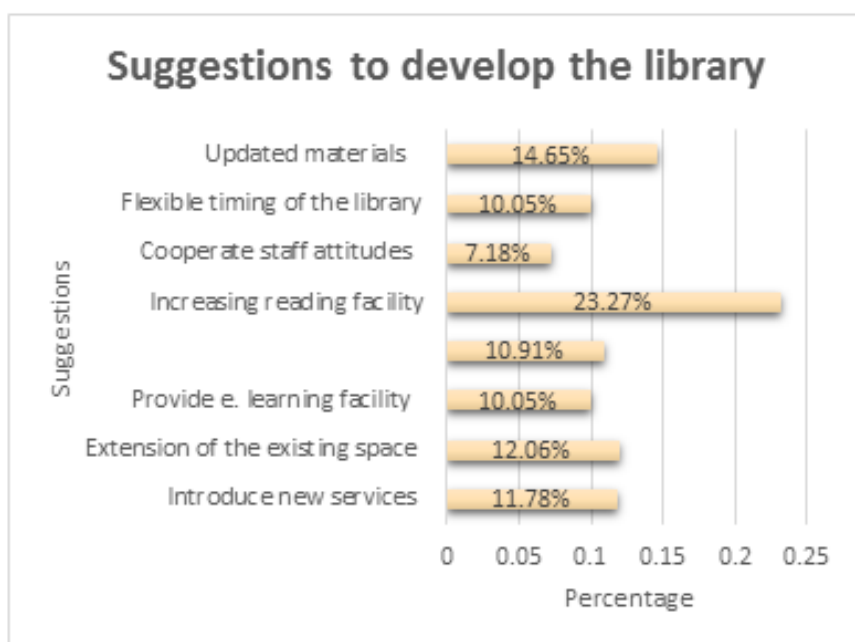


Figure 8. Suggestions to develop the library

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the current study, it is revealed that most of the public library’s users belong to the youth age groups and students by their profession. Therefore it is obvious from the results that most of the students

in the Horana metropolitan area consisted of the public library as a regular clientele. Their information-seeking activity is therefore often confined to the curriculum and educational purposes of the school. Therefore, library programs should be established based on youth categories. Current research has found that most users need to expand the library reading facility to enhance their activity in search of information. Without promoting the reading habits of public library users, it is not possible to create a knowledge society. The lifelong learning of individuals is also the key aim of a public library. Learning is a mechanism of active involvement with practice. Lifelong learning is necessary since continuous learning in a changing environment is crucial for survival (Wijetunge, 2000). As suggested by Shepherd in 1998, lifelong learning is from pre-nursery to post-retirement (Abumandour, 2020). Current research evidence clearly indicates that the population of public library users is not limited to one or two age groups and belongs to various age categories. Therefore the object of their quest for knowledge and information-seeking characteristics differ according to their age, gender, and other demographic factors. The further current study showed that public library users more need to provide the current information as well as health and political-related information. For their day-to-day activities, most Asian people prefer to know about this kind of information. Business people and other middle ages are consisted of particularly as public library user groups and retired people, and these information requirements are popular among these types of people. These facts can be highlighted from the findings of this study. Besides, this report stresses the value of public libraries and all the programs they offer. In the meantime, the essential and unique role of specialized librarians has been brought to light. Most of the studies highlighted that public libraries provide their community with an excellent e-learning environment with all their tools, programs, and expert librarians and be of great benefit to educational institutions and organizations (Adelani, 2002). In the published literature, different authors described e-learning according to the subject covered, suppliers, techniques, and tools used. E-learning was described by Sharifabadi (2006) as the use of the Internet to disseminate educational resources and materials for learning. Additionally, the framework establishes relationships between students and teachers and/or trainers to improve the experience of teaching and learning (Bhatnagar, 2016). However, this current study found that although eLearning is an essential and basic service provided by the public library Horana public library is not provided this service as much expected by the user community.

The need for information (or the need for information) is a factual situation in which an inseparable relation between "information" and need" exists. Therefore, the need for information can be said to be the amount of positive information that a person or group of users need for their employment, leisure, and many others like happiness. Therefore, wherever individuals are in a situation needing the expertise to deal with the situation as they see fit, information needs to emerge. In other words, the lack of information necessary to accomplish a task results in the need for information that several scholars have defined and explained in different ways (Adeniji, 2007; Fatima & Ahmad, 2008; Singh & Satija, 2006). Current research has found that inadequate information accessible at the library is badly affected by information-seeking behavior as well as dissatisfaction with the use of the public library. According to the results of the current study, a study proposed that the public library administration should implement mechanisms to increase reading facilities, upgrade books, extend the existing space, introduce user-centered new services, and include eLearning facilities to enhance user knowledge-seeking capability more efficiently. Moreover, to build a positive attitude towards users, employees should be well trained.

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