



Evidence Summary

Many Indian PhD Students Lack Motivation and Skills to Use Academic Journal Articles, Their Libraries Lack Resources and Standards

A Review of:

Saxena, S. (2018). Factors impacting the usage of academic journal articles by PhD students in India. *Information Discovery and Delivery*, 46(4), 204-213. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IDD-09-2017-0069>

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Abstract

Objective – To investigate the factors influencing the use of academic journals by PhD students in India.

Design – Grounded analysis.

Setting – Five universities in India.

Subjects – 147 PhD students.

Methods – Subjects were selected using a mix of convenience and purposeful sampling. Email was then used to send the questions, receive the responses, and seek clarification as

required. This process was conducted between September 2016 and January 2017.

Main results – Completed responses were received from 134 students, resulting in a response rate of approximately 91%. The researcher identified five factors influencing academic journal usage: *institutional, task complexity, relevance and application, information quality, and technical*. There was “marked” dissatisfaction with library facilities and access to academic resources, with one respondent stating that their library “does not subscribe to a single electronic journal” (p. 209). Other identified issues include students’ insufficient awareness of what is available, limited

motivation to “undertake serious research work” (p. 210) and inadequate skill levels to use available resources effectively.

Conclusion – Universities should provide the required resources (both human and infrastructure) to ensure their academic libraries meet quality standards. To do so requires appropriate funding. Additionally, researchers should be encouraged to use their library’s resources in the context of improving their scholarly contribution.

Commentary

Studies about the information seeking habits of doctoral students have been well synthesized (Catalano, 2013; Spezi, 2016). However, most of the included studies originate in the West. This study, therefore, provides a needed view of the topic from a developing country.

The study was reviewed for rigour (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003) and credibility (Oktay, 2012). Both strengths and weaknesses were found.

The researcher’s useful table of related literature identifies a sound rationale for the study. The researcher also articulates the context and demographic details of her participants.

Regrettably, the paper’s methods section is inadequate for demonstrating adherence to grounded theory methods. The credibility of the research is, therefore, unclear (Oktay, 2012). Remarkably, the researcher has not disclosed how, or if, she coded the data. Further, readers do not know how the researcher arrived at her conclusions nor if she had considered other hypotheses.

Participants could “contribute any miscellaneous information” (p. 205) they wished, and clarification was sought from them as required. However, it does not appear that participants guided the research process in any way. Moreover, there is no evidence the researcher used participant feedback to confirm or revise the emerging theory. The use of focus groups or live interviews, rather than

an open-ended survey, could have provided a richer body of data to work with.

The researcher appears to draw conclusions from the data and connects her findings to her participants’ own words. However, she does not state how well these quotations typify the data nor if this information “earned its way into the theory... [through] repeated presence” (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003, p. 429).

Despite these limitations, the proposed practitioner implications are sensible. Academic librarians in India will no doubt welcome calls for greater funding and the pursuit of quality standards. The transferability of the findings, however, could have been further demonstrated by linking the conclusions to relevant literature.

The study will be of interest to academic librarians who work with PhD students educated in developing nations. The apparent lack of library resources available to students studying in these countries is notable. Ways to support research students transferring from these countries to better-resourced institutions should be considered.

References

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