

Expectations of Distance Learners about Library Services at the Study Centers of the Universities in Kerala: a Study

Gopakumar, V.

Librarian (UGC)

Government College, Kasaragod, Kerala
gopakumar.v@rediffmail.com

Dr. A. K. Baradol

Professor

Department of Library and Information Science
Mangalore University, Mangalore
baradol@mangaloreuniversity.ac.in

Abstract

This study aims at identifying the various kinds of library and information services that the distance learners in the four universities in Kerala expect through the study centers, and to make an assessment of the present state of affairs. The services that the learners would like to have, in order to support their academic activities and the expected level of each were collected through a survey among a sample of 650 students. Both undergraduate and postgraduate learners are included in the sample. The students expect the study centers to provide a good collection of documents for reading and reference, cordial and helpful staff, convenient library timings, collection of question papers of previous examinations, collection of reserve materials and orientation programmes. It is found that majority of the students has access to the study centers and they need an average of one hour journey time to reach their nearest study centres. But the library facility provided in these study centers at present is bare minimum. The findings of the study project the need for improving library services to the distance learners in Kerala.

1. Introduction

Distance education as an alternative to the conventional education has made immense growth all over the world. It has proved itself as a best means to cater economically feasible, democratic and flexible education at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. A limited face-to-face interaction is an important extra component in distance education, even though good distance teaching course materials carry everything that distance learners need to know to succeed in their course. The periodical contact programmes arranged for distance learners perform five main functions. They are:

- Teaching students the skills that they need to study at a distance.

- Dealing with the difficulties the students encounter with the subject matter of the study.
- Conducting the required practical sessions.
- Teaching students to learn from each other; and
- Individual teaching.

Personal contact programmes are conducted at these study centres. These programs do not attempt to cover the complete syllabus of study but most often will be a confidence building exercise for the students. They will be trained in self learning. Study centres in principle should equip with all the required resources for the students like equipments for practical sessions, materials for research and

reference, question papers of previous examinations and audio-video gadgets. Library and Information services are essential at the study centres. As such, the study centres have a major role to play in the learning process of a distance learner.

2. The Research question

As mentioned earlier the study centres act as a point where the distance learners get various student support services. The present study is carried out with the intention of identifying what all services do the distance learners in the universities in Kerala expect from the study centres and desired level of each.

3. Previous studies

Library service to distance learners has been a topic of much discussion during the past few years. The peer reviewed journal: *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning*, is the premier one of its kind, launched 2004 addresses issues specifically of this topic. A summary of publications on this topic brought out during 2004-5 is given by Adrian K Ho (2006). Ann and Purpur (2005) report the initiatives taken by the librarians in a University in North Carolina to provide its distance learners, library services comparable to those in campuses. Specific issues pertaining to this area are dealt with in Abels (2004), Adams et al (1998), Antell (2004), Bargellini and Bordoni (2001), Barsun (2002), Barsun et al (2005), Behr (2008), Block (2007), Boadi and Letsolo (2004), Courtney (2003), Dermodi (2005), Gandhi (2003), Gupta (1997), Hart (2008), Hitchen (2005), Holliday et al (2006), Hufford (2004), Needham and Johnson (2007), Renner and Vardaman (2007), Richard (2006), Subba Rao (2006), Tuñón et al (2004), Washburn and Draper (2004), and Washburn and Wages (2008). Studies on the Indian scenario are very few in number and publications on the Kerala situation are completely lacking.

4. Methodology

Survey method is used for the conduct of this research study. The scope of the study is

limited to the distance learners in the four universities in Kerala viz. University of Kerala, Mahatma Gandhi University, University of Calicut and the Kannur University. A structured questionnaire was distributed among 650 distance learners of the four universities which offer courses through distance mode. The students were asked about their perception and use of study centres. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed applying statistical techniques and inferences were drawn.

5. Access to the study centre

The universities in Kerala which conduct distance courses are providing contact classes (personal contact programmes) in study centres. These study centres are located in either the affiliated colleges or in other academic institutions. The University of Kerala has established three library extension study centres with full library facilities in the nearby districts. The Mahatma Gandhi University also has four study centres established within its area of jurisdiction. The Calicut University has one such centre.

A study centre situated at a distant place which requires several hours of journey to reach does not suit a distance learner at all. The distance and transportation facilities are therefore very important factors. The students were asked to furnish the approximate distance to the nearest study centre in their home town and the time required to reach there. Further, the expectations of the students with respect to a study centre and the facilities they require at the study centre were also explored. Access to study centre is analysed in terms of the availability of a centre in the home town of the learners, mean distance to the nearest study centre and the mean time required to reach there.

5.1. Availability

Table 1 provides the course-wise grouping of students based on the availability of a study centre in their hometown where the contact classes are held. The numbers of postgraduate students who have access to a study centre in their home town and who do not have it is almost equal. Out of

the 390 postgraduate students 198 (50.77%) are having study centres in their hometowns. But the case is a little different in the case of undergraduate students. As many as 178 (68.47%) undergraduate students out of 260 do not have a study centre in their hometown. The students have also provided the distance to the study centre and the time required for reaching the study centre.

Course	Access to a study center		Total
	Yes	No	
Undergraduate	82	178	260
	31.54%	68.46%	100%
Postgraduate	198	192	390
	50.77%	49.23%	100%
Total	280	370	650
	43.08%	56.92%	100%

$\chi^2 = 23.528$ for $df = 1$

Table 1

Access to a study centre (course-wise)

5.2. Distance

An analysis of the nearness of the study centre for a student was done based on the distance to the study centre furnished by the respondents. The mean distance was analyzed with respect to the universities and the data are provided in table 2. The mean distance to the nearest study centre for a student in the University of Kerala is found to be 18.50 kilometers, whereas it is a little less for Mahatma Gandhi University students. The recorded mean is 18.11 kilometers. The mean distance to the nearest study centre for the students of the University of Calicut was found to be 13.94 kilometers, whereas it is 11.14 kilometers for the students of Kannur University. On an average the students of the sample are having a study centre at a distance of 16.52 km from their residence.

University	Mean distance (in km.)	Standard Deviation	Count
University of Kerala	18.50	13.03	137
Mahatma Gandhi University	18.11	13.46	28
University of Calicut	13.94	10.57	108
Kannur University	11.14	12.56	7
Total	16.52	12.33	280

Table 2

Distance to the nearest study centre (University-wise)

5.3. Travel time

The analysis of travel time to the study centre was also done based on the answers given to a question. The Table 3 provides analysis based on this data.

University	Mean Travel time(M)	Standard Deviation	Count
University of Kerala	55.18	30.87	137
Mahatma Gandhi University	61.25	34.84	28
University of Calicut	48.06	24.47	108
Kannur University	37.86	18.22	7
Total	52.61	29.04	280

Table 3

Travel time to study centre (University-wise)

It is seen that a student needs 53 minutes to travel to the nearest study centre on an average. It is lowest in the case of students of Kannur University, whereas it is highest in the case of students of Mahatma Gandhi University. It is just above one hour. While analyzing the demographics of the

students in the sample, it was noticed that 85% are unemployed and the large majority are continuing their regular studies through this stream of learning. It can be concluded that if library and information services are provided at the study centers, majority of the students would take advantage of it, as the travel time and distance are within their reach.

6. Availability of library facilities in study centres

The availability of library and information services at the study centers was ascertained. The data is provided in Table 4.

University	Availability		Total
	Yes	No	
University of Kerala	53 20.38%	207 79.61%	260 100%
Mahatma Gandhi University	5 10.00%	45 90.00%	50 100%
University of Calicut	6 1.84%	319 98.15%	325 100%
Kannur University	1 6.66%	14 93.33%	15 100%
Total	65 10.00%	585 90.00%	650 100%

$$\chi^2 = 55.35 \text{ for } df = 3$$

Table 4

Availability of library facility at the study centre (University-wise)

The answer reveals the disappointing state of affairs in the case of library services to distance learners at the study centers. Only 65 (10%) students out of the sample of 650 say that they are getting library services at the study centers. The majority of these students out of this 65 belong to the University of Kerala, because the library of the University of Kerala is having three extension study centres at Kollam, Alapuzha and at Pandalam. The library facility available at the study centre attached to the Institute of Distance Education of the University of Kerala at Kariavattom is also catering library and information services to the students. As many as 53 (20.38%) of the students the University of Kerala have reported that they are getting library services at the study centers.

7. Students' expectations on library services at the study centres

After registering for a course of distance learning, the students establish contact with the University which provides the course through the study centres. They have to visit these study centres for their contact classes and for getting information on other academic matters like assignments, dissertations and examinations. As such, the study centre can be a place where the students can be provided with the library and information services. Every student will be attached to a study centre. Hence it would be better to provide library facilities at the study centres itself. As already observed only 10% of the respondents are getting library services at the study centres. Hence the respondents were asked whether they need library facilities at the study centres. The respondents were then asked to rank ten facilities / services that they expect at the study centre library. The respondents were asked to rank the listed facilities / services in the questionnaire by giving rankings from 1 to 4, where 1 being most required and 4 being least required. The facilities were:

- i. Collection of books to support the course
- ii. Reading room facility
- iii. Cordial and helpful staff
- iv. Convenient library timings
- v. Internet facility
- vi. Inter-library loan facility
- vii. Photocopying facility
- viii. Collection of question papers
- ix. Collection of reserve materials
- x. Training to use the library

Initially analysis was done based on the gender of respondents and then by the course they are undergoing.

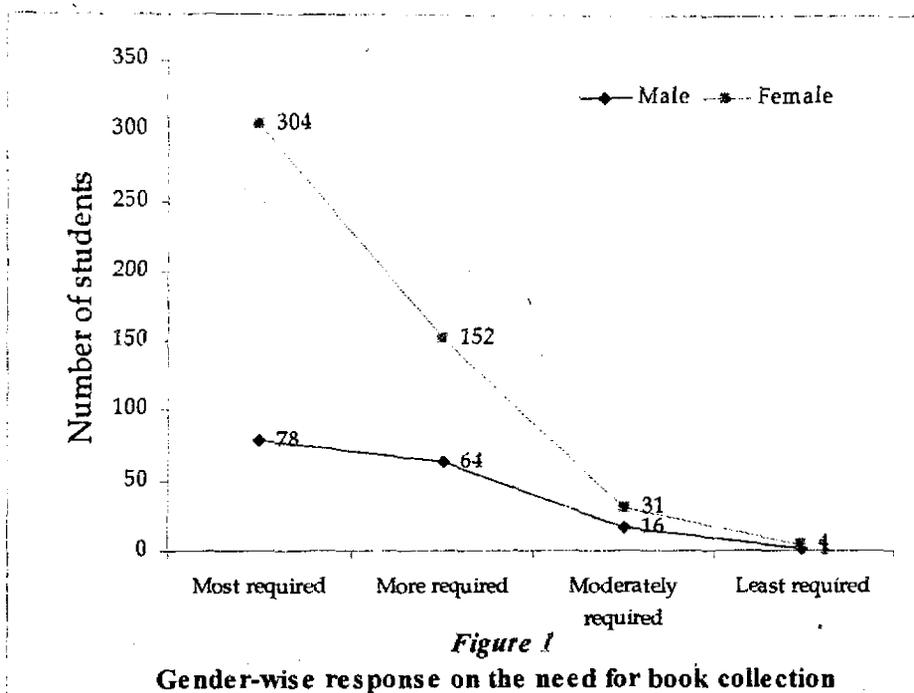
7.1. Collection of books to support the course

A collection of books that support the curriculum of the students of distance learning kept at the study centre would be of immense help to the students. Such collections are either called as off-campus collections or as satellite collections. These

are usually held in study centre libraries or in public or academic libraries. Figure 1 shows the ranking that the respondents have given to this facility, grouped by their gender.

Collection of books to support the course is most required for 304 female and 78 male students.

It is more required for 152 female and 64 male students. Altogether 92 % of the total sample expect a good collection of reading and reference materials in the study centres. Only 5 students have opined that they least needed collection of books in the study center. This data was cross-tabulated against the course they are undertaking (table 5).



Course of study	Response on the need for book stock				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Under-graduate	178 68.46%	64 24.60%	16 6.15%	2 0.76%	260 100%
Post graduate	204 52.30%	152 38.97%	31 7.95%	3 0.77%	390 100%
Total	382 58.76%	216 33.23%	47 7.23%	5 0.76%	650 100%

$\chi^2 = 17.300$ for $df = 3$

Table 5

Response towards the need for collection of books in the study centre libraries (course-wise)

As many as 93 percent of the undergraduate students and 91 percent of the postgraduate students find collection of books to support their studies essential in the study centre libraries. These findings point to the fact that study center is the ideal location to have a satellite collection of books

to help the students of distance learning.

7.2 Reading room facility

A calm and quiet place to read and do research work is essential in any library. The students of regular courses in colleges can go and make use of the reading rooms in their colleges

and university libraries. But the distance learners have to depend on facilities they may get at the study centres or other local libraries. Therefore the next facility studied was the availability of reading

room. The ranking provided by the students is analyzed based on gender and is summarized in table 6. It is seen that 75% of the respondents are concerned about the need for a calm and quite

Gender	Response on the need for reading rooms				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Male	62 38.99%	63 39.63%	29 18.24%	5 3.14%	159 100%
Female	237 48.26%	124 25.26%	105 21.39%	25 5.09%	491 100%
Total	299 46.00%	187 28.76%	134 20.61%	30 4.63%	650 100%

$$\chi^2 = 12.43 \text{ for } df = 3$$

Table 6

Response towards the need for reading room facility in study centre libraries (gender-wise)

place in the study centre for their reading and research work. Both male and female respondents agree equally on this aspect. The main reason can be that they may not be in a position to go frequently to the study center and make use of this facility. As already mentioned in section 2, only 280 (43.08%) have opined that they have a study centre in their home town. That too needs travel time of around one hour to one side on an average (table 3). Hence the number of students who have ranked in favor of this facility is less in number. The value of rank correlation coefficient calculated for this variable taking gender as a grouping variable was found to be 0.788, which means that both male and female agree in their opinion with regard to this facility.

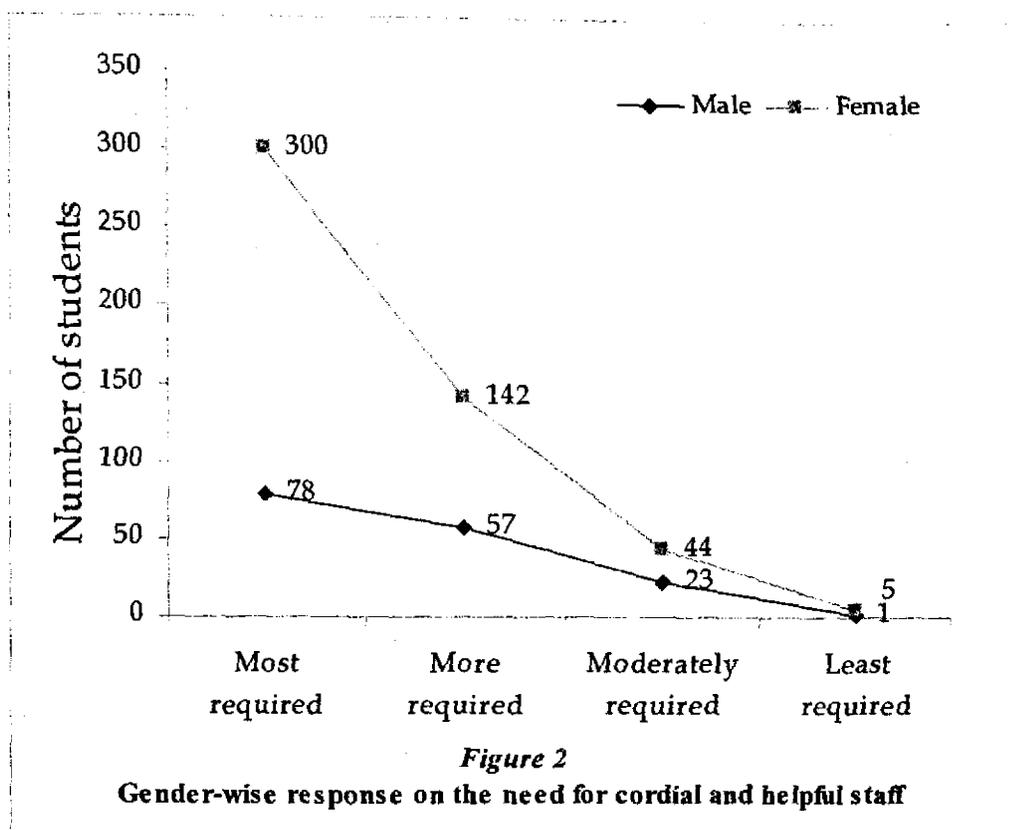
7.3. Cordial and helpful staff

Libraries being service institutions, need cordial and friendly staff, serving the readers which, in turn, attract more and more users to the library. A major complaint always raised about the libraries in developing countries is the negative attitude of the staff towards the user. Much literature has appeared on the proactive role of librarians in the present scenario where the profession of librarianship itself has lost considerable ground to 'information science and information technologists'.

The role and attitude of librarians and their professionalism have a significant role in the service to distance learners. The third aspect studied was the need for cordial and helpful staff in the study center library. The ranking given on this variable is first analyzed with gender and is portrayed in figure 2.

The analysis shows that the best majority of distance learners feel that they expect warmth and cooperation from the staff at the library of the study centre. 135 (85%) of the male respondents and 442 (90%) of the female respondents have expressed this view. The response of a higher percentage of female respondents expressing this view is noteworthy as they seek more help from the staff of the library. As many as 577 (88.8%) of the respondents seek cordial and helpful professional staff in the study centre libraries.

The same variable was then analyzed with the course as a grouping variable and the data are provided in table 7. This analysis also has shown results which are very much similar to the analysis based on gender. Majority of undergraduate students, as many as 235 (90.38%) and 342 (87.69%) of the postgraduate students feel that they require a cordial and warm atmosphere in the study centre library.



Course of study	Response on the need for cordial staff				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Under-graduate	160 61.54%	75 28.84%	25 9.62%	0 0.00%	260 100%
Post graduate	218 55.90%	124 31.79%	42 10.77%	6 1.54%	390 100%
Total	378 58.15%	199 30.61%	67 10.32%	6 0.92%	650 100%

$\chi^2 = 5.49$ for $df = 3$

Table 7

Response towards the need for cordial and helpful staff in study centre libraries (course-wise)

7.4 Convenient working hours

Study centre libraries are either extension services of the university libraries or the libraries of the colleges or other academic institutions where the contact classes are held. The service and working hours of these libraries should suit the distance learner; otherwise it will be of no use to them.

Hence the opinion of students was sought to know whether they feel that convenient library hours are an important factor for them. The ranking given by the respondents is provided in table 8. Here the grouping variable is the gender of the respondents.

Best majority of respondents consider convenient working hours as a vital factor. As many

as 131 (82.40%) of the 159 male students and 418 (85.12%) of the 491 female students regard it as an important factor. Altogether, 549 (84.46%) of the 650 respondents believe that they can make use of a study centre library if it is accessible during their convenient timings. An analysis based on

course also has given a similar picture. The data is provided in figure 3. 220 (84.61%) undergraduate and 329 (390%) postgraduate students feel that convenient library timings are essential for them to make use of the library facility at the study centres.

Gender	Response on convenient working hours				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Male	69 43.41%	62 38.99%	24 15.09%	4 2.51%	159 100%
Female	258 52.54%	160 32.58%	57 11.62%	16 3.26%	491 100%
Total	327 50.30%	222 34.16%	81 12.46%	20 3.08%	650 100%

$\chi^2 = 4.82$ for $df = 3$

Table 8

Response towards the need for convenient working hours in study centre libraries (gender-wise)

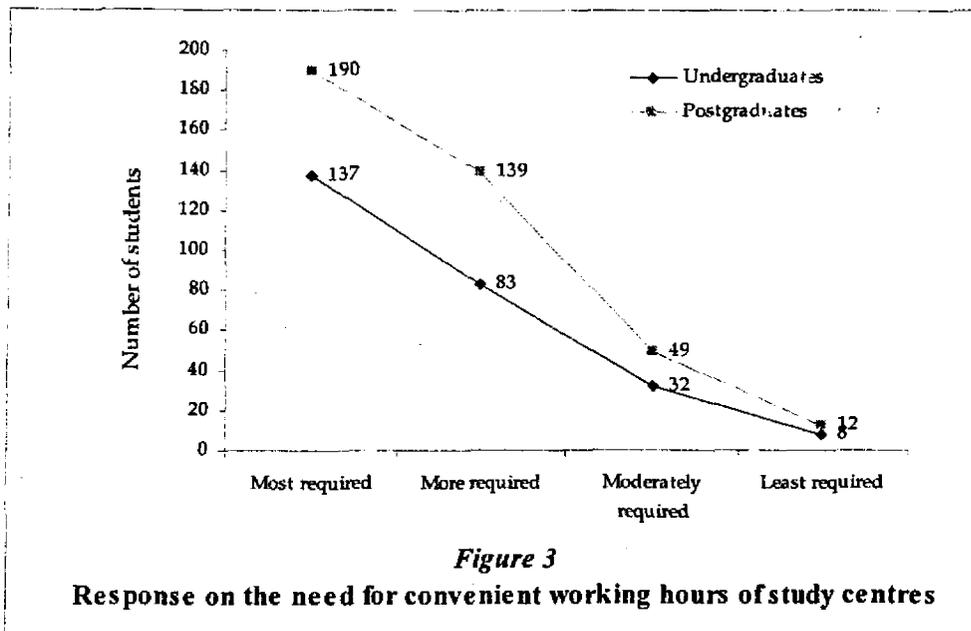


Figure 3

Response on the need for convenient working hours of study centres

7.5. Internet facility

Internet has become a major source of information worldwide. It is an indispensable medium from which students can obtain information on various aspects and they can clear their doubts through established websites and

portals. In addition, if the faculty is ready to respond from the other side, students can contact them easily and quickly. The Internet connectivity is available in almost all urban and suburban areas in Kerala during the period of this study. But it still remains a costly affair to the common man. If

such a facility is available at the study centre, it will be an advantage to the distance learners. The analysis was done keeping in mind that 51.8 percent of the total population which gave only fifth rank, the lowest, to Internet as a preferred source of

information and it was found to be unpopular among the students of distance learning in the present study. The analysis of this variable based on gender as a grouping variable is summarized in Table 9.

Gender	Response on Internet facility				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Male	45 28.30%	52 32.70%	37 23.27%	25 15.72%	159 100%
Female	150 30.55%	174 35.44%	50 10.18%	16 3.26%	491 100%
Total	195 30.00%	226 34.77%	154 23.69%	75 11.54%	650 100%

$\chi^2 = 3.67$ for $df = 3$

Table 9

Response towards the need for Internet facility in study centre libraries (gender-wise)

The analysis has proved that out of 159 male respondents 97 (61%) and 324 (65.99%) of the 491 female are interested to have Internet facility at the study centres. An analysis based on course also gives a similar picture and is portrayed in Figure 4. Though Internet is ranked as the least

preferred source of information, majority of the distance learners are in favor of having this facility in the study centre libraries. The course-wise analysis of the data shows that 251 (64.36%) postgraduate and 170 (65.38%) undergraduate distance learners favour this.

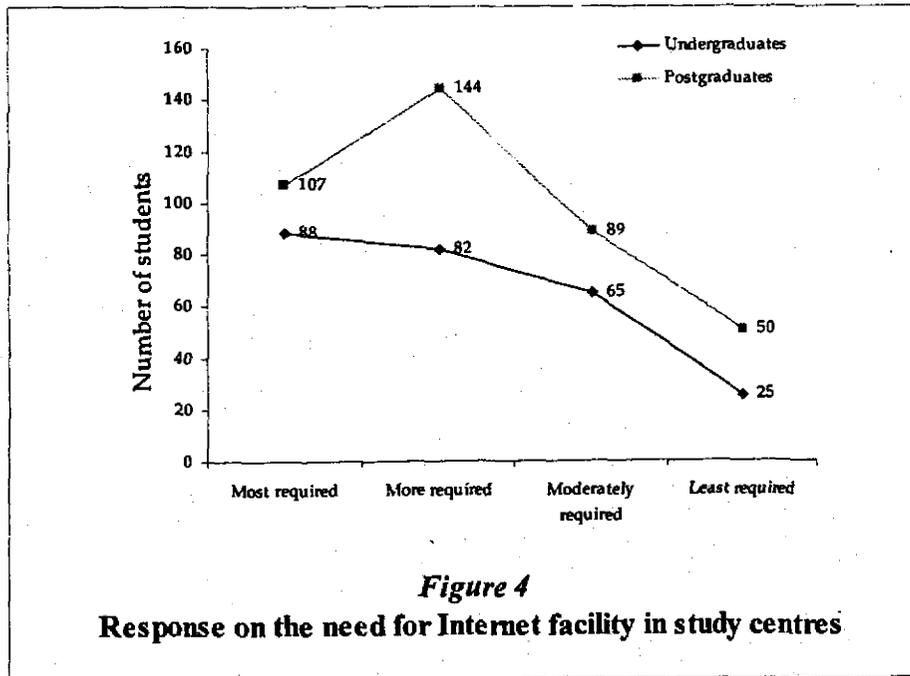


Figure 4
Response on the need for Internet facility in study centres

7.6. Inter-library loan facility

Libraries of an area which are cooperating among themselves are providing interlibrary loan to its patrons. Library networks are performing this function for several decades and many had benefited out of this service. All libraries cannot have an exhaustive and comprehensive collection of books that are useful for their patrons. The cost factor also forces the libraries to go for inter-library loan. This facility can help the students of distance learning for getting books which are not there in their library. The ranking provided to this facility is summarized in Table 10. Overall, the respondents

do not consider inter-library loan as an important facility for them. This is evident from the fact that only 66 (41.51%) of the male respondents and 213 (43.38%) of the female respondents are of the opinion that they need this facility in the study centre libraries. Only 279 (42.93%) of the respondents are in favor of the inter-library loan facility. This may be because; only ten percent of the students have opined that they are getting library services at the study centres. The students think that first they should get the minimum library services at the study centre; other developments can be added later.

Gender	Response on inter-library loan facility				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Male	22 13.84%	44 27.67%	59 37.11%	34 21.38%	159 100%
Female	58 11.81%	155 31.57%	170 34.62%	108 21.99%	491 100%
Total	80 12.31%	199 30.62%	229 35.23%	142 21.85%	650 100%

$\chi^2 = 1.23$ for $df = 3$

Table 10

Response towards the need for Inter-library loan facility in study centre libraries (gender-wise)

The course-wise analysis of this data is provided as figure 5. The figure shows that the majority of the distance learners is not interested to have inter-library loan facility as a priority. Among

undergraduate students, only 120 (46.16%) feel that it is required for them, whereas only 159 (40.77%) of the postgraduate students feel that they require this facility.

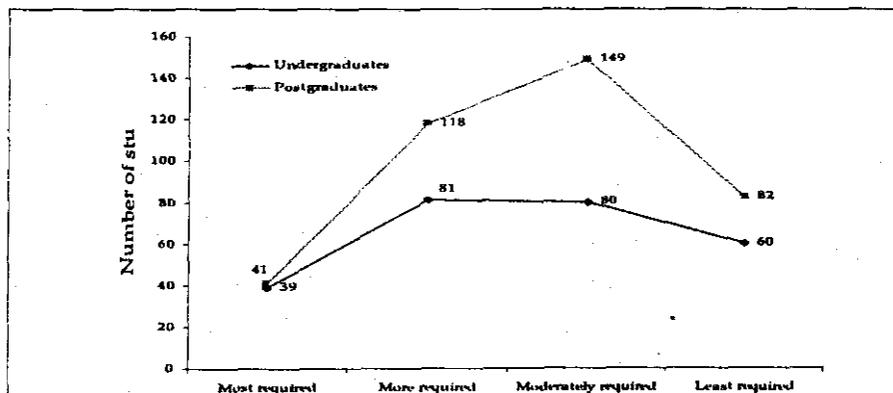


Figure 5

Response on the need for inter-library loan service (course-wise)

7.7 Photocopying facility

A study center library cannot hold copies of books required for all the students attached to that center. Students of distance learning are not in a position to visit the study center frequently for reference and reading. The reserve materials recommended by the faculty and reference volumes of the library are not issued out to the students for use at home. This force the students to take photocopy of the materials as per their need.

Hence photocopying facility becomes a desirable amenity at a study center library. If this facility is available at the study center, a distance learner can make use of the limited time spent at the study center for exhaustive and comprehensive research. The student can take copies of the relevant materials for leisurely reading. The ranking given to this facility was analyzed with gender as a grouping variable. The result of the analysis is provided in Table 11.

Gender	Response on photocopying facility				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Male	31 19.50%	71 44.65%	46 28.93%	11 6.92%	159 100%
Female	133 27.09%	223 45.42%	100 20.37%	35 7.13%	491 100%
Total	164 25.23%	294 45.23%	146 22.46%	46 7.08%	650 100%

$\chi^2 = 6.69$ for $df = 3$

Table 11

Response towards the need for photocopying facility in study centre libraries (gender-wise)

Among the 159 male respondents 102 (64.15%) and among the 491 female respondents 356 (72.51%) want this facility at the study centre. The percentage of female respondents is more. The

reason may be that they cannot travel frequently to the study centre. The ranking is then analyzed with course as the variable and the result is presented as Figure 6.

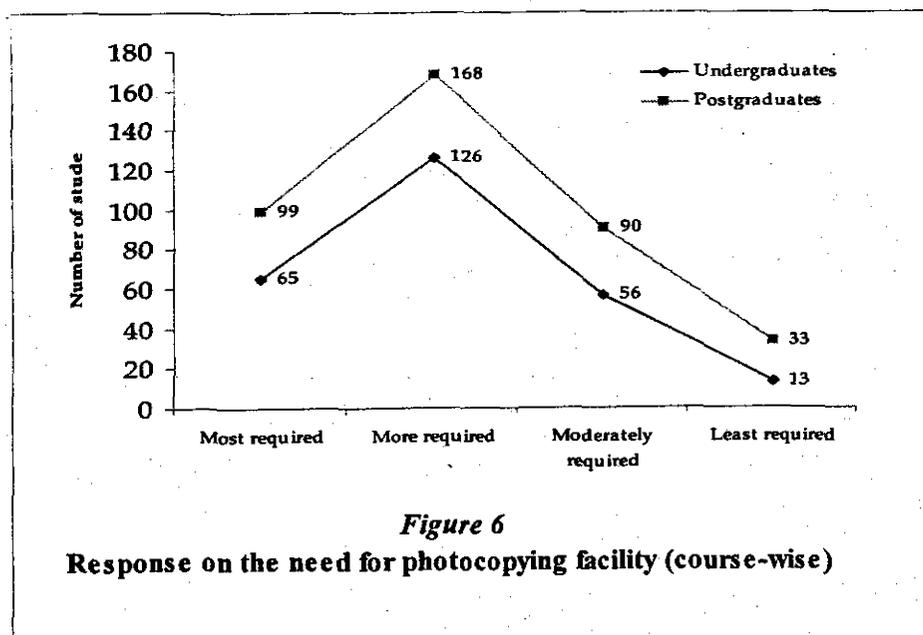


Figure 6

Response on the need for photocopying facility (course-wise)

Among the undergraduate students 191(73.45%) students feel that photocopying service is needed at the study centre. But the percentage is less in the case of postgraduate students. They are only 267 (68.46%) out of the total 390 postgraduate distance learners. Only 13 (5%) of the undergraduate distance learners and 33 (8.46%) of the postgraduate distance learners have opined that they do not require it.

7.8 Availability of question papers

Question papers of previous examinations will help the students to have an idea of the pattern of questions being put to them in the examinations. In a way this will reduce tension during examinations. Hence a collection of question papers of

the previous examinations would be a desirable facility for distance learners at the study centres. This facility was also put for ranking by the distance learners. An overwhelming majority of respondents are in favor of having this facility at the study centre. The summary of the analysis based on gender is provided in Table 12. Among the male respondents 132 (83.02%) and among the female respondents 451 (91.86%) have expressed that they need collection of question papers at the study centre. Among the total sample 583 (89.70%) are of the opinion that they need collection of question papers in the study centre library. The female respondents are more anxious about the examinations and hence a higher percentage.

Gender	Response on making question papers available				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Male	90 56.60%	42 26.42%	14 8.80%	13 8.18%	159 100%
Female	360 73.32%	91 18.54%	26 5.29%	14 2.85%	491 100%
Total	450 69.23%	133 20.47%	40 6.15%	27 4.15%	650 100%

$\chi^2 = 19.09$ for $df = 3$

Table 12

Response towards the need for previous question papers in study centre libraries (gender-wise)

To find whether there exists a difference of opinion between postgraduate students and undergraduate students with regard to collection of question papers at the study centre library, analysis was done based on the level of the course. It is observed that 237 (91.15%) of the undergraduate students and 346 (88.71%) of the post graduate students require the collection of question papers of the previous examinations at the study centre.

7.9. Collection of reserve materials recommended by faculty

The term 'faculty reserves' indicate the documents recommended by the faculty and reserved for the use of distance learners. Faculty

may regard that some journal articles, research reports, text books, and other additional reading materials should be read by the students of distance courses. At present there is no way to provide these materials to the students, except that they can inform during the contact programmes about the relevant materials. But if a library is equipped with such items, it becomes very easy for the students to come into contact with those recommended reading materials. It is extremely helpful for distance learners, if these materials are available in the study centre library itself. Hence the respondents were asked to give their preferences on providing a collection of such items in the study centre. The data are provided in Table 13.

Gender	Response on collection of reserve materials				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Male	83 52.30%	30 18.82%	34 21.38%	12 7.50%	159 100%
Female	287 58.45%	111 22.60%	60 12.23%	33 6.72%	491 100%
Total	370 56.93%	141 21.69%	94 14.46%	45 6.92%	650 100%

$\chi^2 = 8.69$ for $df = 3$

Table 13

Response towards the need for collection of reserve materials in study centre libraries (gender-wise)

As many as 398 (81.05%) of 491 female respondents require the provision of faculty recommended materials in the study centre library. But the percent is 71.12 in the case of male respondents. 113 out of 159 require this in the study center. Only 7% of the total sample disagrees with this option. The analysis shows that the

students recognize the importance of these materials. Female respondents seem to sense the importance of faculty reserves more than the male students.

The course-wise analysis of the ranking provided to faculty recommended reserve materials is analyzed and is provided as Figure 7.

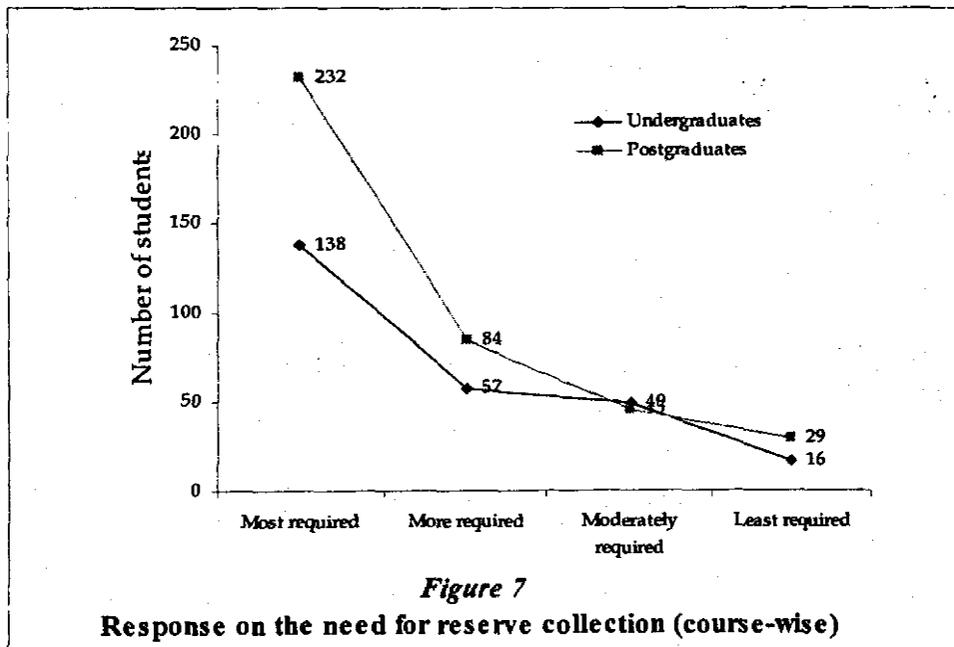


Figure 7

Response on the need for reserve collection (course-wise)

The postgraduate students show more concern towards the availability of faculty materials at the study centre libraries. Among the postgraduate students, 316 (81.01%) are of opinion that study centres should maintain a special reserve

collection of such materials. In the case of undergraduate learners, 195 (75%) respondents have favoured the need for materials recommended by the faculty at the study centre library. This group seems to depend mainly on prescribed texts.

7.10. Training in the use of library

Professional librarians were traditionally offering their patrons various kinds of user education programmes such as initiation to freshmen, and orientation sessions, otherwise called as 'Bibliographic instruction'. This helps the users to help themselves at the library in locating their materials. The proper organization of the collection of a library needs classification, cataloguing and other techniques. There are several services that are being offered by the different libraries, about which

the students should come to know. Orientation sessions are essential at the beginning of courses in academic libraries, and they help the students to access the library materials without anybody's help. In the present scenario of convergence of information and communication technology into library services, training becomes vital and inevitable. Hence the next variable as a service at the study center library put for ranking was 'training to use the library'. The responses of the distance learners are presented in Table 14.

Gender	Response on need for training				Total
	Most required	More required	Moderately required	Least required	
Male	53 33.33%	53 33.33%	35 22.01%	18 11.32%	159 100%
Female	244 49.69%	154 31.36%	67 13.65%	26 5.29%	491 100%
Total	297 45.69%	207 31.85%	102 15.69%	44 6.77%	650 100%

$\chi^2 = 18.98$ for $df = 3$

Table 14

Response towards the need for study centre libraries providing user education (gender-wise)

Female respondents find it very essential to have training to use the library at the study centre. While 106 (66.66%) male respondents out of 159 consider training to use the library very desirable as a facility at the study centre library, 398 (81.05%) female respondents out of 491 are more in favour of it. Altogether 504 (77.54%) of the respondents find it as an important requirement at the study centre library. An analysis based on course confirms that 196 (75.38%) of the undergraduate students and 308 (78.97%) of the postgraduate students require training to use the library.

8. Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be summarized that distance learners in the universities in Kerala expect that a library at the study centre need certain minimum facilities. The selection of the following facilities was made by picking those items which were ranked as mostly required by at least 50 percent of the respondents. They are:

- Collection of books to support the curriculum
- Cordial and helpful staff
- Convenient library timings
- Collection of question papers
- Collection of reserve materials recommended by the faculty, and
- Training to use the library.

The facilities like the reading room, Internet, photocopying and Inter-library loan were not found as crucial requirements. An ideal study centre library should provide those amenities which the students found mostly required. But the provision of the facilities is not enough to ascertain its use. It necessitates marketing strategies on the part of librarian to create more utility for the facilities provided in the study centres. In order to achieve this, they may have to act in tandem with the course providers and course designers of the universities.

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