

A STUDY ON TRENDS FOR STUDENT RESEARCH PREFERENCES

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Abstract: The vast increases in the online information resources lead the students to have fewer visits to libraries to retrieve information and their use of web as a source of information is increasing overall. Hence, there is a movement away from the library towards cyberspace which raises important concerns about the nature of information obtained by students and their ability and desire to evaluate online information effectively. On this issue, there is a little research that addresses how frequently students use the Internet and Web, their motivations for doing so, and what efforts, if any, they make to verify that the information they find online is credible or reliable. For this purpose, a study is conducted to find out to what extent students rely on the Internet for academic information retrieval purposes, what factors they consider when evaluating the medium of data collection, and why they find Internet more preferable than library or otherwise. In order to assess these variables, a survey has been undertaken at International University of Sarajevo (IUS) with a sample population of hundred students and the results of the survey are discussed and elaborated in greater detail in this paper.

Keywords: Search Trends, Internet Usage, Student Research, Library Usage

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Introduction

The evolution of Internet has revolutionized the lives of many people, in a sense that people now use internet resources to gather information about anything they face including retrieval of information for research purposes.

For university students, a key element of academic literacy is the ability to locate, select, evaluate, synthesize, and cite outside sources in their own writing. This traditional cornerstone of academic writing has been called into question, even endangered, by the nature and sheer number of resources available on the Internet. Especially, this is the case given that students select the information randomly. Most of the lecturers complain that students fail to evaluate sources cited in their research, particularly those found on the Internet [1]. Credibility assessment is increasingly important as scholars and students use the web to carry out a variety of research activities and the reliability of information plays a great role in determining the quality of such researches [2].

According to researchers and academicians, Web consists of sources such as blogs, news sites, etc. which fall outside the boundaries of what is generally recognized as suitable for academic citation [3]. But it is also relevant to consider that scholars have enough research experience to make source selection almost intuitive. When searching for resources, they immediately know which databases or indexes to use.

While reading a bibliography, they make judgments about the merit of articles based on what they know about the journal. On the other hand, undergraduate students, who lack in experience with discipline-specific tools and do not necessarily base their source selection decisions on this kind of information [4].

The concept of a learning environment is significant for the successful functioning and survival of a learning organization, and in the absence of it, an organization will collapse [5]. So, university as a learning environment plays a predominant role in educating population of individuals who have the skills necessary to find information required for their current or future studies. In this way, the creditability would not become a big issue since the individuals are skilled to grasp the useful information from a variety of sources.

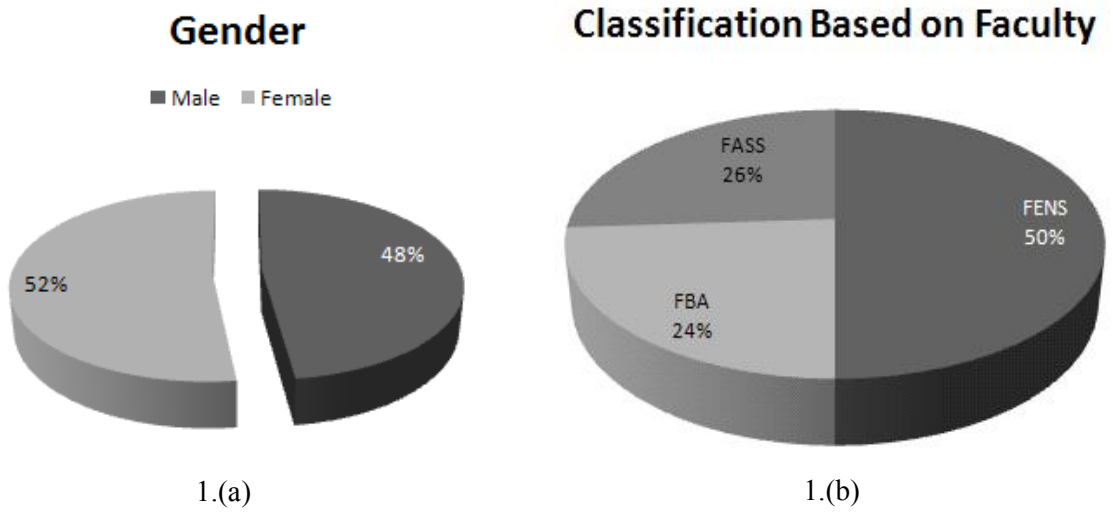
1. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to measure the trends in the student research by exploring on the factors that influence the choice of medium for collecting information and also to elaborate on how students perceive the use of Internet in their academic researches in terms of comparing the internet activity to the academic performance. In order to support this study, an extensive literature review is being undertaken to identify the problem areas in internet as a base to research papers and to design the questions in the survey so as to grab the required data for further analysis. The survey is carefully designed in a way that it doesn't force the students to answer certain options which would create bias in the results. The logical order of questions is put in a manner to lead the respondents to answer in a smooth way. The sample size is selected to be hundred but more papers could be distributed to get better results and conclusions on the relationships. The survey paper consists of eight questions which have multiple choice questions and also some ratings about the overall satisfaction about the university library facilities.

2. Discussion and Results

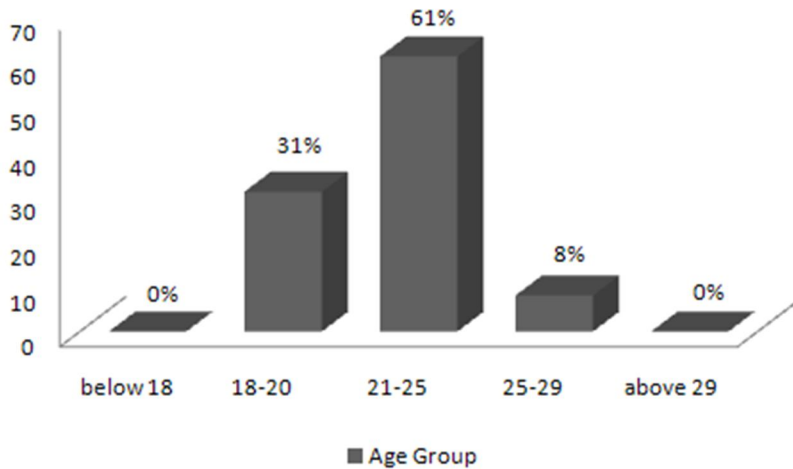
The sample population for the survey was selected to be hundred. In the first section of the survey, the students were asked to select information based upon their gender, faculty in which they study and also the age group to which he/she belongs. These general questions were asked to gather information that is to be used purely for graphical and statistical purposes. The pie charts below in Figure 1. (a) and (b) clearly indicates the relative distribution for each set of data.

Figure 1: (a) Respondent classification based on Gender in sample population (b) Respondent Classification based on Faculty (FENS = Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, FBA = Faculty of Business and Administration, FASS = Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences)



The distribution of the sample population in terms of ages are also presented in the bar chart in terms of percentages. It can be observed from the results that 61% of the people are in the group of 21-25.

Figure 2: Age Group of Respondents



As the starting question of the survey, the respondents are expected to estimate the amount of reading and writing they have done during the semester. This question is relative to the subject of the study because it identifies how much of each material is being used in an

indirect way. The results are presented by a bar chart along with the associated table that indicates the percentage values for each material asked in the question.

As Figure 3 shows, students focus on exams more than any other sources while journals and publications are referred much less than other resources.

Figure 3. Results of Question 1: During this semester, about how much reading and writing did you do?

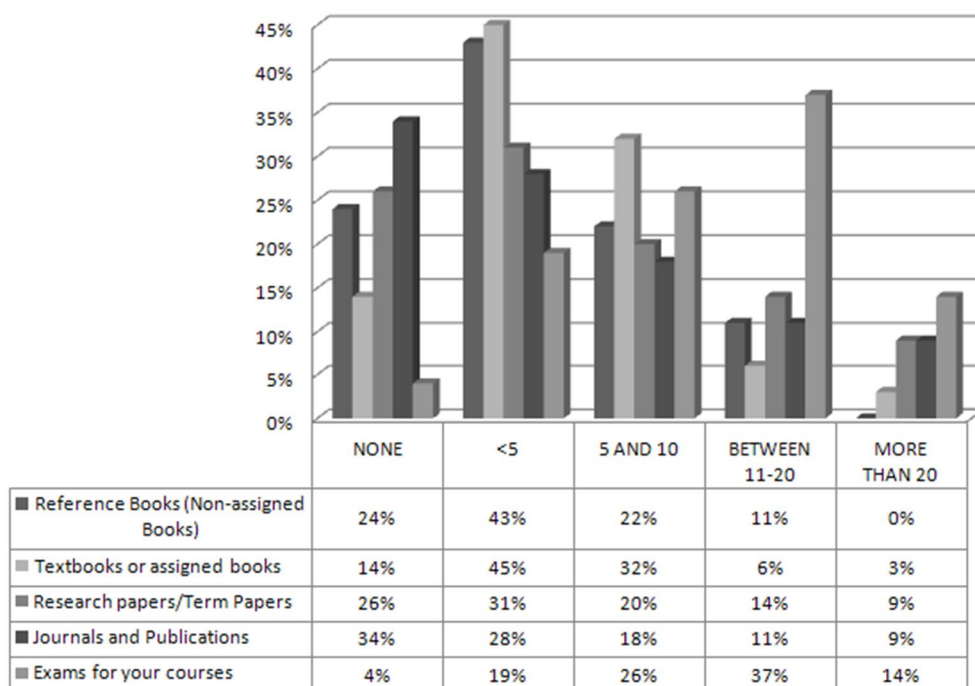
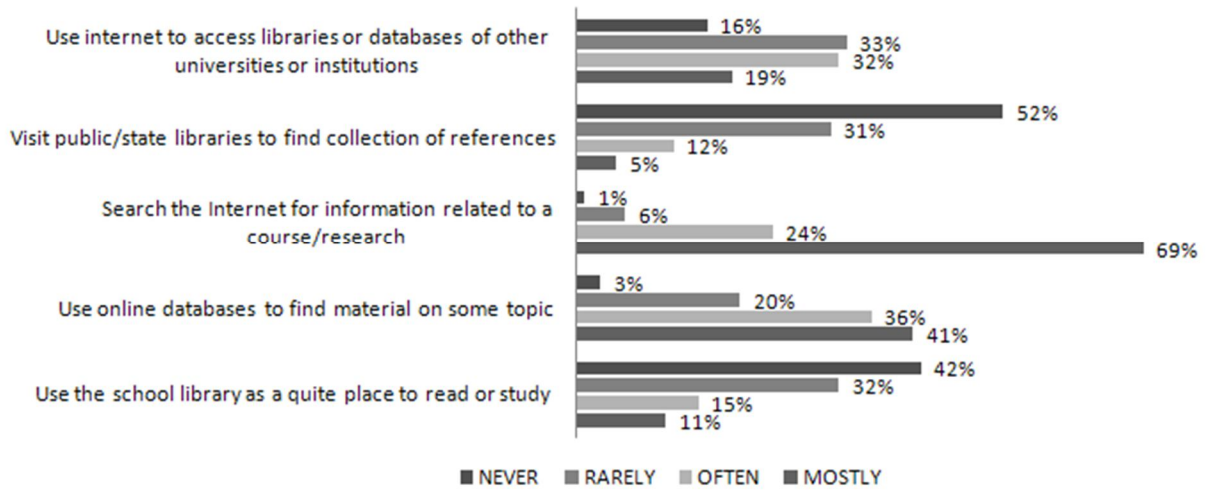


Figure 4 depicts the results of question 2 which asks frequency of usage of the methods for finding information. In the questionnaire, the purpose of asking question 2 was to find out to how frequently students use the library, online databases, public libraries or internet resources in doing their coursework. The use of library was especially a good indicator along with the use of internet resources to see if students prefer library or internet more. But, the answer to this question would be more clear in the following results of the survey. 69% of the students mostly search the internet for information related to a course. The percentage of students mostly using the school library for studying are 11% and 42% of students never use the library for studying purposes. Only 5% mostly visits the public libraries and 52% never goes to a state library in search for information. There is also a significant percentage of students who use online databases mostly as a means to find material on a topic.

Figure 4: Results of Question 2: Frequency of usage of the methods of finding information.



Question 3 is especially designed to analyze and elaborate on the important factors that influence students while they are collecting data for their studies. It can be seen that 58% of the students believe that quickness of information is a very important factor in their research, while 71% of students prefer easy methods to access information in conducting their researches. The 36% only considers the quickness as somehow important factor. The pie charts given in Figure 5 indicates the related results.

Figure 5 (a) (b). Result of Question 2: Important Factors Influencing choice of medium for collecting information for research paper or any other study of student. Figure 5 (c) (d). Result of Question 2: Important Factors Influencing choice of medium for collecting information for research paper or any other study of student

Quickness of information retrieval

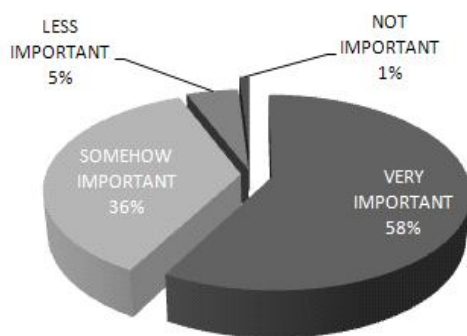


Figure 5. (a)

Ease of access to information

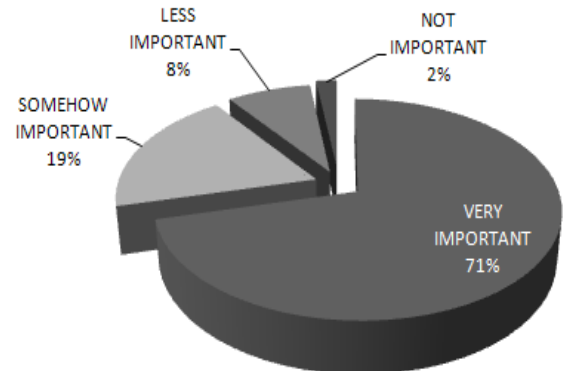


Figure 5. (b)

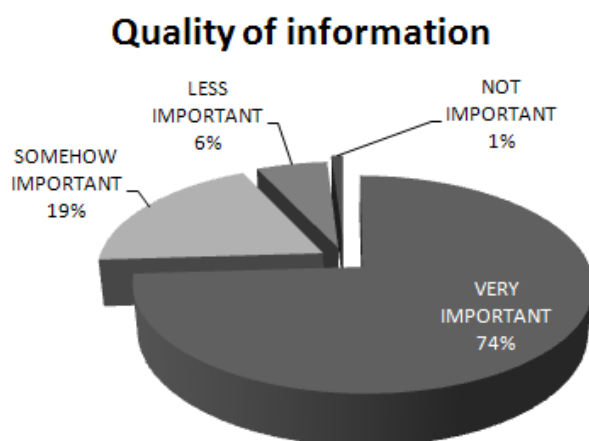


Figure 5. (c)

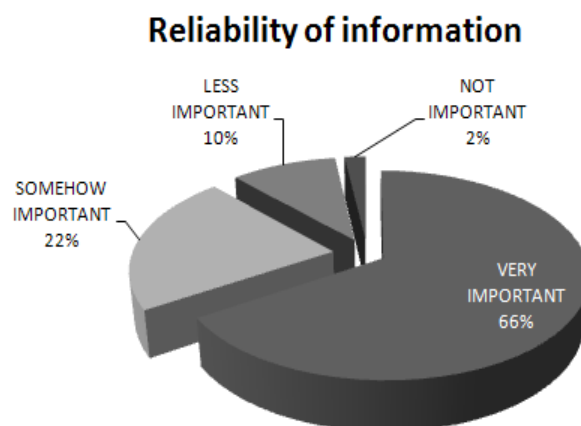


Figure 5. (d)

As per the Figure 5. (c) above, it can be observed that 74% of the respondents rated the quality of information as a very important factor in determining the choice of medium. Only 1% responded that it is not an important factor and the relative percentage of the learners thinking the factor as somehow important is also significant i.e. 19%. As far as the reliability of information is concerned, 66% of the students gave a rating of very important to this factor. On the extreme, only 2% of the students think that it is not important at all.

In question 4 given in Figure 6, the respondents are expected to choose only one option from the given choices. This question is used to test if students prefer internet or library more for collecting materials for their study subjects. It can be clearly observed that only 2% of the students use internet less than the library resources and majority of people about 85% use the internet more than library for their studies. 14% of the students believe that they use the Internet and the library about the same.

Figure 6: Results of Question 4: Comparison of Usage of Library to that of Internet as a medium to collect information

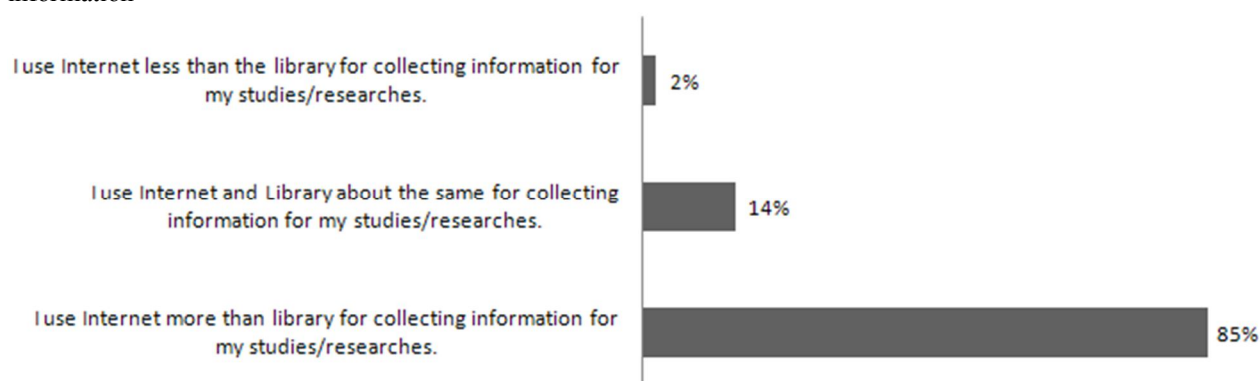


Table 1 reflecting Question 5 is based upon the usage of search engines or sites for collecting information. Here, the results are to provide answers about to what extent and in what frequencies students use the given sites. The students are given an option to specify their own sites and only three of the students responded as www.gigapedia.com,

www.wolframalpha.com and www.businessdictionary.com as a feedback to this. There is an interesting observation that the frequency of rarely or never using Google search engine is 0%, meaning that 96% of the students are mostly using the Google to collect data. The other leading site with 64% is Wikipedia which contains a collection of information written by users.

Table 1: Result of Question 5: How often do you use the following sites or search engines for collecting information for your academic studies?

	MOSTLY	OFTEN	RARELY	NEVER
www.google.com	96%	4%	0%	0%
www.jstor.org	9%	15%	26%	50%
www.scholar.google.com	6%	9%	33%	52%
www.encyclopedia.com	17%	14%	25%	44%
www.wikipedia.com	64%	26%	8%	2%
www.yahoo.com	16%	10%	19%	55%
Other, (specify)	9%	22%	10%	59%

The following question (Figure 7) determines some facts and opinions about the use of internet in students' medium as a research. Most of the students strongly agree that they can have access to new and valuable sources through internet. The percentages are presented in a tabular form in Table 2.

Figure 7: Result of Question 6: About the use of internet as a source of information in your studies, what could be said in your opinion?

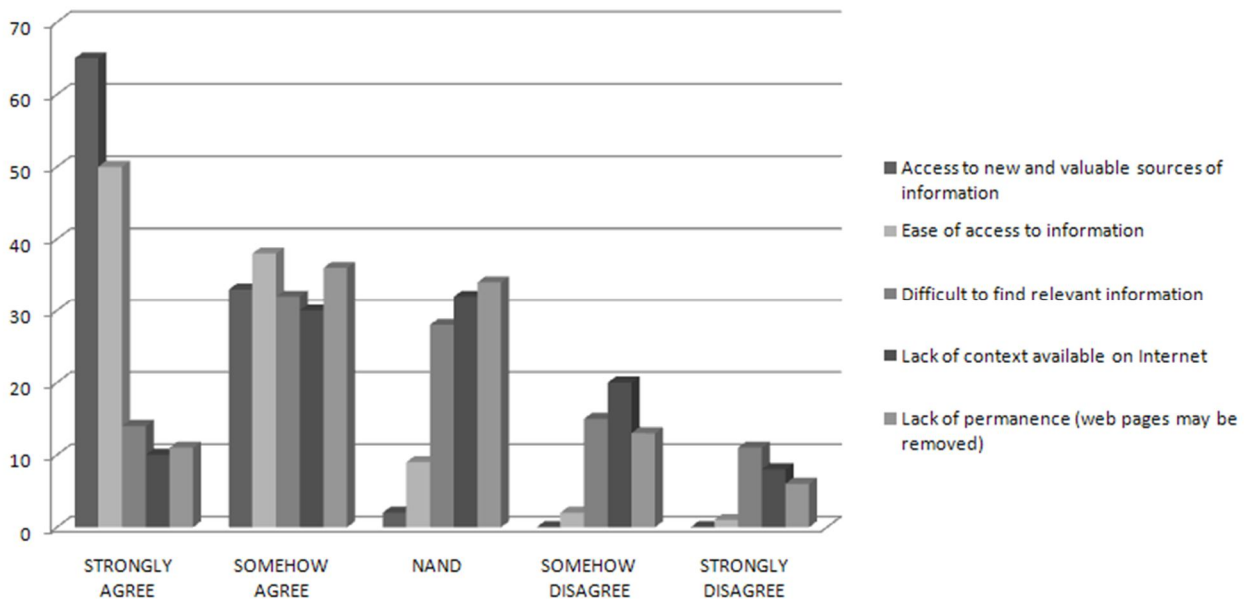
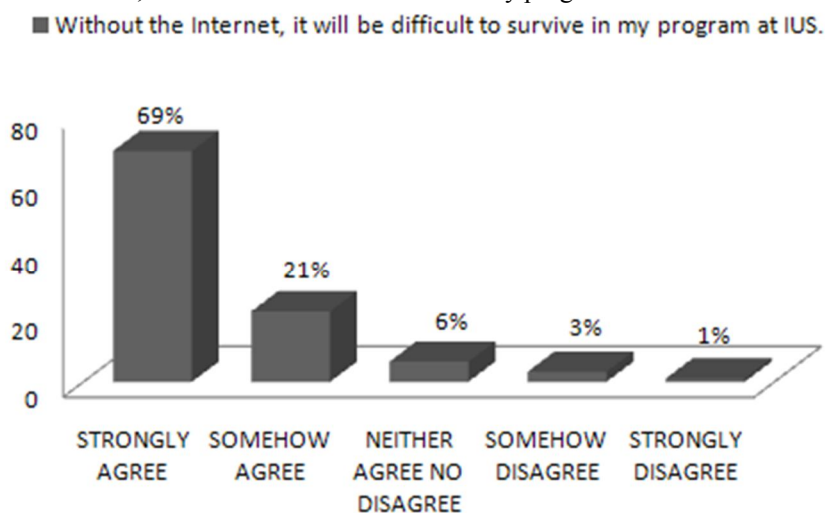


Table 2: Percentages of usage of internet as student research medium

QUESTION 6	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEHOW AGREE	NAND	SOMEHOW DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Access to new and valuable sources of information	65%	33%	2%	0%	0%
Ease of access to information	50%	38%	9%	2%	1%
Difficult to find relevant information	14%	32%	28%	15%	11%
Lack of context available on Internet	10%	30%	32%	20%	8%
Lack of permanence (web pages may be removed)	11%	36%	34%	13%	6%

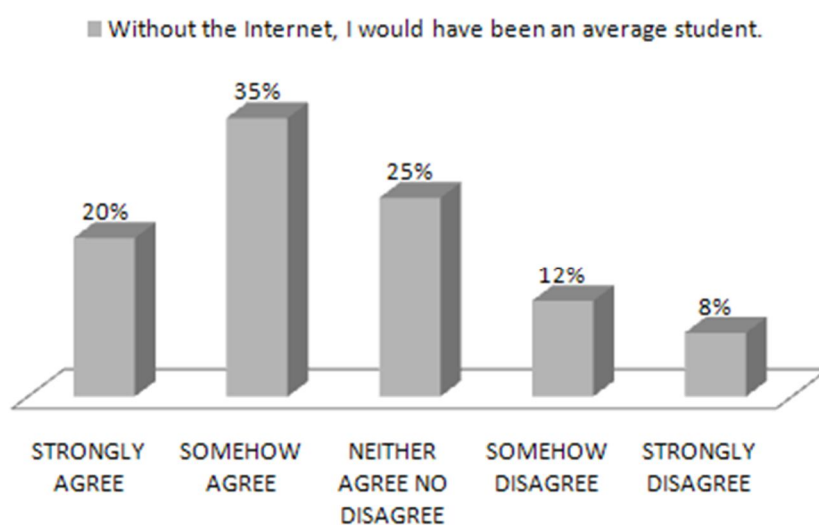
Question 7 is specifically designed to measure to what extent students agree that internet contributes towards better academic performance. In Figure 9, 69% of the students strongly believe that without Internet they wouldn't be able to survive in their studies. Only 1% of the respondents strongly disagrees and the rest are given in the bar chart below.

Figure 9: Without the Internet, it will be difficult to survive in my program.



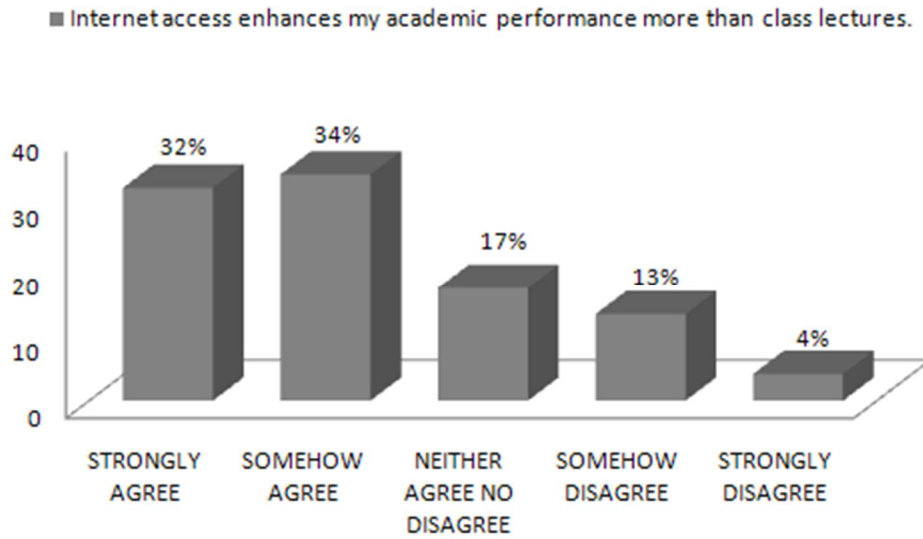
In the second part of the question (see Figure 10) 7, 20% of students strongly agree that without internet, they would be an average student and 35% of the students somehow agree with the statement. On the other hand, 8% of the learners strongly disagree with the given statement.

Figure 10: Without the Internet, I would have been an average student.



As shown in Figure 11, 34% of the students somehow agree with the statement that internet access enhances their academic performance more than lectures. On the contrary, 4% of respondents strongly disagree with the given statement.

Figure 11: Internet access enhances my academic performance more than class lectures



In the last question, the respondents are asked to give their overall rating between 0 and 10 to the library facilities provided by their universities to students. On average, the rating is found to be 3.97 which is very low because the percentage of people thinking that library resources are insufficient is higher than those which are satisfied somehow.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, an investigation was undertaken by conducting a survey that focuses on identifying the current trends in the student researches and exploring on the current needs of the student in terms of finding a better medium for collecting information and materials for their studies. The questions were designed such that the needs and the purpose of the research are addressed. As per the results discussed in the discussion and results section, the research indicates that online information is much more preferred than visiting the university library to retrieve information. The reasons for internet as a medium to collect data may be due to the lack of facilities provided by their universities management since some of the students personally wrote their own comments on the survey papers that they want the library to improve and provide more materials and copying services in addition to creating study rooms for groups and individuals. They also underrated the library facilities due to the lack of reference materials and lack of library personnel support. Students also responded verbally during the collection of their survey papers that they would prefer retrieving data from library if they were given the chance.

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