PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF PUBLIC LIBRARY USERS IN ISTANBUL, TURKEY: INITIAL SURVEY RESULTS[*]

İstanbul'daki Halk Kütüphanesi Kullanıcılarının Algı ve Beklentileri: İlk Bulgular

Hülya DİLEK KAYAOĞLU

İstanbul Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Bilgi ve Belge Yönetimi Bölümü

dilekkayaoglu@gmail.com

Öz

Kullanıcıların beklentilerini ve isteklerini daha iyi karşılayacak kütüphane hizmetlerini örgütleyebilmek için hem onların mevcut hizmetleri nasıl algıladıklarını, hem de neye ihtiyaç duyduklarını bilmek kaçınılmazdır. Bu araştırmanın temel amacı da İstanbul'daki halk kütüphanesi kullanıcılarının, mevcut kütüphane hizmetleri konusundaki algılarını ve beklentilerini araştırmak olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu amacı gerçekleştirmek üzere kapalı uçlu sorulardan oluşan bir anket hazırlanmış ve İstanbul'daki rastgele seçilmiş 15 halk kütüphanesinin 643 kullanıcısına uygulanmıştır. Kullanıcı incelemesinin ön bulgu ve analizlerine göre İstanbul'daki halk kütüphaneleri temel olarak eğitimsel gereksinimleri karşılamak üzere kullanılmaktadır. Halk kütüphanelerinin genel olarak öğrenciler ta-

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rafından kullanıldığı bilinen bir gerçektir; fakat üniversite öğrencisi olduğunu belirten halk kütüphanesi kullanıcılarının lise ve ilköğretim öğrencilerinden daha fazla olması ise bu ankette ortaya çıkan ilginç bir bulgudur. Anketi yanıtlayan İstanbullular, bilgiye ücretsiz ve eşit erişim olanağı sağlayan halk kütüphanelerinin toplumsal yaşamın vazgeçilmez bir kurumu olduğuna inanmakta ve halk kütüphanelerinin daha fazla finansal desteği hak ettiğini düşünmektedirler. Buna karşın, Internet bilgiye erişimde kullandıkları başlıca kaynaktır; ayrıca zamansızlık, Internet aracılığıyla bilgiyi elde etmek, evden uzaklık ya da kütüphane hizmetlerinden habersiz olmak gibi nedenlerle halk kütüphanelerini kullanmamaktadırlar. Anketi yanıtlayanların genel olarak "zayıf" olarak algıladıkları hizmet ve kaynaklar ile kütüphaneye daha sık gelmelerine yol açacak hizmet ve kaynaklar ise örtüşmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Halk kütüphaneleri, kütüphane kullanıcıları, kullanıcı algıları, kullanıcı beklentileri, Türkiye.

Abstract

The main aim of this study was to explore public library users' perceptions and expectations of the quality of library services in Istanbul. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and data were collected using a questionnaire administered to 643 respondents randomly selected from 15 public libraries in the metropolitan area of Istanbul. Some of the initial results were as follows: The study found that the most common reason for visiting a public library is to meet educational needs. One of the surprising initial findings of the study is that the heaviest users of public libraries are not high school and K–8 students, but rather 18–29-year-old students. The respondents consider public libraries as a fundamental part of society, as they provide free and equal access to information; the respondents also believe that libraries deserve more financial support. On the other hand, they cite the Internet as their main source of information, and do not use public libraries because of lack of time, the convenience of the Internet, not living close to a public library, and being unaware of library services.

The services that are perceived as "poor" by the respondents coincide with the services that have the potential to attract them to libraries.

Keywords: Public libraries, library users, user perceptions, user expectations, Turkey.

1. Introduction

1.1. A Brief History and Organizational Structure of Public Libraries in Turkey

The term "public library" was first used with its current meaning in 19th-century England. The use of the term is relatively new in Turkey, and is a product of the Turkish Republic (1923–). Yet, "public library services" existed in the Otto-

man Empire and can be dated back to the 15th century foundation libraries.[1] Some of the 15th-century foundation libraries that were located in mosques can be considered as the very first examples of public libraries, as they were open to the public. The later general libraries (*Kütüphane-i Umumi* in Ottoman Turkish) (1876–1923), Turkish Hearts (1927–1931), and People's Houses (1932–1951) also offered public library services (Keseroğlu, 1989, p. 81).

The libraries left over from the Ottoman Empire were reorganized in the 1960s. "Public library" was defined as a term and the Library General Directorate was established within the Ministry of Foundations. Today, although not established by law,[2] a public library organization and tradition exist in Turkey, and the public libraries are considered as public service institutions, working under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's General Directorate of Libraries and Publications. They are mainly established and funded by the central government. The city's private offices also provide some financial support to the public libraries. The children's libraries, which are governed under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, are mainly established within the public libraries. There are no legal obstacles preventing the municipalities from establishing libraries, but local administrations have been quite lax in this matter. With the dawn of the 21st century, the municipalities started taking more initiative on this issue and began organizing more public library services—at least in Istanbul.

The present government has been trying to change the Turkish public administration since 2003, and issued a draft bill in order to make this change happen. The main aim of this draft bill was to transfer the public administration from the government to the local administration system. This change will also affect the present public library system in Turkey. If the law passes in the Turkish Parliament, Turkish public libraries will operate under the responsibility of local authorities in the near future. This would initiate a radical transformation of the Turkish public library system (Yılmaz, 2010, p. 306).

According to the latest draft bill (Kamu, 2003), city public libraries will remain under the administration of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, while town public

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[1] The libraries established during the Ottoman era were foundation libraries that were endowed by individuals. The endowers determined the terms and conditions of their donations through acts of foundation called *vakfiye.* These documents used to have information on the donated books, the donation date, and the place of the donation, as well as the beneficiaries and terms of use. Foundation libraries were first established in Edirne, then in Istanbul as a part of mosques, madrasas, and cultural centers attached to the mosques. In the 17th century, people started establishing these libraries in independent buildings. The libraries were still being founded up until the first quarter of the 20th century, in diminishing numbers (Barkan, 1971, pp. 109-110; Soysal, 1981, pp.103-105; Erünsal 1988, p. xiv).

[2] However, there are some regulations concerning the services of public libraries, such as: "Public Libraries Regulation", "Ministry of Culture and Tourism Regulation of Selection of Publications", "Regulation of Educational and Cultural Activities in Libraries", "Regulation of Inter-Library Lending Printed Books", and "Regulation of Celebrating the National Library Week".

libraries will be transferred to the local administrations. This means that technical and administrative coordination between them will be abrogated. The local administrations are highly influenced by current politics in Turkey, and if the libraries are transferred to the local authorities without laying the necessary legal groundwork, they may turn into political institutions. The buildings and staff may be used for different purposes, and the collections may be reshaped according to political ideologies. In a relatively recent study (Faydalıgül and Yılmaz, 2012), it was stated that any takeover that is conducted without proper legal regulations, including library standards, will cause irrevocable mistakes.

Table 1: Statistics on Public Libraries in Turkey[3]

Year	No. of Libraries	No. of Mobile Libraries	No. of Staff	No. of Books	No. of Visits	No. of Members	No. of Books Loaned
2012	1.112	36	3060	15.785.280	19.545.940	885.282	6.790.817

Source: *General directorate of libraries and publications statistics of 2012.*

As seen in Table 1, today there are 1,112 public and 36 mobile libraries in 81 cities in Turkey. They function under the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications. There is, on average, 1 public library per 68,000 people in Turkey.[4] There is one book for every five inhabitants. A single public library staff member has to serve approximately 24,000 users. Public library members (registered users) make up roughly one percent of the population. Also, the number of mobile libraries is not sufficient to meet the users' needs and expectations.

1.2. Problem Statement and Research Questions

Although public libraries emerged and developed in different ways in Europe, the USA, and Turkey, they all have the same principle: providing equal access, regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status, and educational level (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994, pp. 1–2). Children of all ages and genders, young people, students, teachers, homemakers, and people from all occupations are amongst the potential and actual users of public libraries. The users have a variety of educational levels and socio-economic backgrounds, and therefore, each user group has different needs and expectations. So, it is essential to determine the users' perceptions of existing library services, as well as their expectations, in order to develop library services that fulfill the users' different needs.

Stevenson (1997, p. 113) defines a perception as "an opinion about someone or something." Perceptions are certainly not fixed notions—they may change as user

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[3] Public libraries operated under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism; manuscript libraries were not included.

[4] The total population of Turkey was recorded as 75.6 million in 2012 (Turkish Statistical Institute Address-Based Population Registration System).

experience changes. As pointed out by Cook and Heath (2001, p. 581), "library users approach the various dimensions of services with differing expectations. When it works well, the library is a place that enters into the consciousness of the user little more than the span over open water enters into the awareness of the traveler; the library is merely an entity that facilitates a more important undertaking. When expectations are not met – whether it be inadequate collections, insufficient hours, or otherwise – the perception of service quality can be altered." Lilley and Usherwood (2000, p. 13) have indicated that the "user's experience, past experience, language and present motivational state or goals for the future influence our perception of the present. Past learning has a significant influence on our perception." The literature has also shown that expectations are pre-trial beliefs about a product or service (Olson and Dover, 1976). According to Zeithaml et al. (1988), what customers hear from other customers; individual characteristics and circumstances relating to personal needs; experience with using a service; and communications from service providers to customers, are all elements that determine expectations. In the present day, even more than in the past, libraries need to understand the background of their users, and determine whether they are meeting or exceeding expectations, or not.

The overall purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and expectations of public library users in Istanbul, so that we can determine: (i) who the users are, (ii) the services provided for these users, (iii) their perception of these services, and (iv) their thoughts on the areas that need improvement. In order to achieve the above-mentioned goals, a survey consisting of close-ended questions was prepared and distributed to Istanbul public libraries and their branches. The study findings will be important for public library decision makers at all levels, and will give them an understanding of the users' expectations and perceptions regarding adequate services. The following are the specific research questions for the study:

1. How often do users visit the selected public libraries in Istanbul? Is there any meaningful correlation between frequency of use and gender, age, work status?
2. What are users' main reasons for visiting the selected libraries in Istanbul?
3. What are the barriers that prevent people from using public library services in Istanbul?
4. What types of information sources do users use?
5. What are the features that would encourage more frequent visits to a public library?
6. What are the perceptions of the users about the services, resources and facilities of the selected public libraries?
7. How important or unimportant do users think public libraries are as a service to the community?

2. Background and Methodology

There are 53 public libraries at the service of Istanbul's public, spread over a wide geographical area, from the historical peninsula to the peripheral areas. Of these 53 libraries, 37 function under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's Direc-

torate of Libraries and Publications, and 16 are organized under the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

As can be seen in Table 2, there is, on average, 1 public library for every 260,000[5] people in Istanbul. There is 1 book for every 8 inhabitants. Only 21 percent of the collections in public libraries have been checked out. One public library staff member has to serve 34,276 people. Registered users make up only 0.07 percent of Istanbul's population. Mobile library services far from meet the needs of Istanbul's citizens. It should be noted here that the state of public libraries in Istanbul is worse than the country as a whole, as is shown in Table 1. When we compare the data in Table 2, we observe that the number of the libraries that are governed by the central government in Istanbul is twice the number of metropolitan municipal libraries. The mobile library service is not funded by the central government—this service is entirely overseen by local administrations. In addition, the sum of books in the libraries that are governed by the central government is about twice that of the libraries that are governed by the metropolitan municipalities; whereas, metropolitan municipal libraries have more than three times the number of registered users and a lending rate about two times higher than the libraries that are supported by the central government.

Table 2: Statistics on Public Libraries in Istanbul[6]

2012	Public Libraries Funded by the Central Government	Public Libraries Funded by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality	Total
Number of Libraries	37	16	53
Number of Mobile Libraries	-	5	5
Number of Staff	192	208	400
Number of Books	1.179.256	596.336	1.775.592
Number of Visits	448.103	721.346	1.169.449
Number of Members	22.109	76.835	98.944
Number of Books Loaned	143.672	230.191	373.863

Source: *General directorate of libraries and publications statistics of 2012* and *2012 annual report,*
Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

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[5] As of 2012, according to official census data from the Turkish State Institute of Statistics, the population of Istanbul has increased to 13,710,512 people (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu Adrese Dayalı Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi 2012—Turkish Statistical Institute Address-Based Population Registration System 2012).

[6] The few municipal libraries governed and funded by local authorities (town municipalities) are "information houses" that are run by town municipalities, and usually serve students in their area and provide homework support; they are not included in this study.

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF PUBLIC LIBRARY USERS IN ISTANBUL,
TURKEY: INITIAL SURVEY RESULTS

In order to examine and understand the perceptions and expectations of the public library users in Istanbul, a descriptive survey method using a self-developed questionnaire was used. Firstly, a pilot study was conducted and some users were asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire and write their comments about the questionnaire on a separate sheet. Valuable comments were obtained from the users, and based on this feedback, some survey questions were re-worded and some were removed. The final version of the survey, which consisted of 18 closed, multiple-choice questions, was sent via mail to randomly selected 15 Istanbul public libraries—funded by both the central government and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality—between November 2012 and January 2013. Each of the questionnaires was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the study's purpose and asking for cooperation.

The questionnaires were administered randomly to 700 users at 15 selected public libraries in the metropolitan area of Istanbul. A total of 643 questionnaires were returned, representing a return rate of 92 percent. This is a high response rate for a survey of this type. The collected data were coded, tabulated using tables and percentages, and analyzed using SPSS version 11.5 for Windows. In order to determine the relationship between two variables, the Pearson correlation test was used and $p \leq 0.05$ significance was accepted (p=level of significance). The user survey addressed the following topics:

- the demographic characteristics of the users;
- frequency of use of a public library;
- reasons for using a public library;
- barriers to using a public library;
- types of information sources;
- features that would encourage more frequent visits to a public library;
- perceptions of library services, resources, and facilities;
- attitudes towards public libraries.

3. Initial Results and Analyses

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Users

Among the 643 users who responded to the survey, 46 percent were male and 54 percent were female. The largest age group was 18–29 (62 percent) (Fig. 1). This group was followed successively by the following age groups: 12–17 (18 percent), 30–39 (11 percent), 40–49 (4 percent), 11 and under (3 percent), 50–59 (1 percent), and 60 and over (1 percent). As people age, the proportion that visit public libraries tends to decrease, except for the age group 11 and under; however, it should be noted that compared to the general population, library users are underrepresented in the 11 and under age group.
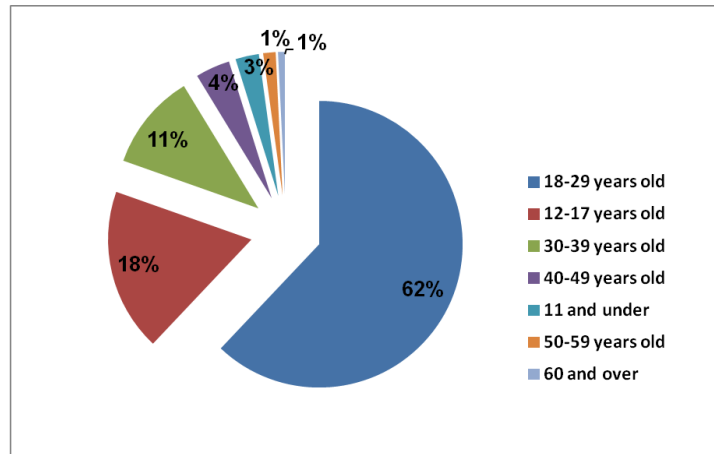
Figure 1: Age of Respondents N=643.

In terms of current work status, the survey revealed that 76.8 percent of library users were students, 13.2 percent were in the workforce, 3.1 percent were homemakers, and 2 percent were retired (Fig. 2). The findings also indicate that more than half of the respondents were high school graduates (56 percent), 22 percent reported that they were K–8 graduates, 11 percent reported that they were 4-year college graduates, 7 percent said that they were 2-year college graduates, 2.6 percent said that they had a masters or doctoral degree, and the remaining 1.6 percent gave no answer. The demographic data indicate that public libraries in Istanbul are used most often by 18–29-year-old female students, who are in the career exploration and development stage of their lives.

In addition, the survey asked the respondents to indicate if they were registered users (members) of a library. The findings regarding membership status are encouraging: over 54 percent of the respondents were currently registered users, a further 6 percent had previously been registered users, and 40 percent had never been registered users of a public library.
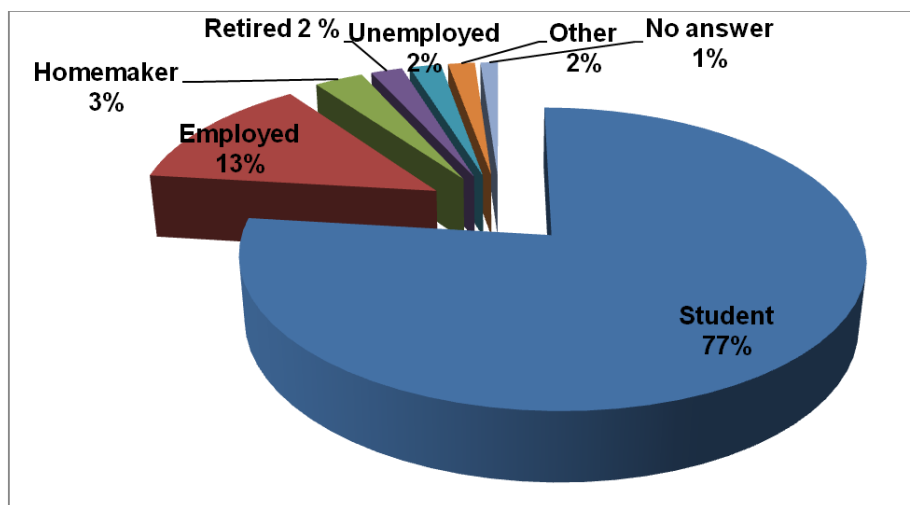

Figure 2: Current Work Status of Respondents N=643.

3.2. Frequency of Use of a Public Library

The respondents were asked how frequently they had used a public library during the past 12 months. The options were: more than once a week, once a week, a few times a month, once a month, a few times a year, this is my first time, or almost never. The majority of respondents (44 percent) indicated that they used the library two or three times a week. The remaining 56 percent were divided among responses of two or three times a month (14.5 percent), once a week (14 percent), a few times a year (12 percent), or once a month (6.7 percent). However, 9 percent of respondents reported that this was either their first use of the library or they had never made use of library services before. The relationship between frequency of use and gender, age, and work status were also examined. There was no any appreciable difference in frequency of visits based on gender, age, or work status, but it is noteworthy that the majority of very frequent users (two or three times a week) were students (77 percent), and surprisingly were in the 18–29 age group (62 percent) (Fig.3). The most common use of the very frequent users was studying (85 percent), as might be expected.

On the other hand, the pattern of frequency of use differed for remote access to public libraries, with more than half (60.7 percent) not visiting remotely at all in the previous 12 months, and about 14.5 percent visiting remotely a few times a year.
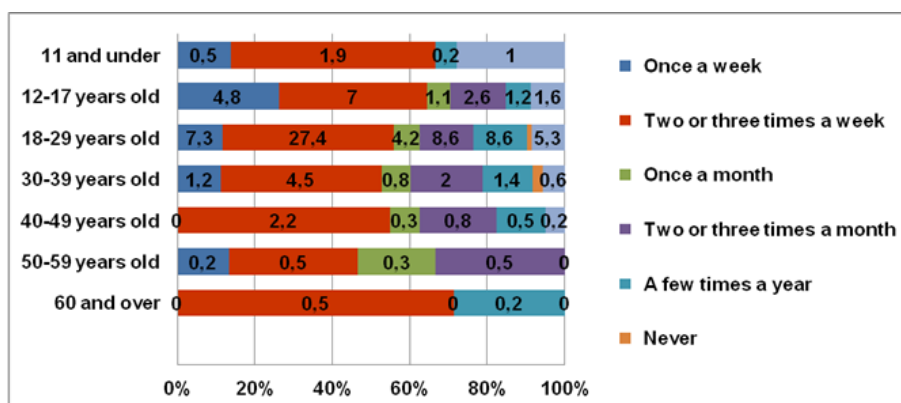

Figure 3: Frequency of Use by Age.

3.3. Reasons for Using a Public Library

All of the respondents were asked to cite all of the reasons why they used the library. The main reasons are depicted in Figure 4. The most popular reason was studying/doing homework (51.3 percent), followed by borrowing or returning (36.1 percent). Other reasons for visiting the library included conducting research (35.5%), reading books, magazines, or newspapers (26.4 percent), or browsing books (13.1 percent). Only eight percent of users cited using a workstation to access the Internet as one of their reasons for visiting the library.

These findings show that the most common reason for visiting a public library is to meet educational needs. This result is consistent with the fact that most public library users in Istanbul are students. The reasons for using public libraries do not seem to differ very much in terms of age, gender, or work status; however, as expected, the majority of users visit libraries for studying purposes, and 73 percent of them are aged between 18 and 29. The male to female ratio is 41.2 to 58.8 percent, indicating that most of the students who visit the library for studying are female.
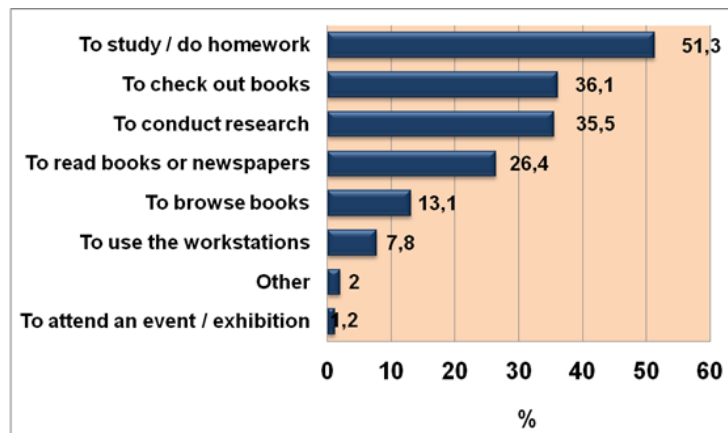

Figure 4: Reasons for Using a Public Library. Percentages may not add to 100% for questions where multiple responses are allowed.

It should be noted that public libraries also serve as school libraries in Turkey, because of the insufficient number of school libraries in the mostly state-run elementary and high schools. This negatively affects the services and facilities of the public libraries. One of the surprising findings of this study is that public libraries are not used by K–8 students, but rather by students in the 18–29 age group. It might be that these students are Open University students, as was explained during a consultation with the director of the Istanbul City Public Library; the director suggested that these students might also be university students preparing for various career development exams (such as the Public Personnel Selection Examination or the Foreign Language Placement Exam) (Acar, 2013).

3.4. Barriers to Using a Public Library

The main reason given by the respondents for not visiting the library regularly in the last 12 months was being too busy (21.5 percent, Figure 5). The next three most frequently cited reasons were: they get information via the Internet, the library is too far from home, or they were unaware of the library services and resources (11.4 percent, 9.3 percent, and 6.8 percent, respectively).
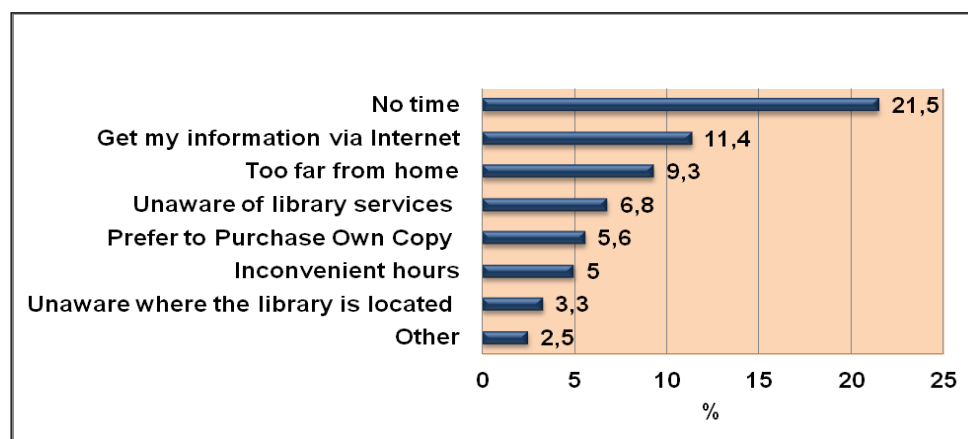
Figure 5. Barriers to Not Using a Public Library.

The participants cited lack of time as the main reason for not visiting the library regularly. However, the reasons for this scarcity of time are not clear, and need to be investigated further. The scarcity could be the result of the demands of modern city life, as well as preferring other sources of widespread public information to visiting libraries, or both. The fact that Turkish people rank highly in terms of Internet usage (Internet World Stat, 2012) and TV watching (RTUK, 2009, p. 38) suggests that the chosen ways to spend free-time have shifted to TV and the Internet, or other web-based services. The fact that the Internet search engines are cited as the main source of information by the survey's participants may be considered as evidence of this (see Figure 6). Almost 10 percent of the respondents stated that the public library is too far from their home. Additionally, being unaware of public library resources and services and the libraries' working hours were also stated as reasons for not visiting libraries. It should be mentioned here that distance from home was also perceived by respondents as a main barrier to not using the library (36 percent) in a nationwide study conducted by the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications (Türkiye, 2011, p. 209). These findings indicate that a lot needs to be done in order to develop contemporary public library services and also promote these services to the public.

3.5. Types of Information Sources

When the respondents were asked to state the main sources they used to obtain information, almost half of them named Internet search engines as their main sources of information; libraries ranked second at 34 percent, followed by bookstores at 11 percent, and family and friends at 4 percent (Figure 6).

The fact that search engines are cited as the main sources of information can be considered a local reflection of the worldwide situation. Rapid innovations in information technology have caused profound changes in social and economic systems—and as part of these systems, libraries are also affected by these changes. It is now possible to store, display, and access huge amounts of information on computers and mobile devices. More importantly, the expectations of users, who are accustomed to fast and easy access to information, have grown accordingly. It

seems inevitable that the public libraries will need to upgrade their services to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the technological innovations.
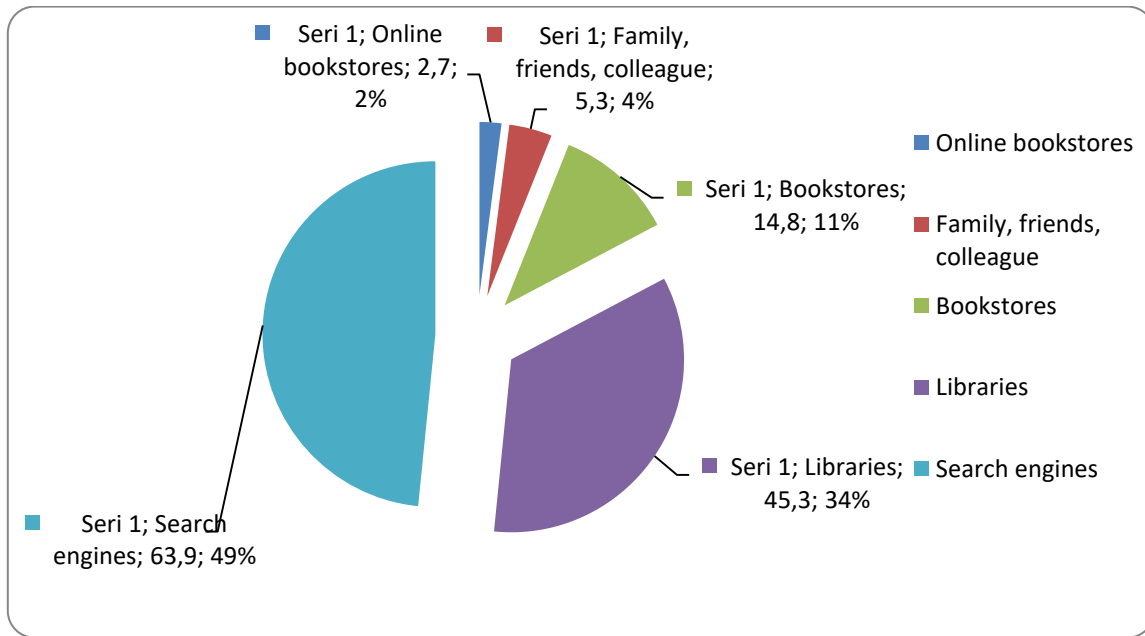

Figure 6. Types of Information Sources.

3.6. Features that would Encourage More Frequent Visits to a Public Library

The majority of the participants (44.3 percent) claimed that they would visit the library more often if the library had more computers with Internet access. Other factors that could increase library visits were as follows: the addition of recent books to the collection (33.6 percent), increasing the opening hours of the library (32 percent), and opening the library on Sundays (29.9 percent). Also, 20 percent stated that they are content with the current situation (Figure 7).

When the answers to this question were evaluated, it became evident that the users claimed they would visit the library more often if there were more computers with Internet access and other online services in the library, if the hours of business were more flexible, and if they could access recent books, CDs, DVDs, and e-books.
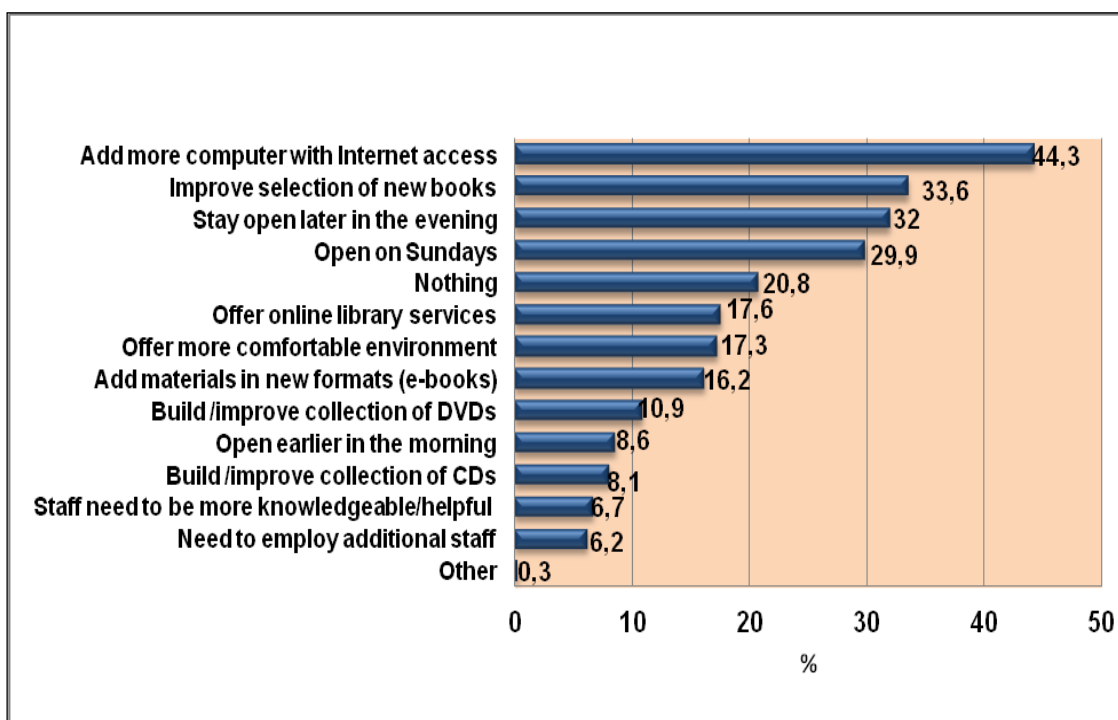
Figure 7. Features that would Encourage More Frequent Visits to a Public Library.

3.7. Perceptions of Library Services, Resources, and Facilities

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the respondents' perceptions of certain library services, resources, and facilities. All respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements about the quality of library services, using a five-point Likert scale, which used scores ranging from "poor" to "excellent".

The survey results indicated that the perceptions of public library users in Istanbul were relatively positive for certain services and resources, and negative for others. Services and resources with relatively positive perceptions included: general attractiveness of the exterior of the library building, ease of access, ease of movement within the library, signs and signage, layout and arrangement, cleanliness, lighting, heating or climate, staff knowledge and helpfulness, and book collection. It should be noted here that in recent years, library renovations and improved interior design have contributed to this positive perception. Services and resources with relatively negative perceptions included: provision of seating and tables, provision of meeting room space, magazine collection, music on CD, DVDs, young adult fiction, young adult non-fiction,

Table 3: Perceptions of Library Services, Resources, and Facilities

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	N/A or Don't Know
General attractiveness of the exterior of the library building	20,7	25,7	**26,3**	15,1	11,8	2,2

Ease of access entering the library	5	27,4	**30**	24,1	13,4	1,8
Ease of movement within the library	7,5	22,1	**32,5**	24,1	13,2	2,6
Signs and signage	15,1	26	**31,6**	17,3	8,9	3,2
Layout and arrangement	16,2	22,2	**30**	17,9	12,9	3,4
Provision of seating and tables	**29,4**	24,6	21,9	14,8	8,1	4,2
The provision of meeting room space	**32,5**	17,3	15,6	6,5	6,1	32,4
Cleanliness	8,7	19,1	**28,3**	24,6	18	3,2
Lighting	9,6	19,1	**29,7**	23,3	17,1	4,7
Heating/cooling	7,6	16,8	**25,7**	24,3	23,6	5
Staff knowledge	5,4	2,8	**16,2**	25,3	17,7	8,7
Staff helpfulness	6,5	13,1	**23,8**	28,3	25,8	5,5
Book collection	19,8	21,2	**22,9**	15,1	14,2	10,9
Magazine collection	**27,8**	18,2	18	10,6	6,7	25,2
Music on CD	**44,3**	10	7	2,3	2,5	45
DVDs	**44,3**	9,5	6,8	2,6	2,5	45
Young adult fiction	**24,4**	21,3	19,4	11,4	5,1	27,4
Young adult non-fiction	**24,6**	20,2	16,8	10,9	5,4	32,5
Children's books	**18,8**	14	13,2	12,8	8,9	42,7
Computers with Internet access	**29,1**	20,5	15,1	10,1	7,3	17,9
Online library services	**24,6**	17,6	14,3	7	7,8	37,7

children's books, computers with Internet access, and online library services. It is also important to state that there is a correlation between the factors that the participants determined as "poor" and the factors that they said would cause them to visit the library more often.

The services that were determined as "poor" may give an idea of how to prioritize the operations that need to be conducted in order to develop the infrastructure of Istanbul's public libraries. According to this, services targeting young people and children, and online services based on web technologies, need to be improved first. A wide range of materials, including print and non-print media, as well as online resources, should be present in a typical public library collection.

3.8. Attitudes towards Public Libraries

Figure 8 shows the respondents' thoughts on the importance of public libraries. They were asked to rate their degree of agreement with the statement, "public libraries play an important role in our communities by providing free and equitable access to information," using a five-point Likert scale. The findings are highly encouraging: almost all of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement (97 percent).
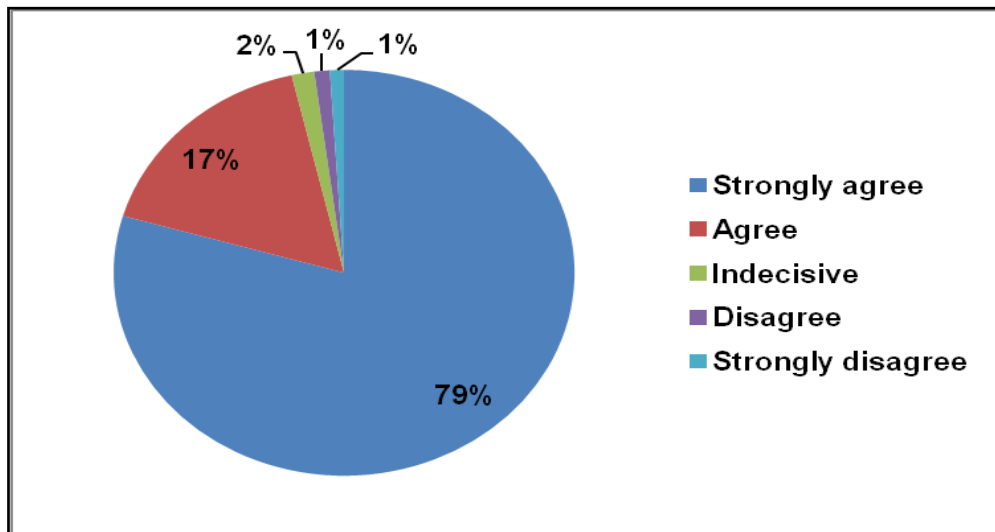
Figure 8. Public Libraries Play an Important Role in Our Communities.

The respondents were also asked to rate their agreement with the statement, "public libraries deserve more financial support," using a three-point Likert scale. A total of 84 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement. Only 6% disagreed with the statement, and 10% were undecided (Fıgure 9). These results are presented graphically in the pie chart below:
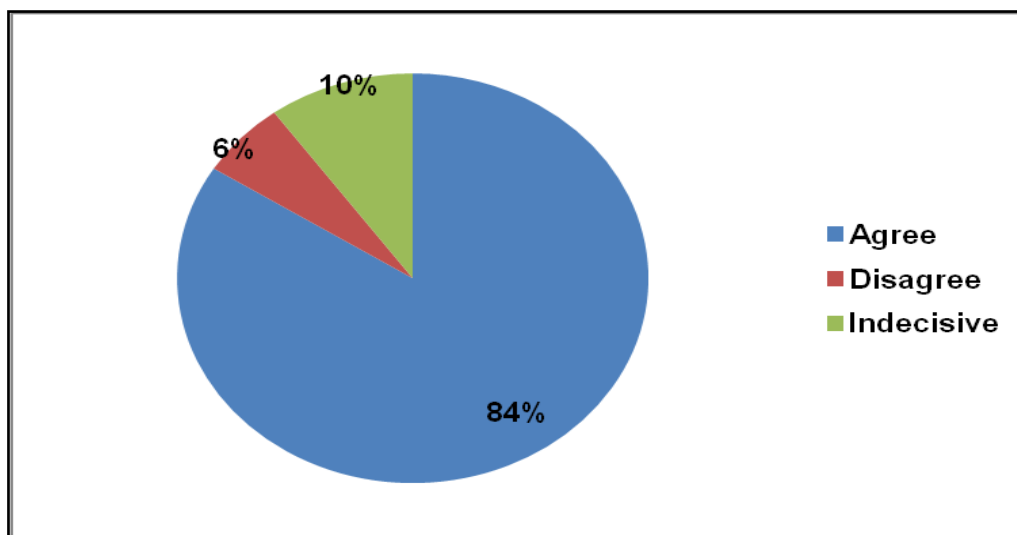

Figure 9. Public Libraries Deserve More Financial Support.

When these two statements were analyzed by age, it was found that almost all age groups included in the survey displayed a positive attitude towards public libraries, but respondents aged 18–29 showed the highest level of response (agree or strongly agree) for the aforementioned two statements (62.7 percent and 62.8 percent, respectively).

4. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore public library users' perceptions and expectations of the quality of library services in Istanbul. A survey was conducted in order to reach this goal; the demographic findings of the survey showed that a typical public library user in Istanbul is a female university student aged between 18 and 29. The majority of the participants in the survey stated that they had visited the library two or more times in the previous year (44 percent), and 51 percent of the users indicated that they visited the library for studying purposes.

Based on these initial findings, it seems that the majority of respondents perceived the library as a place to be visited in person, primarily for educational purposes. It has been proven via public library statistics that public libraries are mostly used by students in Turkey. The idleness of libraries in state-run elementary and high schools is pushing the students to public libraries. A surprising finding of this survey was that most of the students stated that they are enrolled in higher education, rather than elementary or high school. This finding not only indicates that these students prepare for career-related central exams at public libraries, but that they may be enrolled in the Open University.

The Istanbul residents who took part in the survey considered public libraries a fundamental part of society, as they provide free and equal access to information; they also believed that the libraries deserve more financial support. However, they cited the Internet as their main source of information, and avoided libraries because of time shortages, the convenience of the Internet, not living close to a public library, or being unaware of library services. These findings highlight the importance of developing online public library services that will enable easy and fast access to information, and show that the public needs to be more informed about public library services. The services that were perceived as "poor" by the participants coincided with the services that could possibly attract them to libraries. The services that were perceived as "poor" by the users also do not meet professional standards. Users want fast and easy access to library services and a wide range of materials in a variety of formats.

This study's results are specific to the Istanbul area, but they also emphasize two major, intertwined problems of Turkish public libraries in general. The first is the weak infrastructure of public libraries. The infrastructure has to be developed with the help of the latest technology, and particular attention should be paid to prioritizing children's and young people's needs. However, the public libraries also lack the strong legal basis (public library law) needed to enforce these developments. The public library organization in Turkey is in the process of being transferred from a central administration to local administrations. A public library law that will ensure high-quality service and set the service standards has to be determined before this transition. Without such a law, this transfer will only lead to chaos.

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