

Evaluating the usage of E-resources in academic libraries

Sanjay Bhausaheb Jogdand

Kalikadevi Arts, Science and Commerce College Shirur (KA) Tq. Shirur (KA) Dist. Beed, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

Electronic resources (e-resources) have become essential in academic libraries, enabling rapid access to scholarly information beyond print collections. Evaluating how e-resources are used informs collection development, user training, and library planning. This study examines patterns of e-resource usage, factors influencing use, and implications for academic libraries. Data were collected through surveys, usage statistics, and interviews with library users. Analysis shows that academic need, ease of access, and awareness significantly influence e-resource utilization. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing user engagement and optimizing e-resource services.

Keywords: E-resources usage, academic libraries, digital information behavior, user awareness, database utilization

Introduction

The proliferation of electronic resources has transformed academic library operations, enabling users to access journals, e-books, databases, and other digital content anytime and anywhere. E-resources are critical for teaching, learning, and research, and their effective use is a key performance indicator for academic libraries (Tenopir and King, 2004) [7]. Evaluating usage patterns helps librarians understand user behavior, justify expenditures, and tailor instructional support.

This research explores how e-resources are used in academic libraries, what factors influence usage, and how libraries can better support users in navigating and maximizing digital resources.

Literature Review

1. E-Resources in Academic Libraries

E-resources include electronic journals, bibliographic databases, full-text repositories, theses, and multimedia content. Their adoption has grown rapidly due to improvements in information and communication technology (Markey, 2007) [5]. Unlike print collections, e-resources require ongoing subscription management and technical infrastructure.

2. Measuring E-Resource Usage

Usage evaluation commonly involves:

- Statistical measures (e.g., number of downloads, logins, search queries)
- User-centered measures (e.g., surveys on satisfaction, perceived usefulness) Tenopir and King (2004) [7] highlight the importance of combining quantitative usage data with qualitative user feedback to understand actual patterns of information behavior.

3. Factors Influencing Usage

Several studies identified key influences on e-resource use:

- Accessibility (ease of remote access, search interfaces) (Liu, 2009) [4]
- Awareness and training (user familiarity with databases) (Case, 2002) [1]
- Relevance to academic work (alignment with coursework/research needs) (Nicholson, 1998) [6]
- Perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989) [3]

4. Barriers to Effective Use

Barriers include lack of awareness, limited search skills, and inadequate promotion by libraries (Chu, 2003) [2]. These issues can diminish potential benefits, even when resources are available.

Methodology

1. Research Design

A mixed-methods design was used, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive assessment of e-resource usage.

2. Data Collection

Data were collected from a mid-size academic library through:

- User surveys (distributed to undergraduate, postgraduate, and faculty)
- Usage statistics (database download and access logs)
- Interviews with a sample of frequent and infrequent users

3. Sample and Instruments

A total of 200 respondents completed the survey. A semi-structured interview protocol explored users' experiences, search strategies, and perceived barriers.

4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used for quantitative data, and thematic analysis informed interpretation of qualitative responses.

Findings

1. Usage Patterns

Survey results indicate that:

- E-journals** are the most frequently used (78% of respondents)
- Subject databases** follow closely (61%)
- E-books and multimedia resources** are used less frequently (45% and 22%, respectively)

Usage statistics corroborate these patterns, with the highest number of searches and downloads occurring in major journal databases.

2. Influencing Factors

Key influences identified include:

- **Academic requirement:** Students used e-resources more when assignments required scholarly articles.
- **Ease of access:** Users preferred platforms with intuitive interfaces and off-campus access.
- **Training and awareness:** Respondents with prior training reported higher confidence and usage frequency.

3. Barriers Identified

Common challenges included:

- Difficulty in formulating effective search queries
- Limited awareness of specialized databases
- Preference for general search engines over library portals

Interviewees noted that time constraints and lack of instruction contributed to underutilization.

Discussion

The findings align with earlier research emphasizing the importance of both technological access and user competence in shaping e-resource usage. Case (2002) ^[1] observed that user awareness significantly affects how academic communities engage with digital information. Similarly, Tenopir and King (2004) ^[7] argued that combining user training with clear information about available resources enhances meaningful engagement.

The prominence of e-journals reflects the research intensity of academic users, but lower use of e-books and multimedia suggests potential untapped value. Academic libraries must therefore consider differentiated strategies that account for disciplinary preferences and varying information needs.

Barriers related to search proficiency and resource awareness echo Liu's (2009) ^[4] findings on the critical role of information literacy in e-resource usage. Addressing these through structured training and integration of library resources into course curricula can support higher engagement.

Conclusion

Evaluating the usage of e-resources in academic libraries reveals that user behavior is shaped by academic needs, access convenience, and familiarity with digital platforms. E-journals and subject databases dominate usage, but targeted interventions such as user training, improved promotion, and tailored access services can broaden engagement with a wider range of digital resources. Regular assessment of usage patterns and user feedback should be integrated into library planning to ensure e-resource services remain responsive and effective.

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