Analysis of Information-Seeking Behavior and Information Needs of International Students at the University of Tabriz with Special Attention to the University Library

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the information-seeking behavior and information needs of international students at the University of Tabriz.

Methodology: The research is applied in nature and employs a survey method for data collection. The study population consisted of approximately 2,100 international students enrolled at the University of Tabriz at the time of the research. A sample of 325 students was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire.

Findings: Websites and online databases were identified as the primary sources of information for international students. Academic journal articles and books were the most frequently used and preferred information formats. Chi-square test results indicated no significant relationship between students' academic level and their frequency of library visits, suggesting similar usage patterns across different academic levels. However, a significant relationship was found between students' familiarity with the Persian language and their library usage; students with higher proficiency in Persian were more likely to utilize library resources. The most prominent information need identified was related to academic coursework. The greatest barrier reported by international students in using the university library was the limited availability of foreign-language books.

Conclusion: The information-seeking behavior of international students at the University of Tabriz is characterized by a goal-oriented, academically focused, and digitally driven approach. University libraries primarily serve educational purposes for these students, rather than social or recreational functions.

Value: This study provides valuable insights for educational policymakers and librarians at the University of Tabriz, offering guidance to make the library experience more inclusive, accessible, and effective—particularly for international students.

Keywords: *International Students, University of Tabriz, Information Seeking Behavior Information Need, University Library*

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Extended Abstract

Introduction: Information behavior encompasses all actions an individual takes in relation to the acquisition, use, and dissemination of information—whether performed actively and consciously or passively and unintentionally—and includes activities such as seeking, requesting, and utilizing information (Rocha & Casarin, 2023). One group that has garnered significant attention in information behavior research is international students. Their information behavior is particularly noteworthy, as these students must navigate unfamiliar academic and social environments. They often encounter challenges in meeting their informational needs within the host university, which can generally be categorized into linguistic, cultural, and technological barriers. These challenges may significantly affect international students' ability to access both academic and everyday information. Therefore, understanding the information-seeking behavior of international students is critical for planning and providing effective library services and support.

Purpose: This study aims to investigate the information-seeking behavior and information needs of international students at the University of Tabriz. In line with this primary objective, the study seeks to address the following secondary objectives:

- To identify the most important sources of information used by international students at the University of Tabriz.
- To determine the frequency of library use by international students at the University of Tabriz.
- To explore the information needs of international students at the University of Tabriz.
- To identify the main obstacles faced by international students in using academic libraries.
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Methodology: This study is applied in nature and employed a survey design for data collection. The research population consisted of approximately 2,100 international students enrolled at the University of Tabriz as of June 2024. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's sample size table, a total of 325 students were selected using proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure representation across relevant subgroups. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, prepared in three languages—Persian, Arabic, and English—and consisting of 22 items. The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using the test–retest method with 30 respondents, yielding a correlation coefficient of 0.91, which confirmed high reliability. Content and face validity were assessed and verified through expert review by professors specializing in Knowledge and Information Science. For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. Descriptive statistics summarized participants' responses, while inferential analyses—including population proportion estimation and chi-square tests—were used to examine relationships between variables and test hypotheses.

Findings: Websites and online databases were identified as the highest-priority sources of information for international students at the University of Tabriz (88.78%), whereas radio and television were ranked as the least-used sources (15.06%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Primary Information Sources for International Students at University of Tabriz

Information Source	Frequency	Percentage	95% CI (Low)	95% CI (High)	Standard Deviation
Websites and databases	277	88.78%	85.26%	91.99%	0.31
Professors	150	48.08%	43.63%	53.21%	0.50
Library	127	40.71%	35.26%	46.15%	0.49
Friends	113	36.80%	31.09%	41.35%	0.48
Social media	77	24.68%	19.87%	29.80%	0.43
Radio and television	47	15.06%	11.22%	18.91%	0.35

Respondents reported using a variety of information formats. Scholarly journal articles were the most frequently used format (61.22%), followed closely by books (59.94%). Although most participants used both print and electronic resources, reliance on electronic formats was notably higher than on print materials.

In terms of library usage, 217 students (69.55%) reported having visited the university library, while 95 students (30.45%) indicated that they had not. The results of the chi-square test revealed no statistically significant relationship between students' academic level and the frequency of library visits. However, students with higher proficiency in the Persian language were more likely to visit the library, and a statistically significant relationship was confirmed between Persian language familiarity and library use. The primary reason for international students' visits to university libraries was to access information resources for educational and course-related purposes, accounting for 50.69% of responses. This was followed by research-related information needs (50.23%). Regarding overall information needs, curriculum-related information ranked highest (44.87%), while economic information needs were the least reported (3.53%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Information Needs of International Students at University of Tabriz

Information Need	Frequency	Percentage	95% CI (Low)	95% CI (High)	Standard Deviation
Academic curriculum	140	44.87%	39.35%	50.42%	0.49
Continuing education	131	41.99%	36.57%	47.47%	0.49
Course assignments	118	37.82%	32.52%	48.52%	0.37
Research	72	23.08%	16.22%	25.56%	0.40
Science and technology	65	20.83%	16.22%	25.56%	0.40
General knowledge	61	19.55%	15.02%	24.26%	0.39
Business	48	15.38%	11.39%	20.44%	0.36
Everyday life information	48	15.38%	11.39%	20.44%	0.36
Sports	38	12.18%	8.57%	17.06%	0.32
Health	33	10.58%	7.13%	15.41%	0.31
Literature and fiction	29	9.29%	6.01%	14.11%	0.29
Entertainment	27	8.65%	5.53%	13.45%	0.28
Politics	20	6.41%	3.80%	10.72%	0.24
Artistic content	20	6.41%	3.80%	10.72%	0.24
Economic content	11	3.53%	1.83%	6.80%	0.18

Finally, 44.47% of international students reported experiencing obstacles or difficulties when using the university libraries, while 52.56% indicated that they encountered no problems. The most frequently reported challenges, in descending order, were the shortage of foreign-language books, difficulties in the process of ordering required information resources, and the outdated nature of some information resources.

Conclusion: The information behavior of international students at the University of Tabriz can be characterized as goal-oriented, academically focused, and predominantly digital-driven. For these students, university libraries primarily function as educational and academic support centers rather than as social or service-oriented spaces.

Value: This study provides valuable insights for educational policymakers and university librarians at the University of Tabriz by highlighting the specific information needs, behaviors, and challenges of international students. The findings can inform the development of more inclusive, responsive, and user-centered library services, ultimately enhancing international students' academic experiences and satisfaction.

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