

# Reading Priorities among Library Users at Vellalar Educational Institutions, Erode

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## ABSTRACT

College libraries play a crucial role in supporting teaching, learning, and research by providing access to diverse information resources. In the digital era, continuous improvement of both print and electronic collections has become essential to meet evolving user needs. The present study examines the reading priorities, library usage patterns, and engagement with digital resources among students, research scholars, and faculty members of the Vellalar Educational Institutions, Erode, Tamil Nadu. Data were collected from 190 respondents using a structured questionnaire covering reading preferences, frequency and purpose of library visits, satisfaction with library services, and awareness of digital platforms. The findings reveal that printed books, particularly subject-related texts, remain the most preferred study material (61.6%), and English is the dominant reading language (82.6%). Significant associations were observed between institutional affiliation, frequency of library visits, and main purpose of visits and satisfaction with library resources, while seeking assistance from library staff was significantly associated with frequency of borrowing books. Most users visit the library weekly, primarily for reference purposes and computer or internet use. In contrast, the usage of e-resources such as e-books, e-journals, and CDs/DVDs remains limited. The study highlights the need to strengthen digital collections, enhance user awareness programmes, and implement NEP 2020-aligned initiatives to support changing academic requirements. The findings provide insights for effective library resource planning, service improvement, and future research.

**Keywords:** Reading Priority, Library Users, Higher Educational Institution, Library usage, Library Awareness, NEP 2020, Digital Resources, Information seeking behaviour.

## INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries continue to play a central role in higher education by facilitating access to information, supporting independent learning, and promoting research activities. They function not only as repositories of knowledge but also as dynamic learning spaces that contribute to the academic development of students and faculty alike<sup>1</sup>. In recent years, the rapid digital transformation of education—accelerated further by the COVID-19 pandemic—has significantly influenced how information is accessed, read, and utilised within academic environments. Alongside this transformation, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places strong emphasis on self-directed learning, digital literacy, and equitable access to diverse learning resources, thereby expanding the responsibilities of academic libraries<sup>2,3</sup>.

Traditionally, academic libraries focused primarily on providing printed textbooks and reference materials to support curriculum-based learning. However, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed a shift in information dissemination with the increasing availability of electronic resources. Digital formats such as e-books, e-journals, and online databases have addressed several limitations associated with print materials, including physical accessibility and storage constraints. At the same time, studies continue to report that print and digital resources coexist within academic settings, each serving different learning preferences and purposes<sup>4,5</sup>. Effective integration of both formats has therefore become a key concern for library professionals.

Despite the availability of digital resources, their effective utilisation depends largely on user awareness and information literacy. Researchers have emphasised the importance of orientation programmes and awareness workshops to familiarise users with electronic resources and online access tools<sup>6</sup>. Several studies have also highlighted persistent challenges such as lack of reading motivation, limited research interest, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient institutional support, all of which restrict optimal library usage<sup>7</sup>. In this context, librarians play a vital role by guiding users, simplifying access to resources, and providing personalised assistance that enhances overall library engagement<sup>8,9</sup>.

Previous studies on reading habits and information-seeking behaviour have mostly focused on single institutions or specific user groups. For instance, postgraduate students were found to rely predominantly on printed newspapers and web searching<sup>10</sup>, while higher usage of books among students and greater reliance on journals by faculty members were reported in a pharmacy college setting<sup>5</sup>. Although such studies offer valuable insights, there is limited research examining reading behaviour and library usage across multiple institutions functioning under a single educational trust. This gap necessitates a broader investigation into user preferences, frequency of library use, and satisfaction levels across diverse academic categories.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the reading priorities and library usage patterns of students, research scholars, and faculty members across the Vellalar Educational Institutions, Erode, as illustrated in Figure 1, and provides evidence to support the development of responsive library services in the digital age.

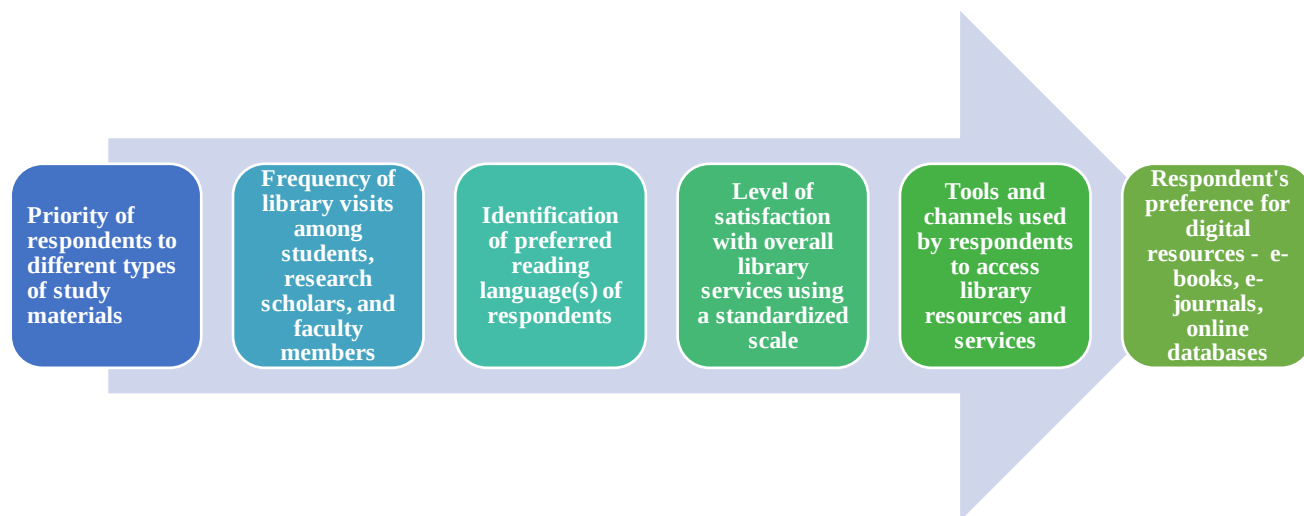


**Figure 1 A Schematic illustration describing the outline of current study**

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine reading patterns, preferences, and library usage among students, research scholars, and faculty members of the Vellalar Educational Institutions, Erode. The design was selected to systematically gather quantifiable data on library behavior across multiple user groups<sup>11,12</sup>.

### Population and Sampling

The target population comprised library users of the Vellalar Educational Institutions, Erode, including undergraduate students, postgraduate students, research scholars, and faculty members. The questionnaire was distributed electronically through Google Forms to library users across the constituent institutions. Participation was voluntary, and respondents who chose to participate and completed the questionnaire were included in the study. A total of 190 valid responses were received from the five constituent institutions:

Vellalar College for Women, Vellalar College of Pharmacy, VET Institute of Arts and Science, Vellalar College of Engineering and Technology, and Vellalar College of Education.

As the respondents participated voluntarily through the circulated online questionnaire, the study employed a voluntary response sampling approach rather than probability-based simple random sampling. The distribution of respondents across institutions and user categories therefore reflects the response pattern obtained during the data-collection period and should not be interpreted as proportionate representation of the entire library-user population.

## Questionnaire Design

A structured questionnaire was developed and validated for clarity and reliability through a pilot test on 15 respondents<sup>13, 14</sup>. The instrument comprised these sections:

1. Demographics: Age, gender, academic category, and institution.
2. Reading Preferences: Priority of study materials (books, journals, newspapers, e-resources), types of books, and preferred reading language.
3. Satisfaction Levels: Overall satisfaction with library services was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Very Dissatisfied to Very Satisfied.<sup>15,16</sup>

## Data Collection

Data were collected *via* Google Forms, ensuring convenient access, anonymity, and efficient response compilation. Collection spanned two weeks, with reminders sent to maximize participation<sup>17,18</sup>.

## Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including percentages and graphical representations, were used to summarize and interpret the data<sup>19,20</sup>. Responses were analyzed across all variables, covering reading preferences, library usage frequency, priority of study materials, and satisfaction levels. Category-wise distributions (institution, gender, academic level) were presented in tables, and trends in the use of physical and digital resources were identified.

Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests were applied to examine associations between categorical variables, including gender, academic category, and institution, frequency of library visits, resource preferences, and satisfaction levels. All analyses were conducted at a 5% significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ) to identify significant variations in library usage behavior and user perceptions across different groups.

## Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and no personally identifiable data were collected. The study adhered to standard research ethics protocols.

## Results and Discussion

A total of 190 responses were received from Vellalar group of Institutions as listed in Table 1 after the questionnaire was circulated *via* Google Form. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify trends and patterns in the information-seeking behavior of Vellalar group of Institutions.

**Table 1 Demographic profile of Respondents (N=190)**

| Variable    | Category                     | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Institution | Vellalar College for Women   | 109           | 57.4           |
|             | Vellalar College of Pharmacy | 41            | 21.5           |

|                   |                                                |     |      |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----|------|
|                   | VET Institute of Arts and Science              | 21  | 11.1 |
|                   | Vellalar College of Engineering and Technology | 12  | 6.3  |
|                   | Vellalar College of Education                  | 7   | 3.7  |
| Gender            | Male                                           | 24  | 12.6 |
|                   | Female                                         | 166 | 87.4 |
| Age group (years) | 18–23                                          | 139 | 73.2 |
|                   | 23–30                                          | 24  | 12.6 |
|                   | 31–35                                          | 5   | 2.6  |
|                   | 36–40                                          | 7   | 3.7  |
|                   | 40–45                                          | 10  | 5.3  |
|                   | 45 and above                                   | 5   | 2.6  |
| Designation       | Undergraduate students                         | 97  | 51.1 |
|                   | Postgraduate students                          | 52  | 27.4 |
|                   | Research scholars                              | 9   | 4.7  |
|                   | Assistant Professors                           | 27  | 14.2 |
|                   | Associate Professors                           | 5   | 2.6  |

The demographic profile (Table 1) indicates that the majority of respondents were **undergraduate and postgraduate students**, with females constituting a substantial proportion of the sample. Most participants belonged to the **18–23 age group**, reflecting the student-dominated nature of the institutions. Respondents were drawn from multiple institutions under the Vellalar Educational Trust, providing representation across different academic settings and patterns of library exposure. Similar demographic patterns have been reported in institutional library-use studies in Indian higher education, where student populations dominate survey responses<sup>21,22</sup>.

### Priority Levels of Reading and Using Study Materials

Table 2 indicates that printed books received the highest proportion of “very high” priority ratings among all study materials, highlighting their continued importance for intensive and sustained academic reading. Newspapers and printed journals also showed relatively higher preference compared to purely digital formats. In contrast, e-books, e-journals, online newspapers, and other electronic materials received predominantly neutral to moderate priority ratings, indicating cautious or selective adoption of digital resources.

This finding reinforces evidence from recent studies suggesting that, despite increased availability of digital resources, print materials continue to play a central role in academic reading, particularly for sustained and in-depth learning<sup>23,24</sup>. The moderate prioritization of electronic resources suggests a hybrid reading environment, where digital formats complement rather than replace print, a trend widely observed in post-pandemic academic contexts<sup>25,26</sup>.

**Table 2 Priority Levels of Reading and Using Study Materials (N = 190)**

| Study Material                                | Very Low n (%) | Low n (%) | Neutral n (%) | High n (%) | Very High n (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|------------|-----------------|
| Books                                         | 48 (25.3)      | 26 (13.7) | 32 (16.8)     | 31 (16.3)  | 53 (27.9)       |
| E-books                                       | 32 (16.8)      | 53 (27.9) | 43 (22.6)     | 45 (23.7)  | 17 (8.9)        |
| Newspapers                                    | 41 (21.6)      | 31 (16.3) | 41 (21.6)     | 46 (24.2)  | 31 (16.3)       |
| Online newspapers                             | 35 (18.4)      | 48 (25.3) | 48 (25.3)     | 45 (23.7)  | 14 (7.4)        |
| Journals                                      | 27 (14.2)      | 46 (24.2) | 51 (26.8)     | 41 (21.6)  | 25 (13.2)       |
| Magazines                                     | 22 (11.6)      | 41 (21.6) | 60 (31.6)     | 46 (24.2)  | 21 (11.1)       |
| E-journals / E-magazines                      | 34 (17.9)      | 42 (22.1) | 54 (28.4)     | 40 (21.1)  | 20 (10.5)       |
| CDs / DVDs                                    | 56 (29.5)      | 31 (16.3) | 54 (28.4)     | 30 (15.8)  | 19 (10.0)       |
| E-materials (other than e-journals & e-books) | 37 (19.5)      | 51 (26.8) | 44 (23.2)     | 35 (18.4)  | 23 (12.1)       |
| Theses / Dissertations                        | 39 (20.5)      | 45 (23.7) | 56 (29.5)     | 31 (16.3)  | 19 (10.0)       |

## Factors influencing reading behaviour of respondents

As shown in Table 3, **English emerged as the dominant language for reading academic materials**, while print newspapers were overwhelmingly preferred over online newspapers. Books were identified as the top priority reading material among respondents, further emphasizing the continued relevance of traditional formats. These results align with earlier research indicating that English remains the primary academic language in Indian higher education, while print newspapers retain relevance for habitual and contextual reading<sup>27,28</sup>. Preference for print newspapers may also be attributed to reading comfort, credibility perception, and ease of access within campus libraries.

It is reported that most respondents visited the library once or twice a week, while a smaller proportion reported daily visits. The primary purpose of library visits was reference use, followed by borrowing books and engaging in multiple activities during a single visit. Use of computers and internet facilities was reported by a comparatively smaller segment. These findings suggest that academic libraries continue to function as knowledge and reference hubs, rather than merely as access points for digital infrastructure. Similar patterns have been observed in Indian and international studies, where reference consultation and book borrowing remain dominant motivations for library visits<sup>29,30</sup>.

**Table 3 Language Preference, Reading Format, Frequency, Purpose of visit and Sources of Information Accessed of the Respondents (N = 190)**

| Reading Preference Variable               | Category                    | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| First priority language for reading books | Tamil                       | 33            | 17.4           |
|                                           | English                     | 157           | 82.6           |
| Preferred format for reading newspapers   | Print newspaper             | 171           | 90.0           |
|                                           | Online newspaper            | 19            | 10.0           |
| Top priority reading material             | Books                       | 117           | 61.6           |
|                                           | Newspapers                  | 31            | 16.3           |
|                                           | Journals and magazines      | 42            | 22.1           |
| Frequency of Visit                        | Daily once                  | 42            | 22.1           |
|                                           | Daily twice or more         | 9             | 4.7            |
|                                           | Once in a week              | 63            | 33.2           |
|                                           | Twice in a week             | 42            | 22.1           |
|                                           | Monthly once                | 32            | 16.8           |
|                                           | Other                       | 2             | 1.1            |
| Main Purpose of Visit to the Library      | Borrowing books             | 47            | 24.8           |
|                                           | Reference                   | 86            | 45.3           |
|                                           | Attending events/ Workshops | 3             | 1.6            |
|                                           | Using computers/ Internet   | 51            | 26.9           |
|                                           | Meeting with study groups   | 3             | 1.4            |

Table 4 demonstrates that institutional affiliation, frequency of library visits, and main purpose of library visits were significantly associated with satisfaction towards library resources. Conversely, language preference, type of reading material, and sources of information accessed did not show statistically significant associations. These findings suggest that actual engagement with library services, rather than demographic or preference-based factors, plays a crucial role in shaping user satisfaction. Similar conclusions have been reported in service quality studies, where frequency of use and task-oriented engagement strongly influence perceptions of library effectiveness<sup>31</sup>.

The significant association observed between frequency of seeking staff assistance and frequency of borrowing books underscores the importance of professional support in enhancing library usage. Users who frequently sought assistance were more likely to borrow books regularly. This result is consistent with prior research emphasizing that human mediation remains a critical component of library service quality, even in

technologically advanced environments<sup>32,33</sup>. Effective staff support not only facilitates access to resources but also enhances user confidence and engagement.

**Table 4 Association between Library Usage Behavior and Satisfaction with Library Resources (N = 190)**

| Library Usage Variable                                                               | $\chi^2$ value | Df | p-value | Result          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----|---------|-----------------|
| Institution                                                                          | 35.143         | 16 | 0.004   | Significant*    |
| Frequency of library visit                                                           | 47.976         | 20 | <0.001  | Significant*    |
| Main purpose of library visit                                                        | 48.158         | 32 | 0.033   | Significant*    |
| Sources of information accessed                                                      | 12.140         | 16 | 0.734   | Not significant |
| First priority reading language                                                      | 6.986          | 4  | 0.137   | Not significant |
| Top priority reading material                                                        | 8.854          | 8  | 0.355   | Not significant |
| Frequency of seeking assistance from library staff<br>× Frequency of borrowing books | 35.992         | 16 | 0.003   | Significant*    |

Note:  $p < 0.05$  indicates statistical significance.

**Table 5 Mean Satisfaction Scores and Association between Respondent Characteristics, Library Usage Variables and Satisfaction with Library Resources (N = 190)**

| Respondent Category           | Range of Mean Satisfaction Score | $\chi^2$ / Test statistic | df | p-value | Result          |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|----|---------|-----------------|
| Institution                   | 1.43 – 2.46                      | $\chi^2 = 35.143$         | 16 | 0.004   | Significant*    |
| Gender                        | 2.00 – 2.29                      | $\chi^2 = 6.557$          | 4  | 0.161   | Not significant |
| Age group                     | 1.29 – 2.20                      | $\chi^2 = 19.490$         | 20 | 0.490   | Not significant |
| Designation                   | 1.70 – 2.40                      | $\chi^2 = 20.285$         | 16 | 0.208   | Not significant |
| Frequency of library visit    | 1.89 – 3.50                      | $\chi^2 = 47.976$         | 20 | <0.001  | Significant*    |
| Main purpose of library visit | 1.90 – 3.33                      | $\chi^2 = 48.158$         | 32 | 0.033   | Significant*    |

Note:  $p < 0.05$  indicates statistical significance.

Table 5 summarizes the range of mean satisfaction scores and the association between respondent characteristics, library usage variables, and satisfaction with library resources. Significant associations were observed between satisfaction and institution, frequency of library visits, and main purpose of library visits. In contrast, gender, age group, and designation did not show statistically significant associations with satisfaction. The findings indicate that satisfaction with library resources was more closely associated with patterns of library engagement and institutional affiliation than with the demographic characteristics examined. The mean satisfaction scores provide descriptive information about the variation in satisfaction levels across categories, while the chi-square results indicate whether the observed associations were statistically significant.

## FINDINGS

### Reading Preferences

- Respondents continue to favor physical books, especially for academic study, highlighting the enduring role of print in learning.
- Journals and magazines attract moderate interest, while newspapers are less frequently consulted.
- English dominates as the language of reading, reflecting curriculum requirements and academic focus.

### Digital Resource Usage

- E-books, e-journals, and online newspapers receive mixed engagement, with many respondents rating them low or neutral in priority.
- Other e-materials, including CDs/DVDs, received relatively low priority, indicating limited use of these formats.
- Overall, digital resources are used less frequently when compared to traditional print materials.

## Library Visit Patterns

- Most respondents visit the library once a week, primarily for reference purposes or using computers/internet.
- Borrowing books is a secondary reason for visits, while attending events or study group meetings is minimal.
- Undergraduates and female respondents constituted the largest groups in the sample, reflecting the demographic composition of the respondents.

## Satisfaction with Library Services

- Satisfaction was significantly associated with the frequency of library visits and the main purpose of library visits.
- Institutional affiliation, frequency of library visits, and main purpose of visits were significantly associated with satisfaction, whereas gender, age group, and designation did not show statistically significant associations.
- Frequency of seeking assistance from library staff was significantly associated with frequency of borrowing books, highlighting the importance of professional support.
- Findings suggest opportunities to improve digital resources and increase user awareness to enhance overall satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

The study shows that print books continue to play an important role in the reading preferences of library users across the Vellalar Educational Institutions, while the use of digital resources remains comparatively limited. Library visits are primarily associated with reference needs and computer/internet use, indicating that libraries continue to serve both traditional and digital information needs. Satisfaction is significantly associated with institutional affiliation, frequency of library visits, and the main purpose of library visits, while the demographic characteristics examined do not show significant associations with satisfaction. The findings highlight the need for libraries to strengthen digital collections, improve awareness of available e-resources, and provide appropriate user support. A balanced approach that maintains relevant print collections while enhancing digital access and information support can help libraries respond more effectively to the changing information needs of their users. These measures are also consistent with the emphasis on technology-enabled learning and equitable access to information under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

### Limitations

- The study was conducted only in Vellalar Educational Institutions, limiting generalizability.
- The questionnaire was circulated through Google Forms, and participation was voluntary. The final sample showed higher representation of female and undergraduate respondents, reflecting the composition of the respondents who participated in the survey.
- Data were collected via self-reported questionnaires, introducing potential response bias.
- Inferential statistical analysis was limited to chi-square tests, and advanced multivariate techniques were not employed to explore deeper relationships.

### Future Scope

- Future research could adopt qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, to understand users' motivations, preferences, and challenges in interacting with library resources.
- Comparative studies across other institutions or regions could provide insights into broader patterns of library use and reading behavior.

- Advanced statistical analyses, including multivariate methods, could reveal deeper relationships between user characteristics, resource preferences, and library engagement.
- Investigating the impact of digital literacy programs and post-pandemic changes in library services could shed light on how users engage with both print and electronic resources over time.

### Research Contribution

This study offers valuable insights into library usage and reading patterns within the Vellalar Educational Institutions, contributing to the field of Library and Information Science in several ways:

1. **Multi-Institution Perspective:** Unlike studies that focus on a single college, this research provides a comparative view across multiple institutions under the Vellalar Educational Trust, highlighting variations in reading preferences and library engagement.
2. **Digital Resource Insights:** The study identifies gaps in the use of e-resources and online materials, offering evidence to guide digital collection development, resource planning, and modernization of library services.
3. **Understanding User Behavior:** By analyzing reading language, preferred materials, and library visit patterns, the research provides a detailed picture of user behavior, which can inform strategic resource allocation and service improvement.
4. **Policy and Practice Implications:** Findings support NEP 2020-aligned initiatives, such as digital literacy programs, library orientation sessions, and outreach efforts, helping institutions design user-centric library services.
5. **Foundation for Future Research:** The study establishes baseline data for subsequent research on hybrid library usage, digital engagement, and post-pandemic academic behaviors, facilitating further exploration of evolving library practices.

### Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Chatgpt in order to restructure certain sentences for better articulation. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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