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FACULTY PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL INFORMATION ACCESS: A STUDY OF ARTS AND SCIENCE COLLEGES IN THOOTHUKUDI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

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Abstract
Digital information resources have become central to teaching, research and professional development in higher education. This study examines how faculty members of arts and science colleges in Thoothukudi District, Tamil Nadu, access digital information. A survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire, and responses were obtained from 782 faculty members. Of these, 579 (74.04%) were female and 203 (25.96%) were male; 568 (72.63%) were assistant professors and 214 (27.37%) were associate professors. The study covers the faculty's frequency and purpose of access, the sources preferred, the problems encountered and the level of satisfaction. The findings of the study was the purpose of using digital information, as this was a multiple-response question, the 782 respondents gave 1198 responses, of which 774 came from Assistant Professors and 424 from Associate Professors. the findings show that Google is the preferred search engine of the faculty members, followed by Yahoo, while the other search engines are used by small minorities. The findings show that the faculty members mostly search by title, author name and subject heading, and that the use of keywords, Boolean operators and advanced search is limited. Libraries should therefore organize training in keyword selection, Boolean operators and advanced search techniques, so that faculty can retrieve digital information more precisely and recommends better infrastructure, regular training and stronger library support for digital access.

Keywords: Digital information access; Faculty; Arts and science colleges; E-resources; Information-seeking behaviour; Thoothukudi District

1. Introduction

The shift from print to digital media has changed how academics find, evaluate and use information. Electronic journals, e-books, databases, institutional repositories, open educational resources and web-based search tools now give faculty rapid access to current knowledge, irrespective of location. For college teachers, these resources support lesson preparation, curriculum updating, research, publication and career advancement.

In India, initiatives such as the UGC-INFONET, INFLIBNET's N-LIST programme, e-ShodhSindhu, SWAYAM and the National Digital Library have widened access for affiliated and aided colleges. However, access does not always lead to effective use. Differences in awareness, skills, infrastructure, institutional support and personal circumstances shape how faculty actually reach and use digital information. Understanding these patterns is essential for library professionals and administrators who plan and evaluate e-resource services.

Thoothukudi District, in southern Tamil Nadu, has a good number of arts and science colleges that serve a large student population from urban, semi-urban and rural backgrounds. Little systematic evidence exists on how the faculty of these colleges access digital information. This study aims to fill that gap by presenting the faculty's own perspectives.

2. Need for the study

Digital information is now central to teaching and research in higher education, yet its value depends on how easily faculty can actually access it. Government aided arts and science colleges in semi-urban and rural districts face challenges such as uneven connectivity, limited subscriptions and varying digital literacy, while earlier studies have focused mainly on universities, professional institutions and metropolitan regions. Faculty in the arts and science colleges of Thoothukudi district remain under-researched, and their perspectives on access, barriers and satisfaction, which may differ by gender and designation, are not well documented. With NEP 2020 and NAAC accreditation placing greater emphasis on digital engagement and research output, evidence on the present position is essential for librarians, college managements and policymakers. This study is therefore needed to fill this gap and to support better digital resources, services and user training in the colleges of the district.

2. Review of Literature

Prabakaran, Ravichandran, Sathiyamurthy and Vijayakumar (2010) carried out a user study of faculty members in two arts and science colleges in Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu. They examined the faculty's information requirements, how useful the library resources and services were, and the problems the faculty encountered. The study treats information access patterns as a core part of user studies. Rajangam and Sivaraman (2017) examined the information search pattern of faculty members from government arts and science colleges affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli. The article was published in the *International Journal of Library & Information Science*, volume 6, number 6. Its population matches yours closely: college teachers in arts and science institutions in Tamil Nadu. It is therefore the most directly comparable earlier study, and you may wish to compare your results on search patterns and access with its findings. Haleem, A., Javaid, M., Qadri, M. A., & Suman, R. (2022). Made a study on Understanding the role of digital technologies in education: A review. This review established that academic level is closely associated with patterns of e-resource use, and that preferences for resource formats vary based on ease of use, relevance, and timeliness of information. Sivaraman P and Rajangam C (2017) made an attempt to examine the extent of use of library facilities and services by the faculty members of selected arts and science government aided colleges affiliated to Bharathidasan University by exploring the purposes of seeking and collecting required information; preference of utilizing information resources and services; the users' satisfaction on the services provided by the selected libraries; and to identify the problems associated with information seeking. A total of 512 faculty members from eight colleges were surveyed through questionnaire. It was found that majority of the respondents are satisfied with the resources and services available in the selected libraries.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. Describe the demographic profile of faculty members of arts and science colleges in Thoothukudi District.
2. Identify the devices, locations and networks used to access digital information.

3. Determine the frequency of access and the purposes for which digital information is used.
4. Find out the types of digital sources preferred by the faculty.
5. Examine the problems faced in accessing digital information and the level of satisfaction with the access facilities.
6. Suggest measures for improving digital information access.

4. Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between male and female faculty in their access to digital information.
2. There is no significant difference between assistant professors and associate professors in their access to digital information.

5. Methodology

A descriptive survey method was adopted. The population comprised faculty members teaching in arts and science colleges in Thoothukudi District. A structured questionnaire was prepared covering personal details, awareness, access points, frequency, purpose, preferred sources, problems and satisfaction, mostly on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed to the faculty, and 782 completed responses were obtained and used for analysis. The data were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation), together with chi-square test.

6. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Of the 782 respondents, 579 (74.04%) were female and 203 (25.96%) were male, so nearly three-fourths of the sample consisted of women. This reflects the predominance of women faculty in the aided arts and science colleges of the district. By designation, 568 respondents (72.63%) were assistant professors and 214 (27.37%) were associate professors. The majority of the respondents were therefore at the entry and middle levels of the academic cadre. Since this composition affects the generalisation of results, the findings are interpreted with it in mind.

7. Analaysis and Discussion

Table 7.1 Distribution of respondents based on hours spent per week for searching of digital information.

S.N	Time Spent	Assistant Professors	Associate Professors	Total
1	Less than 2 hours	179 (31.51)	49 (22.90)	228 (29.16)
2	2-4 hours	138 (24.30)	56 (26.17)	194 (24.81)
3	4-6 hours	94 (16.55)	45 (21.03)	139 (17.77)
4	6-8 hours	62 (10.92)	25 (11.68)	87 (11.13)
5	8-10 hours	49 (8.63)	21 (9.81)	70 (8.95)
6	More than 10 hours	46 (8.10)	18 (8.41)	64 (8.18)
	Total	**568 (72.63)**	**214 (27.37)**	**782 (100.00)**

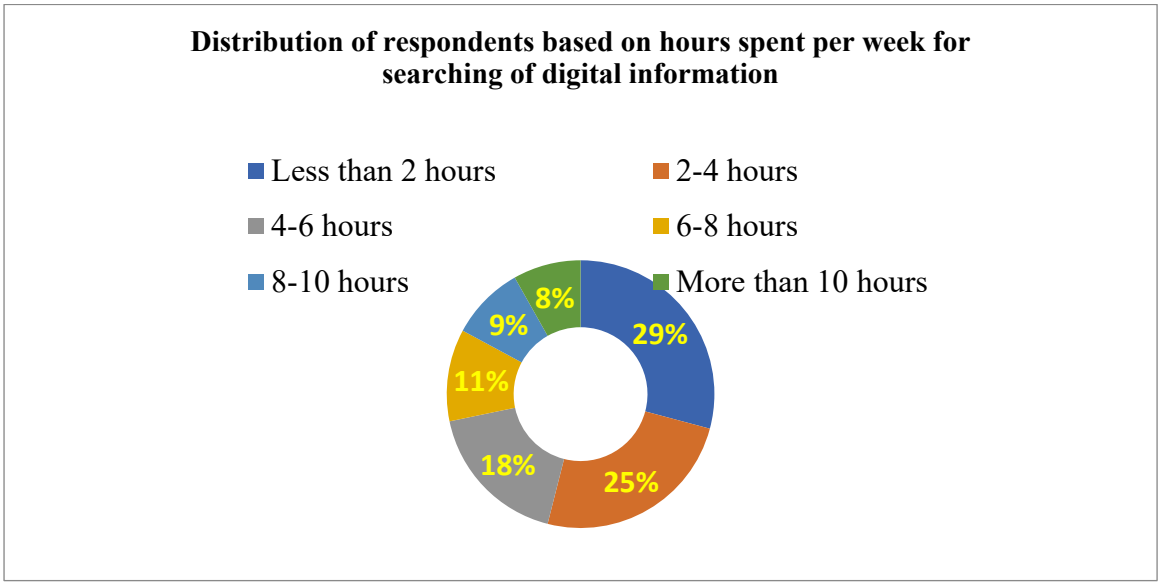


Table7.1 Distribution of respondents based on hours spent per week for searching of digital information.

Table 7.1 shows the distribution of the respondents by the time they spend on digital information per day. Of the 782 respondents, 568 (72.63%) are Assistant Professors and 214 (27.37%) are Associate Professors.

The largest group, 228 respondents (29.16%), spends less than 2 hours, followed by 194 (24.81%) who spend 2-4 hours and 139 (17.77%) who spend 4-6 hours. The remaining groups are 6-8 hours (87, 11.13%), 8-10 hours (70, 8.95%) and more than 10 hours (64, 8.18%). More than half of the respondents (422, 53.96%) spend less than 4 hours, and 561 (71.74%) spend less than 6 hours. Only 221 respondents (28.26%) spend more than 6 hours, and 134 (17.14%) spend more than 8 hours. The proportion falls steadily as the time increases, so most faculty members are moderate users.

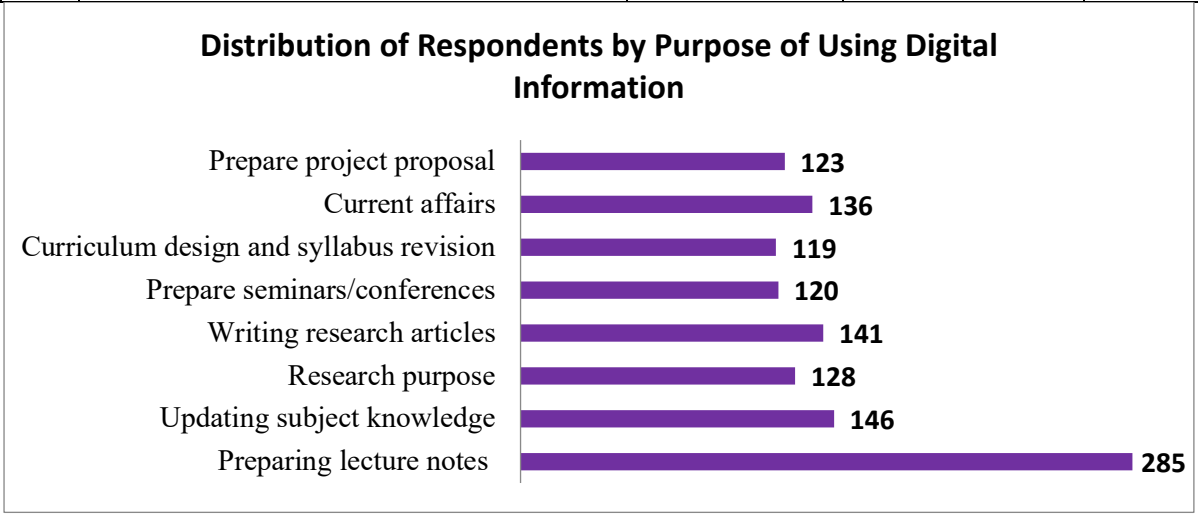
By designation, the largest group among Assistant Professors is less than 2 hours (31.51%), followed by 2-4 hours (24.30%) and 4-6 hours (16.55%). Among Associate Professors, 2-4 hours ranks first (26.17%), followed by less than 2 hours (22.90%) and 4-6 hours (21.03%). Assistant Professors have a clearly higher share in the less than 2 hours group (31.51% against 22.90%), while Associate Professors have higher shares in the 2-4 hours (26.17% against 24.30%) and 4-6 hours (21.03% against 16.55%) groups. Those spending less than 4 hours make up 55.81% of Assistant Professors and 49.07% of Associate Professors. Those spending more than 6 hours make up 27.64% of Assistant Professors and 29.91% of Associate Professors. This suggests that Associate Professors tend to spend somewhat longer on digital information than Assistant Professors, although the difference is small. The share of heavy users (more than 10 hours) is almost equal in the two groups (8.10% and 8.41%).

The findings show that most faculty members spend less than 4 hours a day on digital information, and only a small proportion spend more than 8 hours. The difference between the two designations is slight.

Table 7.2 Distribution of Respondents by Purpose of Using Digital Information (multiple response)

S.N	Purpose of Using Digital Information	Assistant Professors	Associate Professors	Total

1	Preparing lecture notes	236 (30.49)	49 (11.56)	285 (23.79)
2	Updating subject knowledge	95 (12.27)	51 (12.03)	146 (12.19)
3	Research purpose	78 (10.08)	50 (11.79)	128 (10.68)
4	Writing research articles	95 (12.27)	46 (10.85)	141 (11.77)
5	Preparing seminars/conferences	69 (8.91)	51 (12.03)	120 (10.02)
6	Curriculum design and syllabus revision	58 (7.49)	61 (14.39)	119 (9.93)
7	Current affairs	71 (9.17)	65 (15.33)	136 (11.35)
8	Preparing project proposals	72 (9.30)	51 (12.03)	123 (10.27)
	Total	**774 (100.00)**	**424 (100.00)**	**1198 (100.00)**



7.2 Distribution of Respondents by Purpose of Using Digital Information

Table 7.2 shows the distribution of the respondents by their purpose of using digital information. As this was a multiple-response question, the 782 respondents gave 1198 responses, of which 774 came from Assistant Professors and 424 from Associate Professors.

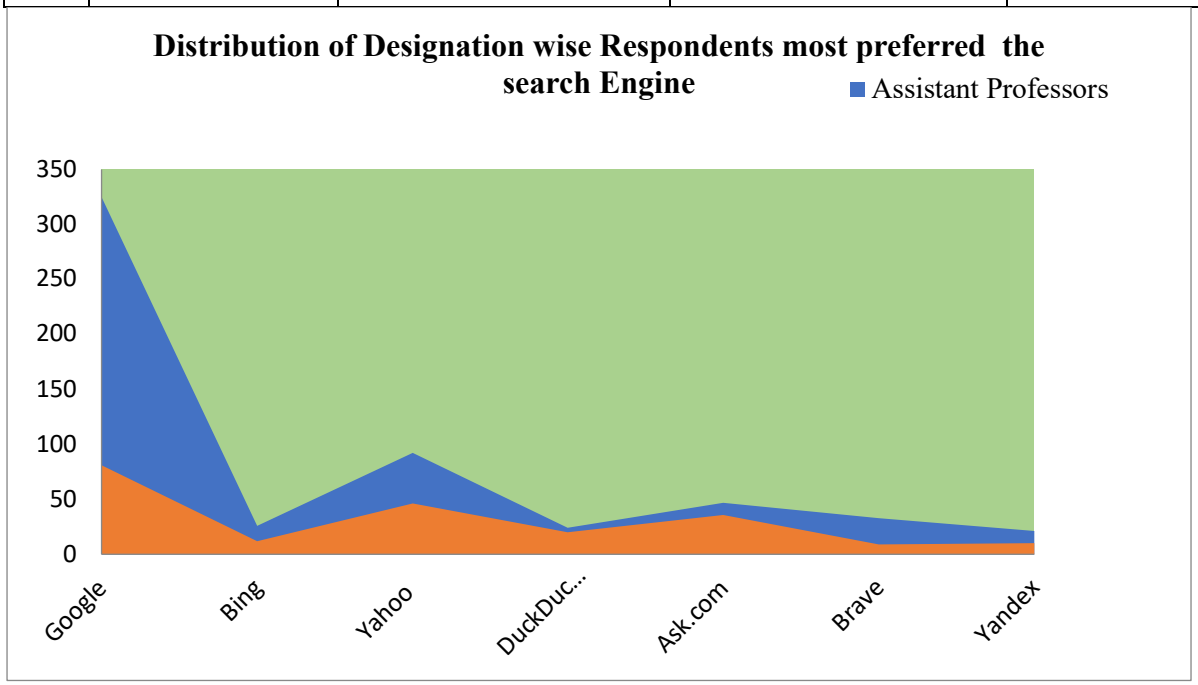
Preparing lecture notes is the main purpose, with 285 responses (23.79%), almost double that of any other purpose. It is followed by updating subject knowledge (146, 12.19%), writing research articles (141, 11.77%), current affairs (136, 11.35%) and research purpose (128, 10.68%). Preparing project proposals (123, 10.27%), preparing seminars/conferences (120, 10.02%) and curriculum design and syllabus revision (119, 9.93%) have the lowest shares, but the differences among these are small. Teaching-related purposes (lecture notes, updating subject knowledge and curriculum design) account for 550 responses (45.91%). Research-related purposes (research purpose, writing articles, seminars/conferences and project proposals) account for 512 responses (42.74%), and current affairs for the remaining 136 (11.35%). Faculty members thus use digital information for both teaching and research, with a slight lead for teaching.

By designation, preparing lecture notes is by far the most important purpose for Assistant Professors (30.49%), followed by updating subject knowledge and writing research articles (12.27% each). Among Associate Professors, current affairs ranks first (15.33%), followed by

curriculum design and syllabus revision (14.39%), and the other purposes are spread fairly evenly between 10.85% and 12.03%. Assistant Professors have a much higher share for lecture notes (30.49% against 11.56%). Associate Professors have higher shares for curriculum design (14.39% against 7.49%), current affairs (15.33% against 9.17%), preparing seminars/conferences (12.03% against 8.91%), project proposals (12.03% against 9.30%) and research purpose (11.79% against 10.08%). Teaching-related purposes make up 50.26% of the responses from Assistant Professors but only 37.97% from Associate Professors, whereas research-related purposes make up 46.70% of the responses from Associate Professors against 40.57% from Assistant Professors. Overall, the findings show that digital information supports both the teaching and research roles of the faculty. Preparing lecture notes is the single most common purpose, and the Associate Professors' use is more evenly spread across purposes.

Table 7.3 Distribution of Designation wise Respondents most preferred the search Engine.

S.N	Search Engine	Assistant Professors	Associate Professors	Total
1	Google	325 (57.22)	81 (37.85)	406 (51.92)
2	Bing	26 (4.58)	12 (5.61)	38 (4.86)
3	Yahoo	92 (16.20)	46 (21.50)	138 (17.65)
4	DuckDuckGo	24 (4.23)	20 (9.35)	44 (5.63)
5	Ask.com	47 (8.27)	36 (16.82)	83 (10.61)
6	Brave	33 (5.81)	9 (4.21)	42 (5.37)
7	Yandex	21 (3.70)	10 (4.67)	31 (3.96)
	Total	**568 (72.63)**	**214 (27.37)**	**782 (100.00)**



7.3 Distribution of Designation wise Respondents most preferred the search Engine.

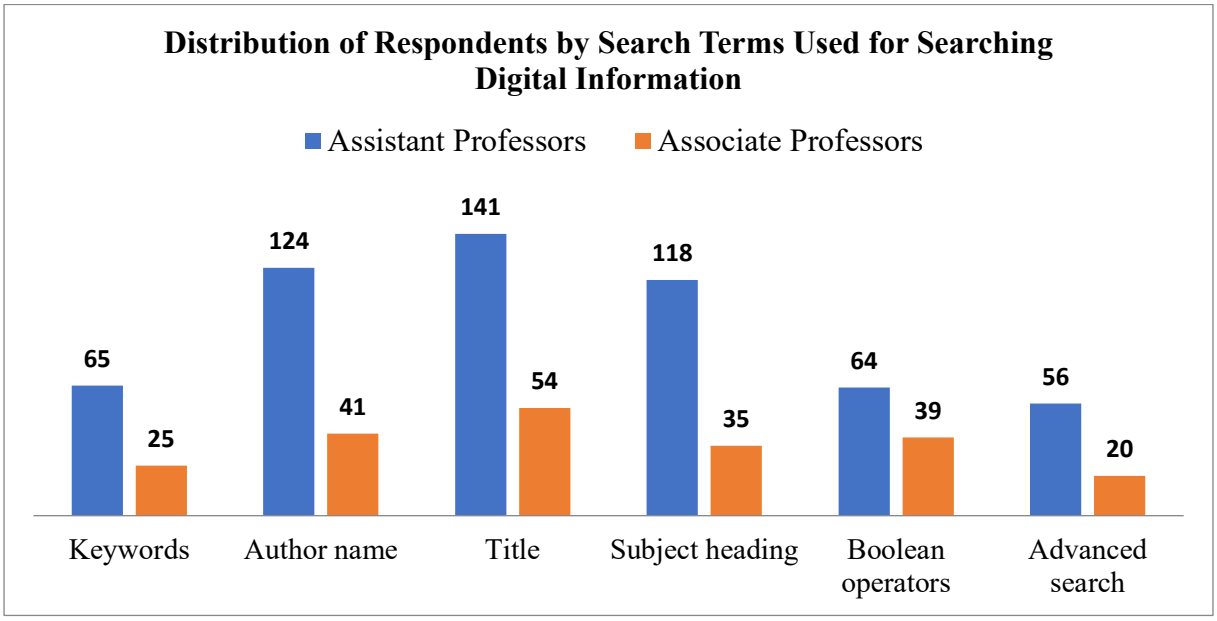
Table 7.3 shows the distribution of the respondents by the search engine they prefer. Of the 782 respondents, 568 (72.63%) are Assistant Professors and 214 (27.37%) are Associate Professors. Google is by far the most preferred search engine, chosen by 406 respondents (51.92%), which is more than half of the sample. It is followed by Yahoo with 138 respondents (17.65%) and Ask.com with 83 (10.61%). The remaining search engines have small shares: DuckDuckGo (44, 5.63%), Brave (42, 5.37%), Bing (38, 4.86%) and Yandex (31, 3.96%). Google and Yahoo together account for 544 respondents (69.57%), so the choice is concentrated in two search engines. The privacy-oriented search engines, DuckDuckGo and Brave, together account for 86 respondents (11.00%), which is higher than the share of Bing (4.86%).

By designation, Google ranks first in both groups, but its dominance is much greater among Assistant Professors (57.22%) than among Associate Professors (37.85%). Yahoo ranks second in both groups, with a higher share among Associate Professors (21.50% against 16.20%). Ask.com ranks third in both groups and is twice as popular among Associate Professors (16.82% against 8.27%). Associate Professors also have a higher share for DuckDuckGo (9.35% against 4.23%) and Bing (5.61% against 4.58%). Assistant Professors have a higher share only for Brave (5.81% against 4.21%), while Yandex is almost equal in the two groups (3.70% and 4.67%). Google and Yahoo together are preferred by 73.42% of Assistant Professors and 59.35% of Associate Professors. This suggests that junior faculty depend more heavily on Google, while senior faculty spread their choice over a wider range of search engines, including Ask.com and DuckDuckGo.

Overall, the findings show that Google is the preferred search engine of the faculty members, followed by Yahoo, while the other search engines are used by small minorities. Libraries should therefore train the faculty in advanced search techniques and introduce them to scholarly search tools such as Google Scholar, so that they do not depend only on general search engines.

Table 7.4 Distribution of Respondents by Search Terms Used for Searching Digital Information

S.N	Search Terms	Assistant Professors	Associate Professors	Total
1	Keywords	65 (11.44)	25 (11.68)	90 (11.51)
2	Author name	124 (21.83)	41 (19.16)	165 (21.10)
3	Title	141 (24.82)	54 (25.23)	195 (24.94)
4	Subject heading	118 (20.77)	35 (16.36)	153 (19.57)
5	Boolean operators	64 (11.27)	39 (18.22)	103 (13.17)
6	Advanced search	56 (9.86)	20 (9.35)	76 (9.72)
	Total	**568 (72.63)**	**214 (27.37)**	**782 (100.00)**



7.4 Distribution of Respondents by Search Terms Used for Searching Digital Information

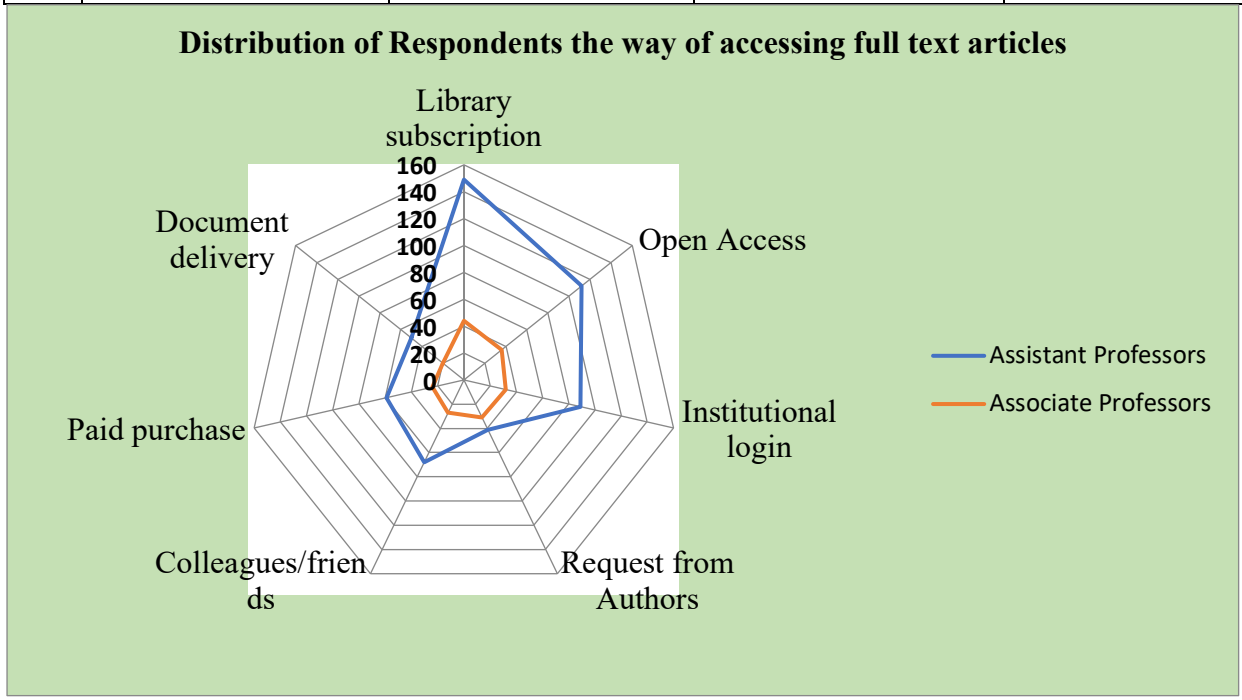
Table 7.4 shows the distribution of the respondents by the search terms they use to search for digital information. Out of 782 respondents, 568 (72.63%) are Assistant Professors and 214 (27.37%) are Associate Professors. Title is the most common search term, used by 195 respondents (24.94%), followed by author name (165, 21.10%) and subject heading (153, 19.57%). Boolean operators are used by 103 respondents (13.17%), keywords by 90 (11.51%) and advanced search by 76 (9.72%), the least. Title, author name and subject heading together account for 513 respondents (65.60%). By designation, title ranks first in both groups (24.82% of Assistant Professors and 25.23% of Associate Professors). Among Assistant Professors, author name ranks second (21.83%) and subject heading third (20.77%). Among Associate Professors, author name is second (19.16%), but Boolean operators rank third (18.22%), ahead of subject heading (16.36%). Boolean operators are used far more by Associate Professors than by Assistant Professors (18.22% against 11.27%). Assistant Professors have higher shares for author name (21.83% against 19.16%) and subject heading (20.77% against 16.36%). The shares for keywords (11.44% and 11.68%) and advanced search (9.86% and 9.35%) are almost equal in the two groups. Title, author name and subject heading together are used by 67.43% of Assistant Professors and 60.75% of Associate Professors, while Boolean operators and advanced search together are used by 21.13% of Assistant Professors and 27.57% of Associate Professors. This suggests that junior faculty rely more on known-item searching by title, author and subject, while senior faculty make somewhat greater use of Boolean logic.

The findings show that the faculty members mostly search by title, author name and subject heading, and that the use of keywords, Boolean operators and advanced search is limited. Libraries should therefore organize training in keyword selection, Boolean operators and advanced search techniques, so that faculty can retrieve digital information more precisely.

Table 7.5 Distribution of Respondents the way of accessing full text articles

S.N	Way of Access	Assistant Professors	Associate Professors	Total
1	Library subscription	149 (26.23)	44 (20.56)	193 (24.68)
2	Open access	112 (19.72)	36 (16.82)	148 (18.93)

3	Institutional login	89 (15.67)	32 (14.95)	121 (15.47)
4	Request from authors	41 (7.22)	31 (14.49)	72 (9.21)
5	Colleagues/friends	68 (11.97)	27 (12.62)	95 (12.15)
6	Paid purchase	59 (10.39)	24 (11.21)	83 (10.61)
7	Document delivery	50 (8.80)	20 (9.35)	70 (8.95)
	Total	**568 (72.63)**	**214 (27.37)**	**782 (100.00)**



7.5 Distribution of Respondents the way of accessing full text articles

Table 7.5 shows the distribution of the respondents by the way in which they access digital information. Of the 782 respondents, 568 (72.63%) are Assistant Professors and 214 (27.37%) are Associate Professors.

Library subscription is the most common way of access, used by 193 respondents (24.68%), followed by open access (148, 18.93%) and institutional login (121, 15.47%). Colleagues/friends are the source for 95 respondents (12.15%), paid purchase for 83 (10.61%), request from authors for 72 (9.21%) and document delivery for 70 (8.95%), the least. Library subscription and institutional login together account for 314 respondents (40.15%), so about two-fifths of the faculty depend on resources provided by their institutions. Free routes (open access, request from authors and colleagues/friends) account for 315 respondents (40.28%). Paid purchase and document delivery together account for 153 respondents (19.57%), which shows that a fifth of the faculty obtain digital information at their own cost or through supplied services.

By designation, library subscription ranks first in both groups, but its share is higher among Assistant Professors (26.23%) than among Associate Professors (20.56%). Open access ranks second in both groups (19.72% and 16.82%) and institutional login third (15.67% and 14.95%). Library subscription and institutional login together are used by 41.90% of Assistant Professors and 35.51% of Associate Professors. The clearest difference is in requests from authors, which is used by 14.49% of Associate Professors but only 7.22% of Assistant Professors, and Associate Professors also have slightly higher shares for colleagues/friends (12.62% against

11.97%), paid purchase (11.21% against 10.39%) and document delivery (9.35% against 8.80%). Request from authors and colleagues/friends together account for 27.10% of Associate Professors against 19.19% of Assistant Professors. This suggests that junior faculty depend more on institutional subscriptions, while senior faculty, who are better established in academic networks, make greater use of personal contacts to obtain documents.

The findings show that library subscription and open access are the main ways of access, followed by institutional login, while personal and paid routes are used by smaller groups. Libraries should therefore widen their subscriptions, promote institutional remote login and make faculty aware of open access sources, so that they depend less on personal contacts and paid purchase.

Table 7.6 Respondents' Opinion on the Need for a Training Programme on Using Digital resources

S.N	Name of the College	Yes	No	May be	Total
1	V.O. Chidambaram College	25 (19.08)	71 (54.20)	35 (26.72)	131 (100.00)
2	St. Mary's College	24 (17.78)	70 (51.85)	41 (30.37)	135 (100.00)
3	Kamaraj College	9 (20.00)	24 (53.33)	12 (26.67)	45 (100.00)
4	A.P.C. Mahalaxmi College for Women	26 (20.47)	71 (55.91)	30 (23.62)	127 (100.00)
5	Holy Cross Home Science College	6 (10.71)	32 (57.14)	18 (32.14)	56 (100.00)
6	Aditanar College of Arts and Science	14 (22.95)	36 (59.02)	11 (18.03)	61 (100.00)
7	G. Venkataswamy Naidu College	9 (9.18)	58 (59.18)	31 (31.63)	98 (100.00)
8	Pope's College	11 (12.22)	60 (66.67)	19 (21.11)	90 (100.00)
9	Sri K.G.S. Arts College	9 (23.08)	21 (53.85)	9 (23.08)	39 (100.00)
	Total	**133 (17.01)**	**443 (56.65)**	**206 (26.34)**	**782 (100.00)**

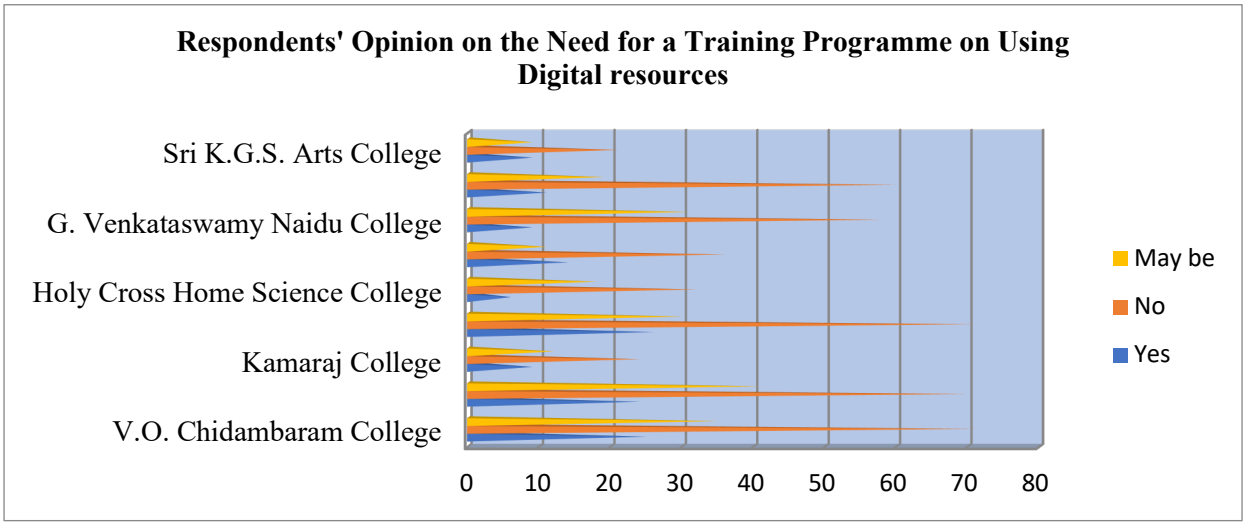
7.6 Respondents' Opinion on the Need for a Training Programme on Using Digital resources

Table 7.6 shows the respondents' opinion on the need for a training programme on using digital information. Of the 782 respondents, 133 (17.01%) said "Yes", 443 (56.65%) said "No", and 206 (26.34%) said "May be". A majority of the respondents (56.65%) therefore did not feel the need for a training programme, while about one-quarter were undecided and fewer than one-fifth clearly wanted one.

College-wise, the proportion of respondents who said "Yes" was highest at Sri K.G.S. Arts College (23.08%) and Aditanar College of Arts and Science (22.95%), and lowest at G. Venkataswamy Naidu College (9.18%) and Holy Cross Home Science College (10.71%). The "No" response was highest at Pope's College (66.67%), followed by G. Venkataswamy Naidu College (59.18%) and Aditanar College of Arts and Science (59.02%), and lowest at St. Mary's College (51.85%). The "May be" response was highest at Holy Cross Home Science College

(32.14%), G. Venkataswamy Naidu College (31.63%) and St. Mary's College (30.37%), and lowest at Aditanar College of Arts and Science (18.03%).

It is evident that in all nine colleges, more than half of the respondents do not feel the need for a training programme. This may be because they already feel confident in using digital information or have benefited from the library orientation programmes. However, the sizeable "May be" group (26.34%) suggests that a considerable number of faculty members could be open to training if it were offered.



8. Suggestions

1. Colleges should strengthen broadband and Wi-Fi infrastructure in departments and libraries.
2. Libraries should conduct regular orientation and hands-on training on consortium resources and databases.
3. Institutions should promote awareness of N-LIST, e-ShodhSindhu, SWAYAM and the National Digital Library through workshops and notices.
4. Library professionals should work closely with departments to match e-resource subscriptions to teaching and research needs.
5. Faculty development programmes should include digital skills for both assistant and associate professors.

9. Conclusion

Digital information access has become an integral part of the academic life of college teachers. The study of 782 faculty members from arts and science colleges in Thoothukudi District shows that the findings show that digital information supports both the teaching and research roles of the faculty. Preparing lecture notes is the single most common purpose, and the Associate Professors' use is more evenly spread across purposes. Google is the preferred search engine of the faculty members, followed by Yahoo, while the other search engines are used by small minorities. Libraries should therefore train the faculty in advanced search techniques and introduce them to scholarly search tools such as Google Scholar, so that they do not depend only on general search engines.

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