

# **A study on awareness and usage of e-books among Academic institutions in Erode District, Tamilnadu**

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## **Abstract**

This exploratory study reports the result of a survey on the awareness and usage of e-books among academic institutions in Erode District, Tamilnadu. The main objective of this study were to (i) assess the awareness of e-books (ii) assess the acceptance level of e-books (iii) measure the usage and usage pattern of e-books and (iv) identify the reasons why e-books are liked or disliked. A total 46 useable questionnaires form the basis of analysis. The study found that the awareness of e-books is very high among academic institutions. They like to use e-books for their teaching and personal research.

## **Keywords:**

User awareness, E-resources, exploratory study, Academic institutions, usage pattern

## **1. Introduction**

With the rise of digital technology, reading habits across the world are slowly but surely evolving. The yesterday's library with its paneled shelves full of printed texts is slowly making way to electronic books or e-books. The reason for this can be decreasing budget limited shelves space, increasing cost of new building and resources, the rising cost of repair or replacement of books, increasing demand from users for electronic resources, rising cost of inter library loan service and the demand to support distance learning needs. E-books provide users immediate easy and convenient access to information and solve library's recurrent problem of lost, stolen or damaged books. Further, the provision of e-books does not require unpacking, processing, shelving and eliminates the extra time previously required to handle and process them before they can be used. The interface of e-books is also becoming user-friendly, making it easy for readers to browse, navigate, and able to view graphics, videos and full text as well as to search within a book or collection of books. While India has not quite taken into the plethora of gadgets which portability and feasibility of e-books and supporting technology compared to the printed text. With the recent introduction of Akash, the government's answer to a cheap tablet, the country seems to be moving towards encouraging usage of e-books and away from the burden of carrying a load to the schools. But how far has this evolution influenced the academic institutions to adapt to the modern technology? How much are they aware of this burgeoning technology? This paper presents the results of a survey of the perceptions that academic institutions have of using e-books.

## **2. Objectives of the study**

This exploratory study investigates the awareness and usage of e-books among academic institutions, Erode District, Tamilnadu. The major objectives were to:

- Assess the awareness of e-books
- Assess the acceptance level of e-books
- Measure the usage and usage pattern of e-books
- Identify the reasons why they like or dislike e-books

### **3. Methods**

A questionnaire survey was conducted among teachers working in various colleges in Erode District, Tamilnadu. A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed; 3 of them were not returned and one questionnaire returned was incomplete. Responses to the rest 46 questionnaire form the basis of the study.

### **4. Results and discussion**

A total of 46 responses were received. From the responses received, 22 percent of respondents are female and the average age range of respondents falls between 40-49 years. The highest response rate was from the education faculty (30%) followed by engineering, computer science and business faculty (22%).

#### **4.1 Awareness of e-books**

The questionnaire contained a series of questions about the awareness of e-books. Awareness levels were very high regardless of subject, gender and age. From that 87% of the responses were positive about the awareness of e-books. However 74% of them used web search engine in identifying and locating e-books and 17% from libraries and 17% through other staff members. The high percentage of awareness could be due to the general increase in electronic resources availability.

#### **4.2 Acceptance level of e-books**

From that 35% of the respondents feel that e-books are as good as printed books. But when asked which format they would prefer the libraries purchase as resources, the majority (35%) opposed the library buying only e-books. At the same time, the greater majority (43%) disagreed to the purchase of books only in printed format. 39% strongly supported the library purchasing books both in print and e-book format. The preference for parallel print medium along with the electronic version shows the unwillingness for a complete shift from print to electronic world and may also be due to the doubt in quality and reliability of e-resources.

#### **4.3 Usage of e-books**

48% of the respondents agree to the fact that they liked using e-books and 57% have used e-books often while 17% used an e-book a couple of times. However 13% have used an e-book only once and other 13% have never used an e-book

For the questions related to the usage of e-book in their subject areas, 74% say that they have used an e-book in their subject area, while 9% have not and 17% have never searched for an e-book in their subject area. The percentage of academic institutions saying that they have used an e-book among libraries in Erode District, Tamilnadu is minimal if not totally absent. 65% of the academic institutions feel that e-books are suitable resources for the subject they teach and 43% agree to the usage of e-books in their personal research.

The study also analyzed the reasons why e-books are liked or disliked by the academic institutions. The responses indicate that the users are well aware of the advantages, disadvantages and characteristics of e-books. The most liked feature of e-books is the 24x7 access from anywhere. The next most important feature was the end to physical borrowing of books. These two features indicate that the user's preference towards easily accessible resources. The advantage of searching across the e-book and searching across the databases, online referencing and copying and pasting were the other reasons why e-books were liked.

The reasons for disliking e-books included difficulty in reading from the screen (48%), slow downloads (30%), online access problems (17%) and cost of printing (5%). Slow downloads and online access problems points to the lack of proper technical infrastructure with internet providers and inefficiency of e-book services.

#### **4.4 Usage pattern of e-books**

From that 70% prefer to read chapters from an e-book, 43% excerpts while only 9% respondents said they would read an entire book online and 22% does all of these. When reading part of a book 65% prefer to take print out and read the book and 52% prefer to read it on screen while 22% prefer to use an e-book reader. Again, while reading the complete book also, 83% prefer to take print out and read, 31% prefer to use an e-book reader and 17% prefer to read it on screen. The lower percentage of preference to use an e-book reader for reading may be due to the lack of knowledge about the available devices and also due to the difficulty in transferring books into e-book reader and lack of knowledge in the conversion formats.

78% of the respondents say that they can spend 30 minutes reading from the screen, 35% can spend one hour reading from the screen, 9% can read for 10 minutes, 9% can read for 2 hours and 9% can read for more than two hours.

#### **4.5 Services used e-books**

This study sought to identify particular e-books services preferred by the respondents. The services listed included e-book services in most of the subject area. The responses clearly showed usage of all e-book services listed. The most preferred service was Pro-Quest (39%) followed by Mc-Graw Hill (35%) and Pro-Quest Dissertation (30%). The choice of favorite e-book services were EBSCO and Scribd. The most preferred e-book services were those which are free, easily accessible, user-friendly and those which are related to their respective fields of specialization.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This survey throws light on some interesting positive and negative aspects of e-book awareness and usage. On the positive side, the results of the survey show that the academic institutions highly aware of the availability and have taken e-books as resources for teaching as well as personal research. They generally like to use the e-books and quite appreciate the advantages of 24x7 accessibility, remote accessibility and easiness of search for specific information. However on the negative side, reading from the screen for extended hours is the main problem for the dislike of e-books.

With academic institutions resources being made available extensively online and difficulties in procuring the printed version of books at short notices, the e-book is slowly emerging as the source of reading and reference. The role of the library is educating and encouraging the users to adapt to the new technology will be effective both in terms of cost and accessibility. The publishers too have realized the slow move towards the electronic version of books and have started offering them along with the printed versions. The only glitch that needs to be addressed is the copyright issues which ought to review so as to promote higher usage of e-book within the copyright guidelines.

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