

The ICLARM Library User: A Profile

Libraries today are faced with the common dilemma of providing high levels of service amidst the increasing cost of books and serials, reduced budget allocations and effects due to inflation. Under these circumstances, libraries large or small have found it necessary to undertake studies on library use and the information-seeking behavior of their users which can provide information for decisionmaking in collection development and tailoring their services to be responsive to the needs and demands of the users they serve.

It is in this light that a preliminary study of the reading habits of external users of the ICLARM library, as an example of library use by researchers, was undertaken.

Library services have been made available over the past eight years to a growing number of external users, currently over 1,000/year. The library holds more than 8,000 volumes of books of which about 700 are added to the collection annually. It has a wide range of serials from developed and developing countries totalling 522 titles.

This study was conducted over nine months from August 1985 to March 1986 through a questionnaire which the users were asked to fill in as they used the various library materials. The data were supplemented by counts of the books, serials, reprints, clippings and maps used each day. It was felt that it was a fairly simple and inexpensive method of obtaining useful information about the users served by the library.

The specific questions this study aimed to answer were: (1) how many and what type of publications researchers read; (2) how much time was spent on each and how deeply read; (3) the purpose(s) in reading these articles or books; and (4) who the researchers were.

A total of 844 questionnaires were distributed; 355 were returned, a 42% response rate.

Results

In all, 7,326 items were used. Serials (49.7%) were the most frequently used material, followed by books (32%), reprints (16%) and others (maps, clippings file and non-print materials—2.3%).

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A total of 312 serial titles were used 3,644 times. These serial titles represent 61% of all those in the collection. Of the serials not used, 96% were received through exchange or gifts or subscriptions were cancelled.

Fig. 1 illustrates how much time was spent reading articles and books. Since some materials were xeroxed (180 serial articles; 6 books) rather than read in the library, the questionnaire was designed to remove bias that would be caused by indicating such items in the time spent reading each item.

The main reasons for using materials were (1) research work — to apply research findings or methods to a current

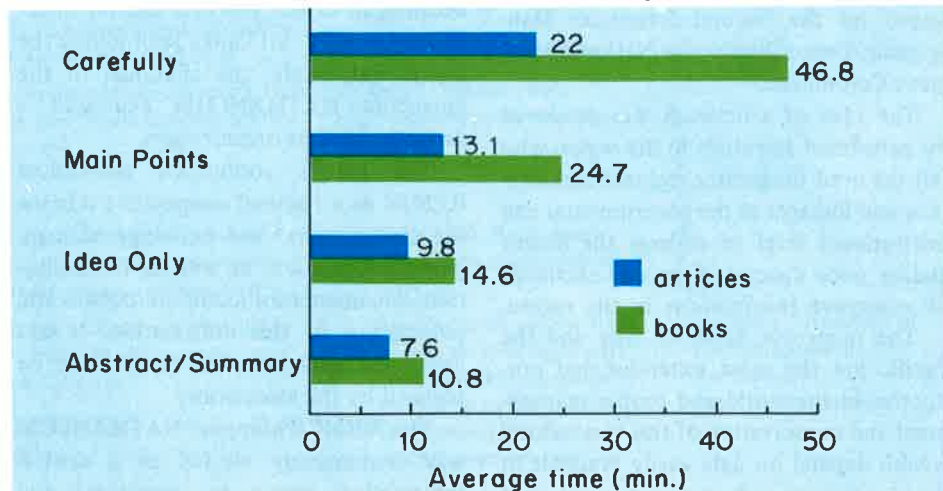


Fig. 1. The average time in minutes spent by ICLARM library users reading articles and books.

The most frequently used serials are shown in Table 1. FAO's products, INFOFISH and ASFA are clearly most important. Just recently, we received a two-year bill for ASFA (\$1,644) and looking at how frequently it was used helped in the decision to continue subscription.

Table 1. Ten most frequently used serials. (Three serials tied for 10th place)

| Title | No. of times used |
|--|-------------------|
| INFOFISH Marketing Digest | 320 |
| Aquaculture | 295 |
| ASFA (Aquatic Science & Fisheries Abstracts (1 & 2)) | 230 |
| INFOFISH Trade News | 182 |
| Journal of Fish Biology | 132 |
| Greenfields (Philippine agriculture) | 92 |
| Current Contents | 89 |
| Marine Pollution Bulletin | 89 |
| Philippine Journal of Fisheries | 87 |
| ICLARM Newsletter | 83 |
| Science | 83 |
| Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Science | 83 |

project; to prepare a research proposal or project; for management purposes, planning, budgeting or management of research; (2) 'writing up' results — to prepare an article, book, thesis or report; for citation purposes; to prepare a lecture or presentation; (3) general interest and current awareness; and (4) other purposes.

External users come mainly from Philippine institutions but include overseas students and scientists. One-third are students pursuing baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degrees; 20% have baccalaureate degrees; 12%, master's degrees and 2%, doctoral degrees. Others did not specify.

The information gained has helped to understand the needs, as well as to gain an insight into the users of the ICLARM library and will be useful in planning collection development, specifically in streamlining the serials collection.

Our questionnaire is available on request. For further information and for those wishing to conduct a similar study, write to The Librarian, ICLARM, MC P.O. Box 1501, Makati, Metro Manila, Philippines.