

University Students' Reading Habits Through Their Use of Libraries: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study examines university students' reading habits with a focus on library use at Tribhuvan University, Nepal. The purpose was to understand how master's level students engage with the library for academic and personal learning needs. A qualitative research design was applied. Data was collected from fifteen Master-level students through in-depth interviews, each lasting around forty minutes. Verbatim transcription and thematic analysis were employed to interpret the data. Findings reveal that students primarily use the library during free periods, for preparing notes, conducting research, and reviewing materials for final examinations. The library is perceived as a supportive learning environment that enhances concentration and provides access to essential academic resources. However, irregular use of the library was also noted, often influenced by busy schedules and availability of digital resources. The study highlights the continued relevance of the university library in developing reading habits, despite growing digital alternatives. It concludes that libraries not only support exam preparation but also foster self-study and academic discipline. Recommendations are made to improve library facilities and promote regular reading practices among students.

Keywords: *Academic resources, library use, qualitative study, reading habits, university students*

Introduction

University libraries play a vital role in shaping students' academic experiences and promoting reading habits, providing access to essential resources, and creating environments conducive to focused learning (Adebayo, 2021; Appiah, 2023). Tribhuvan University Central Library (TUCL), established in 1959 alongside the university, serves as a cornerstone for academic support in Nepal (Shrestha, 2019). Initially starting with only a few hundred books, TUCL has

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grown over six decades into the largest library in the country, housing over 410,000 volumes, including books, bound periodicals, theses, and audio-visual materials (Adhikari, 2018). Its development reflects the evolving academic needs of the university community, offering both physical and digital resources that cater to research, coursework, and independent learning (Matthews, 2024). The library's strategic location at the central campus in Kirtipur, five kilometers southwest of Kathmandu, ensures accessibility to students and faculty, enhancing its role as a central hub for academic engagement (Scoulas, 2024; Shrestha & Acharya, 2024).

The library's infrastructure and services further support its mission to foster effective reading habits among students (Robinson, 2020). Designed by Swiss architect Robert Weise in 1967, TUCL's main building was later expanded with a larger annex to accommodate the growing collection and increasing number of users (Shrestha, 2019). This expansion reflects both the library's commitment to meeting students' academic needs and the continued support from philanthropists and bibliophiles. TUCL is an appropriate framework for exploring the reading habits of university students. The efforts have been made to understand how master's students at TU engage with the library and its resources and how they employ traditional and digital material for the fulfillment of their academic and personal learning needs.

Reading habits are very important for a student's academic journey as well as their intellectual development in higher education. Continuous reading allows students to develop skills such as thinking critically, innovating, and researching, which are vital for academic progression and lifelong learning (Issa et al., 2012). In addition to academics, regular reading helps with self-discipline, focus, and capacity for analyzing abstract ideas. University libraries are at the center of this support by providing access to resources such as books, journals, and digital materials used in structured coursework and independent study (Thanuskodi, 2011). In addition, libraries serve as an appropriate place for concentrated study, and as a way for students to read closely and develop their powers of attention in sustained reading (Adeniran, 2011). In Nepal, a country's reading culture with respect to university students is ever shifting due to the tremendous expansion of digital technologies and online applications. Bibliographic and electronic resources in the form of e-books and online journals are increasingly being accessed and consumed by students, but traditional university libraries are still spaces where students engage in structured study and exam preparation (Shrestha, 2019). TU, the largest and oldest university in Nepal, has well-developed libraries at its Kirtipur campus, and yet there has been little research on how use case of library usage and how master's level students read from both digital and traditional resources may be utilized. More importantly, understanding these modes of library, reading and academic intervention so services can be improved relates to enhanced library services appealing for the improvement of academic engagement into a sustained reading culture in Nepali higher education.

Globally, some reading studies have illustrated a connection between library usage and students reading practices (Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014). In Nepal, however, most

research focuses on the issue of access to resources, giving little attention to actual reading behavior and patterns of library engagement. Lacking such knowledge, it is difficult for educators and policymakers to promote the best use of libraries to enhance students' reading habits. Without knowing students' perspectives, experiences, and challenges, the interventions may not sufficiently serve academic endeavors or inspire students to engage in activities of their own choice. To address this gap, the present research assesses reading styles among master's level students of TU and thereby scrutinizes their library utilization for academic and personal purposes. More specifically, the study aims at finding out how the students utilize the library, for what purpose they visit it, and what issues they face down the track. The research questions guiding this investigation include: (a) How do master's students use the library for academic and personal learning? (b) What are the main purposes and patterns of library use? and (c) What factors facilitate or hinder their engagement with library resources?

Methodology

Research Design

This study took a qualitative approach to examine university students' reading behaviors with a focus on the library use of students at TU. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is useful when wanting to explore in richer depth the experiences, perceptions, and behaviors of participants. As the study wished to understand how master's level students utilize library facilities for both academic and personal purposes, qualitative research also facilitates a rich and detailed data gathering (Acharya et al., 2023) process which has context. Qualitative research enables a deeper examination of and explanation (Pant et al., 2023) for why students behave in a particular way, the reasoning behind their use of information, their motivation, and any variables that impact their use of the library.

Participants and Sampling

A total of fifteen master's level students at TU were selected as study participants using purposive sampling. The use of purposive sampling was to ensure that the participants were familiar with library usage and varied academic disciplines. This led to a sample composed of five students from the Master of Education program, five students in the Master of Science and Technology program, and five students from Management faculty. Overall, the intent was to incorporate a variety of perspectives from different academic fields and to see if reading preferences and library usage differed in relation to field.

Data Collection

Data collection originated from in-depth interviews. Each session was designed to last about 40 minutes, providing considerable time for subjects to talk about their library experiences, preferences, and challenges. Key topics in the interview guide onward like other interviews were students' frequencies and motivations for visiting the library as well as the kinds of

materials accessed, study behaviors, and perceived pros and cons of library resources. Open-ended questions were used to elicit rich responses and pursue study-related themes.

Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded with consent from the participants and transcribed word-for-word to capture the distinctiveness of their stories, and ensure their stories were represented authentically. The research team then engaged in thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase planning of: familiarisation with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes, reviewing themes; naming and defining themes; and writing the report. Thematic analysis guided the research team to identify patterns, similarities and differences in the audience response data, presenting a holistic perspective of students' literacy practices and library connections.

We employed several strategies to ensure the findings were accurate, trustworthy, and verifiable. We checked by sharing back our preliminary findings with the participants to confirm our interpretation. Peer debriefing with colleagues who are knowledgeable about qualitative research also helped reduce researcher bias. Furthermore, we maintained an audit trail to keep track of every decision made during the process of research, any changes made to methods, and any reflection we had during the data collection and analysis.

Findings

The research highlighted that the library is utilized most often by master's students at TU in their free time between classes. Students argued that these blocks of time allowed them to access library resources, while conductor factors or studies distracted them from focusing. One of the students in in-depth interview said:

“Most of us go to the library in the free periods between classes. That's the only time we can really sit down with the books and journals. If we go back to our hostels or get busy with other studies and activities, it becomes very difficult to focus. The library helps us use that gap time productively.”

It implies that planning in their balanced time management is an important part of the use of the library. It is also found that the main purpose of library visitations included preparing lecture notes, researching assignments and reviewing before the final terms. They said that library is important and that helps them more in terms of content and it is the only opportunity to check reference materials that are not online. It is an opportunity that shows the library does not just provide a location but also provides enough academic support to enable and further build upon classroom learning opportunities. Students drew much of the library up as a supportive open space and an enhanced concentration and active learning environment. Students stated that the calming atmosphere, available spaces in the library setting, and general organization of materials helped them concentrate and get the work done. The library

also assists in self-discipline by providing a structure to engage study habits and by reducing distractions morally. To support this finding, one of the students stated:

“The library gives me a calm environment where I can really concentrate. The spaces are organized, the materials are easy to find, and that structure keeps me disciplined. When I study here, I feel less distracted and more motivated to complete my work.”

Students appreciated access to both traditional resources, such as textbooks, journals, reference books, and digital academic databases, are greatly appreciated. Students indicated that textbooks, journals, reference books, and digital academic databases were integral in completing assignments, finding research material, and studying for exams. Another student argued:

“The library really helps us in many ways because it has everything, we need for our studies. We use textbooks, journals, and reference books when preparing notes or revising for exams, and at the same time, the digital databases are very useful for finding updated research articles and additional sources. Honestly, I prefer printed books when I want to study in detail and take notes because it feels easier to concentrate, but I also rely on e-resources when I need quick information. Both traditional and digital resources complement each other, and together they make studying more effective. The only challenge is time—sometimes we are too busy with classes, deadlines, or we use online sources from home instead of coming here. I have also noticed that students from different faculties use the library a bit differently. For example, M.Ed. and M.Sc. students often spend more time reading and making notes here, while management students sometimes use the space more for assignments and group work. So, it depends on our schedule and academic needs, but overall, the library is an important support for all of us.”

Students recognized that although digital materials were convenient, they still preferred physical books for in-depth study while taking notes, and students implied that traditional resources and digital resources work together to meet their learning and study requirements. Although most students indicated they benefited from libraries and/or library resources, a handful of students generally used the library consistently, but that was dependent on busy schedules, course assignments, due date timelines, or accessing open online resources outside the library. Students from different disciplines note slight differences in library use regarding how some M. Ed, M.Sc., students, and Management students used resources and study space. These patterns suggest that students' academic needs and time factors may affect their use of library resources and physical library spaces.

The study demonstrates an important function of university libraries; to continue to encourage reading habits, academic achievement, and professional development. Libraries provide a space for study, specific academic resources and a facility to work independently which digital platforms cannot entirely replace. The study shows that making facilities, hours and resources

more accessible to students will be one way to create more opportunities for students to develop reading habits and lead to academic success no matter the discipline that they study. The study found that master's students at TU attended the library specifically for academic purposes and that this included writing their notes, researching, completing their assignments and reading through material for exams.

“The library is still very important for us because it supports our reading habits, academic growth, and even our professional development. However, digital platforms cannot fully replace what the library offers. Here we get a quiet study space, proper academic resources, and the chance to work independently without distractions. If the facilities, hours, and resources were even more accessible, it would create more opportunities for us to read regularly and succeed in our studies. For example, as master's students, we mostly come here to prepare notes, research, finish assignments, and read for exams.”

Additionally, students recognized that the library offers various resources (such as printed textbooks, reference materials, journals, e-resources and online databases) that students need to be able to work on coursework and study independently. The library was viewed as always helping foster an optimal study space and encouraging students to concentrate, self-discipline and ultimately be productive. Students' reading habits varied, but most had a routine for daily use associated with studying their courses and only some reading for leisure or self-development. Students also relied on whether they read a physical or electronic text, based entirely on the task; for substantive study and note taking, they like the traditional hardcopy, whereas they prefer electronic reading for everything else. A student's academic schedule, which supports gaps and breaks, is also important to promoting student engagement; many students made use of gaps or breaks in scheduled classes to engage in a period of study, maximizing their study time for professional courses.

While there were some variations in how Management, Science and Education students reconfigured the resources and spaces in the library according to their unique course needs (e.g., tabulating daily bank reports in Management courses vs. engaging in quiet space and collaborative work space introducing light reading and global research in Science and Education), overall students reported findings there were additional hindrances to their engagement with the libraries, including the challenge of balancing coursework in busy academic workloads, deadlines for assignments, overcrowded libraries and at times limited access to resources which created challenges for ongoing library attendance.

“I usually go to the library whenever I have a gap between my classes, especially if I need to prepare for my professional courses. It really helps me use that free time productively. But sometimes it is difficult to manage because the library gets overcrowded, or I can't find the resources I need. With so many deadlines and assignments, balancing everything with regular library visits becomes challenging.”

Students viewed the library as a critical partner and resource for academic engagement, self-directed learning and development of research skills. Several students recommended improvements such as expanded operating hours, improved library resources and collection, and additional study areas separated for quiet and collaborative study to enhance engagement through ongoing use of libraries.

Discussion

Tribhuvan University primarily access library facilities (buildings and materials) at free time or periods between classes. This is also consistent with Scoulas (2022), who found that students engaged with library resources in their break periods, focusing on the time they had to use the library facilities to study. This structured use of library times implies that students are merely scheduling their time and managing their academic performance. The study also suggests that students visit the library mainly for note preparation, for research, or to review material before final examinations. These findings hold parallels with Scoulas (2022) that linked library use to students who are experiencing academic success in higher education. The current study also supports Appiah (2023) where Ghanaian colleges reported students utilized library resources for learning outcomes, emphasizing the role libraries have in supporting academic learning activities.

Nonetheless, the study also identified some hurdles that could impede students from using the library facilities consistently. Several students indicated that their library attendance was irregular because they often find themselves too busy or simply chose to access digital resources instead. This finding is in line with Aryee's (2024) finding that having limited library resources can frustrate users and result in limited engagement. The growing focus on digital materials might also lessen the students' need to visit the library in person. Overdrive (2022) reported a dramatic increase in the number of digital books being used in academic libraries, indicating that students are, more than ever, gravitating to online resources. With the focus of the study being confined to one university, one might suggest that the outcomes may not be widely applicable. Zheng et al. (2024) stated that differences in library environments and resources at each institution will influence students' library use and learning engagement. Students from Tribhuvan University may express different experiences than students from another university, suggesting that additional qualitative examination would be beneficial in investigating the desired effect across other institutions.

While the study confirms the important role of university libraries in helping students with their studies, it also points out the need to keep evaluating and improving library services. It is important to address issues regarding library access, resource availability, and use of the library's digital tools to advance the perceived impact of library services in promoting student success. As Scoulas (2024) highlights, psychological factors and the level of involvement on the campus have an impact on students' success. A holistic approach incorporating both physical and digital resources, as well as student psychological engagement, is vital to the development

of a supportive learning environment for students. These findings complement prior literature that recognizes the importance of academic libraries in encouraging self-directed learning and an increased focus on the learning task completion cycle. Tribhuvan University students described the library as a supportive environment that encouraged thoughts and processes connected to self-directed learning. This description supports Robinson's (2020) findings regarding well-structured self-directed learning environments, such as academic libraries, encouraging students' motivation, confidence, and belief in themselves. Additionally, Zheng et al. (2024) found positive and significant impacts of the university library environment on college students' learning engagement during self-directed learning, defining the library as a supportive place in academic work.

Access to academic resources in both print and digital formats is crucial for students. They see textbooks, journals, reference books, and online databases as necessary to complete assignments and research as well as prepare for examinations. This corroborates the study by Amirtharaj (2023), which found that students preferred printed books for depth of study and note-taking, but appreciated the usefulness of digital resources. Matthews (2024) stressed that both traditional and digital academic resources support students' educational expectations. He indicated that students practiced focusing and concentrating well on reading, understanding what they were studying, and recalling that material more easily. Noting the benefits of both print material and e-resources raises challenges about the evolving function of digital material in scholarship. While students understood the convenience of e-books, they also valued the physicality of a printed book and the ease of notetaking. Overall, even with the availability and expansion of digital resources, print books still play a salient role in students' academic habits. Scoulas (2022) noted that academic libraries are exploring ways to demonstrate to stakeholders that individual and group engagement in library resources and services is contributing to students' academic engagement and success academically and in learning, reinforcing the importance of the intersection between traditional and digital resources in students' achievement. Collectively, the results of the study reveal the library environment's importance in promoting self-discipline among students.

The library's organized environment motivates students to study on a regular basis and removes them from distractions that can arise during home or online learning. Similarly, the ideas reflect findings in a study conducted by De Groote (2022), which explored students' perspectives of the role of the library in their own academic success. He concluded that students view the library as a supportive atmosphere that fosters academic performance. The overall findings summarized the ways academic libraries host, support, enable, and promote students' academic success. The utilization of digital resources affords students convenience; however, the traditional library offers students the opportunity for a much more structured place to engage in self-directed study and academic accomplishments. In other words, the library's environment straddles formal and informal spaces where students can utilize both traditional

research resources as well as digital resources to accomplish their academic goals. To best drive students to achieve academic goals, academic libraries should facilitate a combination of traditional space, digital resources, and the library's focused, structured atmosphere. Together, these findings provide insight to the ongoing conversation to facilitate an evolving purpose for academic libraries in higher education. When accessed by students, it is common for them to utilize the library during their academic day, typically in-between classes, or their own defined time for studying. The engagement and access of the library during the planned time to study by students emphasizes how time management is associated with academic success. Research supports the idea that students' schedules, maybe more accurately, affected their library use where examination of library use found that the highest amount of activity occurs during a free period between classes (Curry, 2003). The idea of scheduling library use again provides emphasis on the role of time management and success in the academic environment.

Access to both traditional and digital academic resources was crucially important to the students. Students viewed textbooks, journals, reference books, and digital databases as necessary for completing coursework, conducting research, and preparing for exams. This aligns with Amirtharaj (2023), who stated students prefer printed books for their more in-depth studying styles and note-taking, while appreciating digital resources. Matthews (2024) further recognized the supportive roles of traditional and digital resources in meeting students' learning needs. Matthews (2024) found that print books better supported concentration, concept retention, and memorization of information. Matthews (2024) postulated that even with the increased access to e-books and digital resources, print books raised questions on how students engaged with digital disciplines in academics. Although students prefer the convenience of e-books, they also valued being able to hold physical textbooks and noted that print books made it easy to write and organize notes and engage in academic thought. This preference for academic print books indicates, regardless of the increased use of digital academic resources, students value print in their academic learning. During the pandemic, students quickly transitioned to e-books, but academia remained focused on print, and Scoulas (2022) reported that academic libraries on college campuses are seeking to demonstrate that using library resources supports students' academic success and learning. Regardless, both print and digital academic resources support academic success and learning.

The results of the research emphasize the library's ability to foster self-discipline in the students. The library's regulated environment helped to create healthy studying patterns and reduce overt distractions when compared with studying at home or studying online. This finding harmonizes with De Groot (2022), who examined students' impressions of how the library influenced academic success by incorporating students' perceptions of an academic library as a supportive environment for performance improvement. To summarize, the data illustrates some of the ways academic libraries can provide students with opportunities. Compared to an and because, digital resources offer convenience, in-person academic libraries can provide a

structured environment for students to engage in self-directed learning and promote academic success. The combination opportunity for academic success will always be the combination of person-based and digital resources where the academic library fulfills its aspect of an organized environment to assist students in achieving their academic goals. This information moves the discussion forward about the significance of academic libraries in higher education as these libraries still serve a purpose that supports students. Students largely used the library as a destination during their time between classes, as an effort to plan their use of the library based on their academic schedule. This organization of using the library illustrates the importance of managing time for academic success. Research suggests that student schedules heavily impact library use, with the greatest activity occurring during breaks between classes (Curry, 2003). Again, this reinforces the significance of time management strategies for academic success. Furthermore, the study identified variations in library use by academic program, including M.Ed., M.Sc. and Management. The distinctions in library behavior and, indeed, the impact of educational background on how students use the library, have been identified in previous research (Karunanayake, 2016). The differences could be due to the required academic rigors and research practices in each field. While some learners recognized the potential benefits of the library, their use of it was occasionally at best because of busy schedules, assignment deadlines, and access to online material. This is not fully surprising, owing to previous studies that highlight how busy academic calendars of students and ready access to online materials result in a decline in library visits (Stephens, 2016). Such stressors indicate the need for libraries to adapt to student interests and preferences in a rapidly changing landscape.

Students consistently indicated the library was a positive and dedicated space that would enhance their concentration and independent learning. This observation corroborates research which indicates that academic libraries can create an environment conducive to concentration, focused study, and independent academic learning (Robinson, 2020). The quiet atmosphere and the organized disposition of materials in the library facilitate students' studying. Students also regarded access to academic resources in both print and digital format as very important, whereas they preferred printed books over digital materials for studying in-depth and taking notes. This indicates a role complementarity between traditional, print materials and digital resources, which often fulfil student needs (Amirtharaj, 2023). To enhance student engagement with the library space, the study recommends that facilities be improved, open hours increased, and library resources be more accessible. Improvements in these areas have all contributed positively to library use and academic success (Scoulas, 2024). Libraries can be more supportive of their students' academic and personal development when attention is given to the aforementioned areas of facility, open hours, and access to library resources. The study findings support existing literature that highlights the important role the university library plays in fostering students' academic success. Students at Tribhuvan University use the library primarily for academic tasks including preparing notes, research, assignments, and reviewing for exams. These findings mirror findings from studies by Abid (2023), which

emphasized that consistent library use correlates with improved academic performance and the development of self-directed learning skills.

A diverse array of the library's resources, such as textbooks, reference sources, journals, and online databases, provides support for both assigned course work and independent study, underlining the resource's role in the academic ecosystem (Hicks, 2023; Celik, 2023). In addition to this, students frequently characterized the library space as a helpful environment for study, enhancing focus, discipline, and productivity. This corroborates findings by Erdamar (2009), which indicated that a library with solitude, organization, and open space contributes to student's study habits and academic performance. Students also indicated a preference for printed material for reading longer texts, while referring to digital resources for information quickly. This complements findings from Roesnita and Zainab (2013), whereby students stated they often prefer print texts when reading or studying longer text and digital texts for shorter, more convenient reading. Nevertheless, challenges such as busy academic schedules, project deadlines, and overcrowding were noted as obstacles to regular library use. These difficulties match issues identified in prior studies, emphasizing the need for universities to address these constraints to maximize library engagement (Appiah, 2023; Celik, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendation

University libraries occupy a critical role as academic environments that foster concentration and minimize distractions that are often present in other settings. They provide structured spaces that encourage discipline, independent study, and consistent engagement with academic materials. Students typically utilize libraries for note preparation, examination review, research exploration, and supplementary learning, making the library an essential complement to classroom instruction.

Nevertheless, several constraints impede regular library use. Academic pressures, such as tight schedules, multiple deadlines, and the increasing tendency to rely on rapid online searches, can diminish students' engagement with physical library spaces. Furthermore, patterns of library use are not uniform across disciplines; for example, students in the sciences often prioritize laboratory-based activities, whereas those in the humanities or social sciences are more inclined to use reading rooms and print resources. These disciplinary variations indicate that the nature of academic study strongly influences the modes of library engagement.

Although the expansion of digital resources has transformed access to academic information, traditional library spaces remain indispensable. Their relevance lies in providing curated collections, conducive study environments, and personalized academic support. Enhancements such as extended library hours, diversified print and digital collections, and the creation of more quiet study areas could significantly improve student engagement. Furthermore, discipline-specific initiatives such as tailored collections for engineering, education, or social sciences, along with specialized research assistance would ensure that libraries respond effectively to

varied academic needs. In addition, integrating skill-based workshops on time management, information literacy, and the effective use of library resources would strengthen students' academic preparedness. Such initiatives would not only promote greater reading habits but also enhance students' capacity for independent learning, thereby improving academic performance and readiness for professional challenges. In the case of Tribhuvan University, strategic improvements in library infrastructure, resources, and support services could substantially enrich the student learning experience and contribute to broader educational outcomes.

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