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User Studies in Turkey: An Evaluation of Dissertations
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User Studies in Turkey: an evaluation of dissertations

One reason why user studies in Turkey have not yet made a theoretical contribution to the field is because library and information science departments in many universities have only recently launched graduate programs.

Nazan (Özenç) Uçak

INTRODUCTION

The scope of user studies refers to the relationship of human beings with information. For this reason, the scope encompasses the information needs of individuals, information seeking behaviors, the properties of information use and the reasons affecting these factors. Besides the relationship of human beings with information resources and services, user-specific properties such as cognitive structure, perception, decision taking and selection also fall within the scope of the study. Therefore, it is possible to say that the scope of the study of user needs is comprehensive and inter-disciplinary.

Multi-faceted use can be obtained from the results of the user research, which has been gaining growing importance in library and information science. The need for user studies ranges from collection development to service design, and from building and regulation of information centers to the creation of information policies.

User studies date back to the 1950s. At first the studies were launched in a system-based manner and have gradually developed as user-based studies. Especially from the 1980s onwards, changes have been observed in information needs and information seeking behaviors, and it has also been observed that both the quality and the quantity of studies of user needs have increased thanks to the contributions made by the theoreticians in the field, such as Wilson, Kuhlthau, Dervin and Belkin.

In line with developments in information technology, user needs and expectations change and vary. For information centers to meet these expectations, it is necessary that they know their users closely enough and design their systems in accordance with the users' profile and expectations. Information users are influenced by the culture, physical environment, economic and social structure, working environment and existing information systems surrounding them. For this reason, it is essential for societies to research their own information users and design information centers and systems on the basis of the results obtained.

USER STUDIES IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE LITERATURE IN TURKEY

User studies have gradually gained importance in Turkey and various studies have revealed the place of user studies in the general library and information science literature of the country. Yontar and Yalvaç (2000), for example, analyzed 644 professional and research articles in library and information science published between 1952–1994 with respect to their scope and research methods. The results demonstrated that 'library' and 'information services' were the subjects on which the majority of the studies were carried out, followed by 'library management', 'bibliography' and 'cataloguing and classification'. User studies in Turkey were the least studied of all the topics identified. The few user studies that were conducted during that period focused mainly on the use of information channels and resources by individuals actively using information centers. This study also underlined that information-seeking behaviors have gradually gained importance as a subject of study in recent years.

Another comprehensive analysis of the literature of library and information science in Turkey was carried out by Tonta (2002). Tonta analyzed articles published between 1987–2001 under 25 headings from the most frequently studied subject to the least studied one. Thus, of the total 238 articles published, 51 (21 percent) covered 'libraries', 29 (12 percent) covered 'bibliographic control', 19 (8 percent) 'information technology' and 15 (6 percent), 'information resources'. Only 4 (17 percent) were concerned with users and information use.

It can be concluded from the results of these studies that, in general, the library and information science literature in Turkey has focused on information centers and information services. The profile of information users, their information needs, information seeking and using behaviors have been among the least studied subjects.

THESES ON USER RESEARCH

The situation in respect of the published literature is also the case for all the theses that were completed

before the year 1994. Yontar (1995) analyzed the scope and research methods of postgraduate theses submitted to departments of librarianship in Turkey between 1958–1994. The most frequently studied subject was 'library and information service' with a rate of 50.9 percent. Library administration and planning was also among the most frequently studied subjects. On the other hand, user education, dissemination of information and information seeking behaviors were found to be the least studied subjects.

This research, which only covered the period until 1994, does not reflect the developments that have taken place in the following years. An analysis of theses submitted between 1995–2002 shows that 99 theses were submitted to the librarianship or information management departments in Turkey during this period. According to the classification used in Tonta's article (2002), research on user needs and information use has increased, with 14 percent of theses dealing with the use of information resources and information services, information seeking behaviors, information needs and users. However, it is not possible to state that these researches have been adequate. User studies in Turkey are not sufficient in number or quality to provide an information user profile. As stated by Çapar (1990), the number of user studies carried out in Turkey is not high enough to make a generalization and help contribute to the creation of an information policy.

METHOD

The aim of this study was to provide information about user studies carried out in Turkey, to analyze the master's and PhD theses and evaluate the studies in terms of year, institution, level (master's or PhD), user type, approach to the subject, research method and data collection techniques. A content analysis method has been adopted and the theses submitted to the institutions offering library and information science education have been evaluated to this end.

In Turkey, library and information science education is offered in five universities: Ankara University, Atatürk University, Baskent University, Hacettepe University, and Istanbul University. In all these, except Atatürk University, the departments of librarianship were renamed as of the year 2002 departments of information management.

In the Information Management Department of Ankara University, founded in 1954, theses have been conducted at the level of PhD since 1958, and at master's level since 1976 (Atilgan and Türkan 1995). The Information Management Department of Istanbul University was founded in 1963 and the first thesis was conducted at PhD level in 1967 (Keseroglu 1987). Masters' degree studies in the Information

Management Department of Istanbul University have been conducted since 1985 (Uraz, 1995). The Information Management Department of Hacettepe University was founded in 1972; the first PhD thesis was submitted in 1974 and the first master's thesis in 1975 (Çakin, 1997). In these three departments the number of master's and PhD theses has been gradually increasing over time. In the Librarianship Department of Atatürk University and Information Management Department of Baskent University no theses have been completed as yet.

The theses completed in the three institutions mentioned above are stored in the Theses Center of the Board of Higher Education. In this study, all theses completed in Librarianship/Information Management Departments by 1986 and submitted to the Theses Center of the Board of Higher Education by the end of August 2002 have been analyzed. A total 206 theses were completed between 1958 and 2002. Thirty of these were directly or indirectly related to users. Three more studies were conducted in fields other than library and information science which can also be considered as user studies. Thus, a total of 33 theses were considered as user studies and have been included in the present study.

These 33 theses were classified with respect to universities and departments, date and level (master's or PhD). The types of user considered in these theses were also investigated. The studies were classified using (a) a system-based approach in which the users are regarded as system-dependent, and (b) a user-based system in which the users are regarded as independent of any system. The research methods and data collection techniques used were also analyzed. Attention was paid to the relevance of the research method to the research problem, to the frequency of the adopted methods and techniques, and to whether a model was constructed at the end of the research. The findings were evaluated and interpreted and the problems of the field highlighted.

FINDINGS AND EVALUATION

Theses on user studies account for some 16 percent of master's and PhD theses in library and information science in Turkey. The distribution of these studies according to period, institution, degree, user profile, approach, research method and data collection techniques is presented below.

Distribution by Year

Although theses in library and information science in Turkey date back to 1958, there was no research on information users before 1976. The first user study was conducted in Hacettepe University in 1976 to

find out the features, information needs and expectations of users for the process of designing an information center. From 1976 to 1989 inclusive there were only five theses on this subject. The number began to increase thereafter, and studies conducted in the 1990s account for 85 percent of all user studies. There has also been an increase in the number of articles on users published in the documentation literature in the last ten years. The distribution of theses on users by year is given in Table 1.

Year	Theses
1976	1
1978	1
1979	1
1988	1
1989	1
1990	2
1991	4
1992	1
1993	2
1994	2
1995	2
1996	2
1997	3
1998	2
1999	2
2000	1
2001	3
2002	2
Total	**33**

Table 1. Theses on users by year, 1976–2002.

Distribution by Institution

The distribution of theses on user studies by institution is shown in Table 2 (page 125).

The department which has concentrated most intensively on user studies is the Information Management Department of Hacettepe University, followed by the Information Management Department of Ankara University. Departments other than that of Hacettepe University only recently launched

graduate programs; this has a strong impact on the figures in Table 2.

Distribution by Degree

Of the total of 33 theses on users, 27 (82 percent) were for master's degrees and 6 (18 percent) were PhD theses.

Distribution by Type of User

Different types of users were studied in these theses. The majority (27 percent) were on the information needs, information seeking behaviors and the properties of information channel, resource and service use of academicians.

The second most frequently analyzed groups of users were children (12 percent) and the general public (12 percent). In general, in the studies of pre-school and primary school children, the reading habits of the children and their book choices were studied. Among the studies of the general public are not only those which investigated the way these users make use of public libraries, but also those making an attempt to find out the relation between the socio-cultural status of the user and his or her information use.

Three types of users rank joint third among these studies: students in secondary education, users of private libraries and university students each accounted for 9 percent of the theses. In the studies based on secondary education the relation of the student with the school library and the way the student uses information were studied. The studies of users of private libraries were system-based and concentrated on the services of the institution or on identifying users' expectations for the design of new services. Theses dealing with university students include studies of their cognitive processes in selecting materials as well as studies on purposes and frequency of library use and system-based ones to provide supplementary data for user programs.

Four groups of users ranked joint fourth among the user studies, each accounting for 6 percent of the total. These were: people working in the industrial sector, doctors, disabled people and patients. Two theses studied the needs of users in different sectors of industry and the way their needs were met by different institutions. The studies of doctors covered the information seeking behaviors of this group and the way they use specific channels, resources and services. One thesis was conducted on blind users and another on patients; in these studies, the information needs of these users were determined and the facilities and services of information centers evaluated on this basis. There was also one detailed user-based research on the information needs and information seeking behaviors of journalists.

University	Department	Theses	%
Ankara University	Information Management Department	6	18
Atatürk University	Department of Education	1	3
Bilkent University	Business Administration Department	1	3
Firat University	Education Department	1	3
Hacettepe University	Information Management Department	23	69
Hacettepe University	Program of Children's Health and Education	1	3
Total		33	100

Table 2. Theses on users by institution.

Approach and Point of View

The subjects of these user studies were found to have been studied on the basis of two different approaches. In studies carried out by the traditional method, the user was studied as related to an information center and thus, a system-based approach was adopted. When the second approach was adopted the user was considered as being independent of any system and was studied in his natural setting; there was thus no obligation to relate his or her information needs, information seeking behaviors and information using style to any information center. Of the 33 theses analyzed, 22 (67 percent) were system-based, whereas 11 (33 percent) were user-based. Although user-based studies have gained in importance in recent years, the number of system-based studies is still greater than that of user-based studies. Frequently asked questions in the system-based theses include for what purpose, in what way and to what extent the services and resources are utilized, whether or not there is a need for a new service design, and what is the level of user satisfaction.

The system-based analysis of the use of information resources and services is not the only approach to user studies. Information needs, information seeking behaviors and the reasons for these behaviors, including the mental, social, cultural and professional factors affecting information behaviors and their effect on information systems, also fall within the scope of user studies. These researches are important in that they help determine the users' profiles. The design of information centers and information systems in accordance with the developed profiles results in an increase in user satisfaction. When we look at the literature, we observe that such problems have only very recently started to be dealt with. All 11 user-based studies were carried out after 1993, showing that such studies have gained greater importance in the last ten years. However, their numbers are still too few to draw conclusions or make generalizations.

Research Methods

When the research carried out on library and information science in Turkey is analyzed in terms of the methods used, it is observed that, in general, the most frequently used method is the survey, followed by historical methods and experimental methods respectively. It is widely acknowledged that the frequency of use of bibliometric methods is gradually increasing (Kurbanoglu 1996). Qualitative methods are not generally used in Turkey (Yontar 1995). Thus, there is a similarity between the research methods used in the field of library and information science in general and those used in the theses on user research. Of the 33 theses on users, 32 used quantitative methods and only one used qualitative methods.

The overwhelming majority of the theses have described the current situation and made recommendations. In 97 percent of researches that attempted to find the answers to questions starting with 'what' and 'how', quantitative research methods were used. The most frequently used method was the survey. In 85 percent of these theses, descriptive methods were used, while 6 percent used experimental methods. One study of the information needs and information use of secondary school students used descriptive and bibliometric methods together. Experimental techniques were also used with students. Studies of primary school children and college students examined resource utilization by the students and the effects on them of user training. One thesis adopted the user-based approach to study the information needs and information seeking behaviors of academicians and analyzed the differences between disciplines using comparative methods.

In general, traditional quantitative methods have been employed in user studies and the features of

information use of a group have been reflected using structured questionnaire techniques and statistical analysis. Quantitative methods are sufficient for finding out whether information centers meet the information needs of users or not. However, these methods have failed both to reflect the point of view of the user and way he or she perceives the information environment and to integrate information seeking activities with these features (Ellis, 1993). When there is a need for comprehensive and multi-faceted research into the individual features and the environment of the user, and of factors outside the library, the application of qualitative methods is of crucial importance.

A review of the international library and information science literature shows that the number of user-based studies and the importance of analyzing the user as an individual in his or her natural setting and with his or her natural behaviors are gradually increasing. Research methods known as 'second generation' have undergone a change in line with the consideration of the individual as the center of and active in the information seeking process (Lynn, 1997). If the underlying reasons for information seeking behaviors are to be understood, there is a need for qualitative research (Wilson, 1981). Answers should be sought to questions like 'why' and 'for what', as well as the questions 'what' and 'how'. Only one of the 33 user studies considered here used qualitative methods, in this case to investigate how users process information in their cognitive structure.

Data Collection Techniques

The user studies under review used one or more techniques of data collection, selected in accordance with the chosen research methods. The most frequently used data collection technique was the questionnaire; this was the only technique used in 45 percent of the studies. Questionnaires and interviews were used together in 15 percent of the studies, questionnaires and observation together in 9 percent and questionnaires, interviews and observation together in 18 percent. When all of these are taken into account, questionnaires are found to have been used in 87 percent of the studies. There are only two studies in which the interview technique was used alone and just one which used the technique of document analysis. The fact quantitative methods were adopted in most of the studies naturally influenced the results concerning the data collection techniques employed. As for the theses where qualitative methods were used, data were collected by recording the views and opinions of the subjects.

Modeling

Many researchers who have conducted theoretical studies on information needs and information seeking behaviors have developed information seeking models. The models developed by Wilson (1981; 1999), Krikelas (1983), Wand and Soergel (1998), Leckie, Petigrew and Sylvain (1996) have contributed to the full understanding of the scope and the relationship between the user and information. According to Case (2002), there is a connection between models and theories; generally speaking, models tend to focus on more limited subjects when compared to theories and may contribute to the development of the theories. The development of a theory in any field involves conceptualization of the phenomena in that field. In this way, various phenomena and relationships can be studied together and be comprehended. This makes it is possible to approach problems with a particular point of view (Kuhlthau 1993). The development of theories will not only bring a new perspective but also will make a contribution to the full understanding of the concepts as the already existing theoretical chaos gradually settles.

That the modeling technique has scarcely been discussed in the literature of Turkish library and information science is proved by research conducted by Kurbanoglu (1996). This also applies to the theses on user studies. Only two of the 33 theses have attempted to explain their results with reference to a model. Both are PhD theses and both studies were conducted after 1990. Only a few of the theses on user studies referred to theories in the field and in only one case was the research shaped in the light of a theory and then tested.

Terminology

The problem of terminology, which is one of the fundamental problems of user studies, has been encountered in this study as well. In the theses that have been analyzed a clear and easy-to-understand terminology has not been developed. If this problem arises in the case of foreign literature, it becomes even serious when attempts are made to translate some concepts into Turkish (Uçak, 2001). Further studies are needed in order to develop a standard terminology and make the researches comprehensible for everyone.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude, it may be confidently stated that the user studies that have been carried out so far in Turkey are too few yet to develop user profiles, identify information needs and the features of information use, and make a theoretical contribution

to the field. This situation arises, not only because users have not been taken adequately into account, but also because library and information science education in Turkey only offers undergraduate programs; graduate programs have only recently been launched in universities other than Hacettepe University.

The users' features, expectations and behaviors only began to be studied at all intensively in the 1990s. Different user groups were studied; some were studied frequently while some were totally disregarded. The fact that academicians and students have been the most frequently studied can be explained on the grounds that their use of information is intensive. Generally speaking, the approach and the point of view of the researches have been system-based. The studies usually tend to describe the existing situation and problems, while the reasons for the behaviors of the user in his relationship with information have not been analyzed. This has also influenced the choice of research methods, which have been mainly quantitative. The most frequently used research method has been description and survey; the most frequently used data collection technique has been the questionnaire.

The theses analyzed here have preferred to present an existing problem and its causes rather than develop a theory and conduct the study on the basis of a theory and model of information seeking. This means that the studies cannot be based on theories developed in the field and the findings cannot be put into practice to find solutions to the problems. Also, the concepts used in the theses are vague. Terminology has not been standardized in a manner to make it possible for everyone to understand in the same way.

In line with these results, the following points can be recommended:

- the user studies to be carried out from now on should be improved in terms of both quantity and quality
- the information needs and behaviors of information seeking and information use of users belonging to different groups should be studied
- the users to be studied should be regarded as individuals and to be studied in their natural settings and the results should be evaluated afterwards
- the research method and data collection techniques should be adopted in line with this point of view
- the results of research should be put into practice and be available for the process of service design
- more importance should be given to theoretical and conceptual studies.

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Yontar, A. and Yalvaç. M. (2000). Problems of library and information science research in Turkey: a content analysis of journal articles 1952–1994. *IFLA Journal, Vol*. 26, No.1, pp.39–46.

Abstract

Presents a picture of the recent situation of user studies in Turkey and makes an evaluation. The research population encompassed theses completed from 1958–2002 in the departments of librarianship or information management and other departments in Turkish universities. A total of 33 dissertations were investigated in terms of the year when they were completed, the department where they were conducted, research methods and data collection techniques and type of research – system-oriented or user-oriented. The findings reveal that user studies in Turkey are usually evaluated in relation to the information center, that the number of studies increased in the last 10 years, and that users in the field of education (students, academicians) are preferred as the focus of study. The theses usually describe the existing situation and problems. Quantitative methods are the most frequently used. The study also puts forth some suggestions in the light of the findings.

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MORE ON USER STUDIES AND LIS RESEARCH IN TURKEY

Ankara'daki ilkogretim ogretmenlerinin okuma ve halk kutuphanesi kullanma aliskanliklari uzerine bir arastirma. A research on reading and public library use habits of the primary school teachers in Ankara.

Yilmaz, B. *Turk Kütüphaneciligi / Turkish Librarianship;* 16 (4) 2002, p.441–60

Describes a study whose aim was to discover the characteristics of reading and public library use habits of selected primary school teachers in Ankara, Turkey. Data were gathered through questionnaires that were filled out by 127 teachers in 16 primary schools in six central districts in Ankara. The reading and public library use of the teachers were evaluated in terms of criteria such as age, sex, experience in teaching, primary school curriculum and professional courses. It was also investigated whether they had been educated in these habits as undergraduates. The conclusion reached was that the teachers did not have adequate reading and public library use habits because of the present education system.

Problems of library and information science research in Turkey: a content analysis of journal articles 1952-1994.

Yontar, A; Yalva, M. *IFLA Journal;* 26 (1) 2000, p.39–51

Reports results of a content analysis of the library and information science (LIS) research articles published in the library periodical, Turk Kütüphaneciligi (Turkish Librarianship), between 1952 and 1994. A total of 517 professional articles and 127 research articles were analyzed. Research and professional articles are analyzed by topic. In addition, research articles are analyzed by organizations, by research strategies and by methods of data collection used. The analysis is based on the classification schemes of Jarvelin and Vakkari (Library and Information Science Research, 12 (4) 1990, 395-421 and Information Processing and Management, 29 (1) 1993, 129-44) and includes comparisons and data from an earlier study conducted by Yontar (1995) on an analysis of graduate theses produced by three departments of library science in Turkey between 1958 and 1994. (The authors may be contacted by electronic mail at [mailto:ayontar@istanbu-l.edu.tr] and [mailto:yalvacm@istanbul.edu.tr]).

(From *Library and Information Science Abstracts*)