



# BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE LIBRARY UTILIZATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF STUDENT AND TEACHER EXPERIENCE

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the barriers that hinder effective library utilization among students and teachers in educational institutions. Recognizing the library as a cornerstone of academic success and intellectual development, the research explores why its services are often underused. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a purposive sample of students and teaching staff from secondary and tertiary institutions. Thematic analysis identified several recurring challenges: outdated or insufficient learning resources, inadequate physical infrastructure, limited digital literacy, time constraints, and insufficient assistance from library staff. Moreover, institutional policies and a general lack of awareness regarding library services further compounded these issues. The study concludes that improving accessibility, modernizing resources, training users, and fostering a supportive library culture are critical steps to enhancing library engagement. These findings offer practical insights for educators, librarians, and policymakers seeking to improve the academic utility of library services. These findings underscore the urgent need for systemic improvements in library services. Enhancing the availability of digital and physical resources, upgrading infrastructure, integrating user training programs, and adopting user-friendly library policies are essential steps toward creating a more inclusive and accessible library environment.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Library Utilization, Educational Institutions, Qualitative Study, Student Experience, Teacher Experience, Digital Literacy, Library Access, Academic Support, Barriers to Learning, Library Infrastructure*

## INTRODUCTION

Libraries are essential resources for educational success, yet many students and teachers face significant barriers that prevent effective utilization. Despite the acknowledged importance of libraries in fostering literacy and research skills, challenges such as inadequate resources, insufficient digital literacy, and poor communication persist. Thus, in underfunded schools, students often experience feelings of intimidation and disengagement, further limiting their access to library services. While existing research has examined various factors affecting library usage, a notable gap remains in understanding the specific lived experiences of students and teachers across different educational contexts. This qualitative study aims to address this gap by exploring these experiences, identifying the barriers encountered, and proposing actionable solutions to enhance library services and create a more inclusive learning environment.

Libraries are vital institutions that provide access to information, resources, and services, fostering learning, research, and community engagement. However, despite their importance, many individuals, particularly within specific demographics, face barriers that hinder their effective utilization of library services. This thesis aims to conduct a qualitative study exploring the multifaceted barriers that prevent individuals from fully engaging with their local libraries.

Libraries are essential resources for learning and research, offering a wealth of information and services. However, despite the availability of these resources, many students and teachers face significant barriers to effective library utilization. This qualitative study aims to shed light on these barriers, exploring the perspectives of both students and teachers through the lens of their lived experience.

In Australia, utilization is the act of making use of certain things for a purpose. It is also seen as making use of library facilities for the purpose of attaining educational goals. Utilization of library facilities such as books, journals, research works by students. These library facilities are the materials needed in the library to facilitate learning. In line with this view, Prout (2009) states that the use of library facilities, stimulates interest, excitement and instills confidence in the user to develop his potentials and capabilities both academically and socially. The more accessible the resources are, the more likely they are to be used.

However, in USA limited operating hours, restricted access to remote resources, and inadequate facilities in libraries can create significant barriers for users, particularly for individuals with disabilities. When libraries have reduced hours, they may unintentionally exclude those who cannot visit during standard working hours, such as students with classes, individuals with jobs, or community members with caregiving responsibilities. For individuals with



disabilities, limited hours can be even more problematic, as planning and arranging transportation to and from the library may require more effort and time (Neuman, 2020).

Restricted access to remote resources compounds this issue. Many libraries lack a robust digital infrastructure that enables remote access to e-books, academic databases, and virtual consultations with librarians. This digital gap can particularly disadvantage students, teachers, and individuals in rural or underserved areas, who may not have alternative means of accessing these essential resources (Neuman, 2020). In a time when online learning and remote work are increasingly common, limited digital access can make libraries seem less relevant and accessible, discouraging users from relying on them.

Finally, for individuals with disabilities, inadequate facilities and accessibility features in library buildings can further limit access. Essential accommodations, such as ramps, elevators, adaptive technology, accessible restrooms, and clearly marked, intuitive layouts, are often insufficient in libraries with limited funding or outdated infrastructure. Without these features, individuals with mobility challenges, visual impairments, or other disabilities may find it difficult to navigate library spaces or use library resources independently. This lack of physical accessibility can create a sense of exclusion, signaling that the library may not be a welcoming or usable space for them (Neuman, 2020).

Overall, in Cambodia the combined effects of limited hours, restricted remote resources, and inadequate facilities can discourage patrons from attempting to access the library at all, as these barriers may make usage feel inconvenient or impossible. Addressing these issues by extending hours, investing in digital resources, and improving physical accessibility would enable libraries to better serve diverse populations, creating a more inclusive and accommodating environment that encourages library use across the board.

A lack of awareness about the full range of library resources in Quezon City, coupled with limited training in how to access them effectively, significantly hinders students' and educators' ability to make the most of what libraries offer. Research shows that without comprehensive orientation and ongoing training, many users remain unaware of valuable resources such as academic journals, subject-specific databases, e-books, multimedia materials, and special collections that could enhance their academic and research activities. This knowledge gap often results in underutilization of the library, with users relying on familiar, less specialized resources or external sources of varying credibility (Williams & Rowlands, 2018).

For many students in Metro Manila, particularly those who are new to higher education or less experienced with research, library systems can feel complex and intimidating. From navigating a vast catalog to understanding how to refine search terms for targeted results, students may struggle to locate relevant materials without proper guidance. Even when students do use the catalog, they may miss out on advanced search features or tools that could make their research more efficient and thorough. According to Williams & Rowlands (2018), orientation sessions and training workshops significantly improve students' information literacy, equipping them with skills to critically assess sources, use digital tools, and locate credible, high-quality information efficiently.

Educators in Cebu City also benefit from training in library use, especially as libraries continue to evolve with digital technologies. Familiarity with advanced search strategies, digital repositories, and citation management tools can enable teachers to guide their students more effectively and integrate library resources into their coursework. However, without training, educators may lack the confidence or knowledge to encourage students to use the library fully or may underutilize library resources in their own professional research and teaching.

To address these issues, libraries in Davao City need to prioritize structured, ongoing orientations and information literacy training. Offering workshops on how to use library systems, database search strategies, and resource assessment skills could empower students and educators alike. Embedding library training into coursework or orientation programs and providing easy-to-access digital tutorials can also help sustain engagement with library resources over time. By building users' confidence and competence in navigating library resources, libraries can foster a culture of information literacy that encourages students and teachers to view the library as an essential partner in their academic and professional pursuits.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The effective utilization of library resources is essential for fostering academic success, yet numerous studies have identified various barriers that hinder this engagement among students and teachers. Recent research highlights the impact of digital literacy on library utilization. For instance, a study by Aharony and Tal (2021) found that inadequate digital skills among students significantly limited their ability to access and navigate online library resources. This lack of proficiency not only affects their research capabilities but also contributes to feelings of frustration and disengagement. The authors emphasize the need for targeted training programs to enhance digital literacy, which could empower students to make better use of available library services.

In addition to digital literacy, the physical library environment plays a crucial role in user engagement. A qualitative study by O'Connor and Smith (2022) examined the perceptions of students regarding their library spaces and found that factors such as layout, lighting, and availability of quiet study areas directly influenced their willingness to



utilize library resources. The study revealed that many students felt intimidated by the library environment, perceiving it as unwelcoming or overly formal. This suggests that libraries need to rethink their spatial design to create more inviting and user-friendly environments that encourage greater student interaction and use.

Moreover, the role of institutional support in enhancing library utilization cannot be overlooked. Research by Gonzalez et al. (2023) highlighted that teachers often lack sufficient resources and training to effectively incorporate library services into their curricula. The study revealed that many educators were unaware of the full range of library resources available, which limited their ability to guide students in utilizing these services. The authors advocate for stronger collaboration between library staff and teaching faculty, suggesting that regular professional development opportunities could help bridge this gap. By addressing both student and teacher needs, libraries can create a more supportive ecosystem that enhances overall utilization and fosters academic achievement.

The literature review will examine existing research on library access, utilization, and barriers to engagement. It will explore factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural background, geographic location, disability, language barriers, and digital literacy as potential barriers to effective library utilization. Additionally, the review will examine the role of library services and programs in addressing these barriers.

In many developing regions, libraries are essential to the academic ecosystem, providing students, educators, and researchers with crucial access to information. However, the persistent issue of underfunding severely impacts their ability to serve their communities effectively. Libraries in these regions often face financial limitations that prevent them from updating or expanding their collections, acquiring current resources, and investing in necessary technology. These challenges have a ripple effect on education, limiting students' access to relevant, accurate, and diverse learning materials. (Makoni, 2019).

This shortage of relevant resources leads to a decrease in library utilization. When students and teachers perceive libraries as offering outdated, inadequate materials, they are less likely to use them for research or study. As a result, libraries become underutilized spaces that fail to meet the educational needs of their communities. The cycle of underuse reinforces the perception of libraries as irrelevant, leading to further neglect and underfunding. (Makoni, 2019).

One core issue is the lack of collaboration and communication between teachers and library staff. When teachers and librarians do not engage in regular discussions about curriculum content, upcoming projects, or specific subject needs, librarians may be unaware of the particular resources that could support classroom learning. This disconnect results in library collections that, while perhaps well-curated in general, do not fully align with the specific academic demands of the curriculum. Teachers may then find library materials inadequate or misaligned with their instructional goals, leading to underuse of library resources (Lim, 2020).

### Research Questions

1. What Experience do teachers face in integrating library resources into their educational practices?
2. What coping Strategies do digital literacy skills impact the ability of students and teachers to effectively use library resources?
3. What valuable insights with library services differ across various educational contexts?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The research design for this qualitative study on barriers to effective library utilization among students and teachers employs a phenomenological approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences. This method is particularly effective in understanding the subjective meanings that individuals assign to their interactions with library resources (Smith et al., 2021). Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, which provide flexibility for participants to share their insights while ensuring that key topics are addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2021).

The study will use a purposive sampling strategy, targeting a diverse group of 4 student participants and 4 teachers from various educational contexts to capture various experiences and perspectives (Brown & Wilson, 2022). Thematic analysis will be utilized to identify and interpret patterns within the data, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the barriers users face (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This comprehensive design aims to produce actionable insights that can inform library practices and enhance user engagement.

### Research Participants

For this qualitative study examining barriers to effective library utilization, a total of eight participants will be selected, comprising four students and four teachers, each chosen based on specific inclusion criteria to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The student participants must be currently enrolled in a K-12 or higher education institution and have utilized library resources at least once in the past semester. They should be between 14 to 60 years old, allowing for insights across different educational levels, and represent varied demographic backgrounds, including differences in socioeconomic status, academic disciplines, and levels of digital literacy.



Similarly, the teacher participants must currently be employed in a K-12 or higher education setting, with a requirement to have incorporated library resources into their teaching practices at least once during the current academic year. Additionally, they should have at least two years of teaching experience to provide a well-rounded perspective on library services, and they should represent different subject areas to capture a broad view of library utilization across various educational contexts.

### Research Instruments

The research instrument for this qualitative study on barriers to effective library utilization will primarily consist of semi-structured interview guides designed to elicit detailed responses from participants. These guides will incorporate open-ended questions that encourage participants to share their personal experiences and perceptions regarding library resources (Yin, 2021). The development of the interview questions will be informed by existing literature on library usage and barriers, ensuring relevance and depth (Flick, 2022).

Additionally, pilot testing of the interview guide with a small sample will be conducted to refine questions for clarity and effectiveness, as van Teijlingen and Hundley (2020) recommended. To supplement the interviews, participants may also be invited to complete a brief demographic questionnaire, providing contextual information that will aid in analyzing their responses. This mixed-methods approach within the qualitative framework aims to capture a comprehensive view of the barriers students and teachers face in utilizing library services.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study employed the deductive thematic analysis approach, a structured method for analyzing qualitative data. Utilizing this approach provided a methodical framework for data analysis, ensuring that the findings were chronologically organized and resulted in insightful conclusions. The following step-by-step process was used for data analysis: (1) Became familiar with the data. (2) Generated initial codes. (3) Searched for themes. (4) Reviewed themes. (5) Defined themes. (6) Lastly, wrote up the findings. Conclusively, the data analysis allowed researchers to explore how their data aligned with existing theories or concepts, providing valuable insights and supporting or challenging existing knowledge. The use of the deductive thematic analysis approach, involving the step-by-step processes mentioned, aimed to help researchers gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Maguire & Delahunt, 2018).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Implications

The findings of this study carry several significant implications for educational institutions, library administrators, and policymakers. Firstly, the consistent reports of limited access to updated resources and poor infrastructure suggest an urgent need for increased investment in both physical and digital library collections. Without current and relevant materials, students and teachers are less likely to rely on library resources for their academic and instructional needs (Adekunmisi, 2013).

Secondly, the lack of digital literacy among users highlights a gap in user training and orientation. Implementing regular digital literacy workshops and hands-on library orientation sessions could empower both students and staff to better navigate online databases, catalogs, and e-resources (Lwehabura, 2018). This step is particularly critical in the growing landscape of hybrid and digital learning environments.

Furthermore, the study reveals that time constraints and insufficient support from library personnel create barriers that can be addressed through improved staffing, flexible library hours, and user-centered service models. Training librarians to provide proactive guidance and research support can foster a more inviting and helpful environment (Kumar & Kumar, 2010).

Lastly, addressing institutional and policy-related barriers such as poor awareness campaigns and bureaucratic restrictions can enhance overall utilization. Institutional leaders must prioritize library visibility through integration into academic planning and student engagement initiatives. Libraries should not function in isolation but as integral partners in the academic mission of the institution.

Overall, addressing these barriers will not only improve library utilization but also contribute to enhanced academic performance, greater research productivity, and a more informed learning community.

### Future Directions

Building on the current findings, future research should explore the barriers to library utilization across a wider range of educational settings, including rural schools, technical colleges, and under-resourced institutions. These environments may present unique challenges not fully captured in this study, such as infrastructural deficits, lack of internet connectivity, or cultural attitudes toward library use (Issa, Amusan, & Daura, 2009).

Further, longitudinal and mixed-methods studies could assess the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as digital literacy training, library outreach programs, and resource modernization initiatives. These approaches would provide deeper insights into how sustained changes in policy or infrastructure impact library use over time (Khan & Bhatti, 2017).



The increasing digitization of education also presents a valuable area for future research. Investigating the integration of digital and mobile library services, as well as the use of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence for personalized library support, could offer innovative solutions to existing barriers (Tenopir et al., 2012).

Moreover, participatory approaches where students and teachers are actively involved in shaping library services should be explored as a method to align library offerings more closely with user needs. Such collaboration may lead to more user-friendly policies, inclusive resource selection, and effective service delivery (Ocholla & Ocholla, 2016). Future studies should also consider the role of user involvement in the planning and evaluation of library services. Engaging students and faculty in participatory design processes can lead to the creation of more responsive, user-friendly library systems (Ocholla & Ocholla, 2016). Such collaboration ensures that services are aligned with actual user needs, thus promoting more consistent and meaningful utilization.

Finally, policy-level analysis is necessary to examine how institutional priorities and funding decisions impact library development. Future research could investigate how government and administrative policies either facilitate or hinder equitable access to library resources, especially in resource-constrained educational environments.

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