

Use of information sources by and factors affecting access to information of visually impaired undergraduates

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This study was conducted to find out the use of information sources by the visually impaired undergraduates and the issues faced by them in accessing information. The target population was 43 undergraduates with visual impairment. Out of them, 42 (98%) were interviewed. The interview schedule covered demographic details, main sources of information and issues encountered in general and in the Internet context. The majority of the respondents are males (52%) and are in the age bracket of 21-24 (76%). Out of the 42 respondents, 23 can read only braille whereas 19 can read printed text but with difficulty. In searching of information, 34 students (81%) use the Main Library of University of Colombo and 32 students (76%) use electronic information resources. The Center for Disabled Students of the university, purchases made by them and libraries of other institutions are alternative sources of information for them. The respondents mentioned 18 different issues in using information in general, where lack of audio books (71%) and the need to depend on others to search for information (48%) were the main issues. Lack of braille books (12%) and lack of audio books of award winning Sinhala novels (12%) were the other two issues mentioned. More than half of the respondents use the Internet daily (57%), 24% use it a few times a week and only a few stated (10%) that they rarely use the Internet. Six issues related to the use of the Internet were identified, in which less user-friendly to be read through screen readers (71%) and difficult to find information because of the given format (67%) were the two major issues. Enhancing the audio book collection both in Sinhala and Tamil, establishing a special assistance mechanism for visually impaired users and training both users and the library staff in searching information in the Internet are recommended.

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