Interlibrary Loans and Academic Research:
The Differences between Users and Non-Users and
Factors Affecting Satisfaction with Outcomes

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Abstract:

Today's research climate is characterized primarily by information-seeking via the Internet, particularly during the early stages of research due to the ease and speed of access to results compared to library databases and print sources. In addition, the wide variety and extensive amount of information now accessible via the Internet and library databases exposes researchers to more and more citations and abstracts but not always to the documents themselves. Despite the increasing numbers of electronic documents freely available via the Internet, ILL requests are still requested in high demand in most academic libraries due to the continual growth in the numbers of books and articles being published, which has resulted in additional requests for information which no one library can meet entirely from its own collection.

The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether there were differences between users and non-users of ILL and whether users perceived certain factors to contribute to satisfactory ILL outcomes. The first research question investigated the differences between users and non-users of ILL according to: frequency of library use, style of information-seeking, demographics – age, gender and mother – tongue, and academic profile – seniority, tenure/promotion status, productivity level, and academic discipline. The second research question examined the extent to which the perceived benefits of the following factors were related to satisfaction with ILL outcomes: consultation of secondary information sources, choosing indicative/informative titles, receiving reference assistance, and achieving a timely delivery.

The study employed the survey method in the form of a specially-compiled web questionnaire which was distributed by e-mail to a sample of faculty and

doctoral students at two Israeli research institutions. In total, 330 questionnaires were distributed at the University of Haifa and 1090 questionnaires were distributed at the Technion.

The two most significant findings of the current study were that: (a) the profile of an ILL user is someone who frequently uses the library's services and resources, who has a deep and thorough style of information-seeking, and who is a senior, productive, humanities, faculty member, and (b) ILL users who perceived consulting secondary information sources and receiving reference assistance to be beneficial to ILL outcomes were likely to achieve satisfactory ILL outcomes which exceed their expectations and which were incorporated into their research. In addition, the study uncovered several reason for non-use of ILL such as: a great deal of scholarly information in the sciences and technology was now freely available via the Internet, rendering ILL and libraries redundant in the eyes of researchers, and the preference among humanities' scholars for purchasing personal copies of books which they could keep in their possession for future reference, unlike items obtained via ILL.

The findings of the current study contribute our understanding of the profile of the user and non-user of ILL, and the ways of helping ILL users to achieve satisfactory ILL outcomes. Moreover, they are applicable to current library and information science practice, in that awareness of the profile of ILL users and non-users may enable librarians to indentify potential users of ILL and to encourage them to become users. In addition, awareness of the importance of reference assistance and the consultation of secondary information sources as beneficial to ILL outcomes may bring about an increase in referrals and use of secondary sources prior to requesting ILL.

Despite unsupportive predictions about the future of ILL due to the widespread use of electronic journals in academia, the current study shows that it is unlikely that ILL will be eliminated from library use in the near future. Although in the sciences document delivery has declined, in the humanities book borrowing has actually increased, particularly for esoteric, non-English language items that can only be located with the professional knowledge and

experience of ILL librarians. The main contribution of the current study is its validation of ILL as an essential service for serious academic researchers.

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