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A SURVEY ON THE LITERACY OF LIBRARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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At the beginning of the century literacy simply meant knowing how to read and write. Now it has become an all-inclusive term for a wide range of concepts such as "functional literacy," "library literacy," and "information literacy." Before starting to examine the state of literacy of library school students it is useful to give short definitions for these terms:

"Functional literacy" involves an individual making use of reading and writing skills continuously through one's life in order "to function effectively in his or her environment."¹

"Library literacy" refers to the ability to use libraries or other types of information centers for the purpose of functional literacy and information retrieval.

"Information literacy" is "the ability to effectively access and evaluate information for problem solving and decision making."²

In the light of these concepts we can define literacy as making use of reading and writing skills, information centers, and information media to retrieve and evaluate information in order to function effectively in one's environment, make decisions, and solve problems.

¹ Ruth J. Person and Kenneth O. Phifer, "Support for Literacy Education in Academic Libraries," *College and Research Libraries*, 46 (2, 1985), p.147.

² Hannelore B. Rader, "Information Literacy: A Revolution in the Library," *RQ*, 31 (1, 1991), p.26.

It may seem that, in the last decade of the twentieth century, the role of the librarian is losing its significance in the light of the new developments in information and communication technology. Yet when we look at the wide gap between the developed and developing countries, we clearly see that this is not the case: rather, the information revolution intensifies the librarian's role as educator. Here, educating refers to helping the society to become literate in the most generic sense. To be able to do this, librarians themselves need to be literate.

Starting from this point of view, we have in this paper tried to examine fourth year library school students' literacy to see if they will be able to fulfill their mission of providing literacy education for society. A questionnaire containing 40 questions was applied to the 74 fourth-year students at the School of Library Science, Faculty of Letters, University of Ankara, which has three departments: Archival Science, Library Science, and Documentation and Information. The students of all these three departments were included in this survey.

When asked if they read, i.e., read any material, at any time, for any purpose, 97.30% of the students answered this question 'yes,' only 2.70% said 'no.' They read books (95.95%), newspapers (89.19%), and periodicals (67.57%), in that order. Most of them read all of these three items (58.11%). Reading books and newspapers was the next most popular option (25.68%). Some didn't read newspapers, only books and periodicals (4.05%). (Table 1)

Type of Materials Read	N=74	Percentage (%)
Book	71	95.95
Newspaper	66	89.19
Periodical	50	67.57
Encyclopedia	2	2.70
Book + Periodical + Newspaper	43	58.11
Book + Newspaper	19	25.68

TABLE 1: (continued from previous page)

Type of Materials Read	N=74	Percentage (%)
Only Book	4	5.41
Book + Periodical	3	4.05
Book + Periodical + Newspaper + Encyclopedia	2	2.70
Periodical + Newspaper	1	1.35

The two commonest answers to the question of how they acquired their reading materials were "I buy them and borrow them from other people" (35.14%) and "I buy them, borrow them from other people, and borrow them from libraries" (31.08%).

The purpose of their reading was characterized as follows: "to retrieve the information I need in any subject" (72.97%), "because I enjoy it" (70.27%), "to improve my culture" (68.92%), "to improve my personality" (62.16%), "to satisfy my intellectual curiosity" (47.30%). (Table 2)

TABLE 2

Reason for Reading	N=74	Percentage (%)
To retrieve the needed information	54	72.97
Pleasure	52	70.27
Improve culture	51	68.92
Improve personality	46	62.16
Intellectual curiosity	35	47.30
Leisure reading	27	36.49
To participate in cultural and educational activities	22	29.73
To be useful to society	19	25.68
To support the courses	14	18.92
To forget problems	11	14.86
To influence the social environment	7	9.46
Having literate people in one's environment	3	4.05
Other	3	4.05

When they were asked "how frequently they read," it was seen that most of them read "every day" (72.97%). Other answers were far less common: "once a week" (10.81%), once in two weeks (6.76%), once a month (4.05%).

The majority read for 1-2 hours (41.89%). Students who read for 1/2-1 hour (29.73%), more than 3 hours (5.41%), less than 1/2 hour (4.05%), were also represented.

To the question "at what time do you read?" most gave the answer "in the evening" (78.38%). During weekends (40.54%), holidays (29.73%), and during the daytime (28.38%) were the next choices. (Table 3)

TABLE 3:

Time of Reading	N=74	Percentage (%)
In the evening	58	78.38
Weekend	30	40.54
Holiday	22	29.73
Daytime	21	28.38
During journey	16	21.62
Other	5	6.76

The most popular subject matters were literature (79.73%), psychology (47.30%), history (39.19%), and political science (39.19%). (Table 4)

TABLE 4:

Subject of the Material Read	N=74	Percentage (%)
Literature (fiction, poetry, humor, etc.)	59	79.73
Psychology	35	47.30
Political science	29	39.19
History	29	39.19
Library and information science, etc.	28	37.84

TABLE 4: (continued from previous page)

Subject of the Material Read	N=74	Percentage (%)
Philosophy	26	35.14
Sociology	21	28.38
Art	17	22.97
Religion	17	22.97
Economy	11	14.86
Archaeology	2	2.70
Language	1	1.35
Cinema	1	1.35
Social life	1	1.35
Agriculture	1	1.35
There is no specific subject	1	1.35

Most preferred to read at home (68.92%), a great number said they read wherever they find any opportunity (45.95%), few read in the bus (29.73%). Only a very small number went to libraries to read (13.51%), and they mostly preferred university libraries.

More than half of the students, when asked if they went to bookstores, said yes, "I go to browse and buy books" (68.92%). A significant number said they just go to pass time but sometimes buy books (33.78%). And a small number had other reasons.

Most of the students had their own library at home (90.54%). Few of them did not have home libraries (8.11%).

When asked if they considered themselves functionally literate 81.08% said 'yes' and 18.92% said 'no.'

The most important influences on their literacy were their own personal interest (71.62%), their family (35.14%), their teachers in primary and secondary schools (35.14%), and the career they chose (29.73%). (Table 5 — see following page)

TABLE 5

Positive Factors Affecting Functional Literacy	N=74	Percentage (%)
Personal interest	53	71.62
Family (mother, father, sister, brother)	26	35.14
Teachers in primary – and secondary school	26	35.14
Chosen career	22	29.73
Faculty member in university	13	17.57
Libraries and librarians	7	9.46
Family circle (uncle, aunt, etc)	6	8.11
Other	10	13.51

The factors that affected their not being literate were “having no motivation from the family” (9.46%), the negative influences of primary education (8.11%), the negative influences of secondary education (6.76%), and negative economic conditions (6.76%). (Table 6)

TABLE 6:

Negative Factors Affecting Functional Literacy	N=74	Percentage (%)
Family doesn't motivate	7	9.46
Negative effects of primary education	6	8.11
Negative effects of secondary education	5	6.76
Negative economic conditions	5	6.76
No time	4	5.41
Friends don't motivate	3	4.05
Social environment doesn't motivate	3	4.05
Prefer media sources	3	4.05
Not having the right environment to read	3	4.05
Negative effects of university education	2	2.70
Poor quality of publications	2	2.70
Not being interested	1	1.35
Other	1	1.35
Not having the need	-	-
Not believing it necessary	-	-

When asked if they used any information centers, 82.43% of the subjects said 'yes' and 17.57% said 'no.' Most of those that used information centers went to university libraries (37.84%) and public libraries (29.73%). Documentation centers (9.46%) and archives (4.05%) were least used.

The most common reasons for using information centers were to undertake research concerning the courses taken in the university (75.68%), to get the information needed in any subject (47.30%), to do research about a subject of particular personal interest (31.08%), to borrow materials (31.08%). (Table 7)

TABLE 7:

Reasons for Using Information Centers	N=74	Percentage (%)
To do research connected with the courses taken	56	75.68
To get the information needed in any subject	35	47.30
To do research about the subject on is interested in	23	31.08
To borrow materials	23	31.08
To get information on any subject	16	21.62
To study	14	18.92
To fill leisure time	8	10.81
Because it is comfortable	6	8.11
To socialize	1	1.35
To participate in cultural and educational activities	1	1.35
To participate in audiovisual activities	1	1.35
Other	2	2.70

Reasons cited for not using information centers were as follows: they are boring and gloomy places (8.11%), they are inadequate qualitatively (5.41%), they are inadequate quantitatively (4.05%), lack of interest (2.70%). (Table 8 — see following page)

TABLE 8:

Reasons for Not Using Information Centers	N=74	Percentage (%)
Information centres are dull, boring places	6	8.11
They are not adequate qualitatively	4	5.41
They are not adequate quantitatively	3	4.05
No interest	2	2.70
Not having the need	2	2.70
Information center is too far away	2	2.70
Not believing it necessary	1	1.35
Not having time	1	1.35
Other	5	6.76
Library phobia	-	-

The following answers were the commonest responses to the question "with what frequency do you use the information centers?": I use them when I need (31.08%), once a week (17.57%), once in two weeks (17.57%), once a month (13.51%).

To the question: "Library literacy is an individual's continuing his/her functional literacy all through his/her life without any interruption, using information centers. Do you consider yourself library literate?," 70.27% of the students gave the answer 'no' and 29.73% 'yes.'

The factors that most affected their library literacy: personal interest (25.68%), the career they chose (20.27%), the instructors in the university (17.57%), family (9.46%). (Table 9)

TABLE 9:

Positive Effects on Library Literacy	N=74	Percentage (%)
Personal interest	19	25.68
The profession that has been chosen	15	20.27

TABLE 9: (continued from previous page)

Positive Effects on Library Literacy	N=74	Percentage (%)
Faculty members in the university	13	17.57
Family	7	9.46
Teachers in secondary education	7	9.46
Teachers in primary education	6	8/11
Libraries and librarians	5	6.76
Family circle (aunt, uncle, etc.)	1	1.35
Other	1	1.35

The commonest reasons cited for lack of library literacy were: the belief that libraries were not adequate (22.97%), the negative effects of primary education (18.92%), the negative effects of secondary education (18.92%), the negative effects of university education (16.22%). (Table 10)

TABLE 10

Negative Effects on Library Literacy	N=74	Percentage (%)
Belief in inadequacy of information centers	17	22.97
Information centres being dull and boring	17	22.97
Negative effects of primary education	14	18.92
Negative effects of secondary education	14	18.92
Negative effects of university education	12	16.22
Social environment doesn't motivate	10	13.51
Not having time	9	12.16
Information center is too far away	8	10.81
Family doesn't motivate	7	9.46
No interest	7	9.46
Friends don't motivate	6	8.11
Not having the need	2	2.70
Not believing it necessary	2	2.70
Library phobia	2	2.70
Other	9	12.16

To the question: "If the term information literacy is defined as a person's awareness of his or her information needs and meeting these needs with the help of information specialists, information centers and information sources, do you consider yourself information literate?," 60.81% of the subjects gave the answer 'yes,' 39.19%, 'no.'

The factors that most affected their being information literate were: the profession they have chosen (44.59%), faculty members in the university (36.49%), personal interest (25.68%), family (14.86%). (Table 11)

TABLE 11

Positive Effects on Information Literacy	N=74	Percentage (%)
The profession that has been chosen	33	44.59
Faculty members in the university	27	36.49
Personal interest	19	25.68
Family	11	14.86
Libraries and librarians	11	14.86
Teachers in secondary school	5	6.76
Teachers in primary school	4	5.41
Family circle (aunt, uncle, etc.)	3	4.05
Other	4	5.41

The factors that contribute to lack of information literacy are: not being motivated by the social environment (13.51%), the negative effects of university education (12.16%), the negative effects of primary education (10.81%), the negative effects of secondary education (9.46%). (Table 12 — see following page)

TABLE 12:

Negative Effects on Information Literacy	N=74	Percentage (%)
Social environment doesn't motivate	10	13.51
Negative effects of university education	9	12.16
Negative effects of primary education	8	10.81
Negative effects of secondary education	7	9.46
Information centers being dull and boring	7	9.46
Scared of using information centers	5	6.76
Belief in inadequacy of information centers	5	6.76
Family doesn't motivate	4	5.41
Doesn't have time	4	5.41
Friends don't motivate	3	4.05
No need	3	4.05
Poor economic situation	2	2.70
Information center is far away	1	1.35
Other	4	5.41
Not believing in the necessity of information	-	-

When asked what should be done to create a literate society in the generic sense, the subjects focused on the points below.

Education system: The education system should be renovated, it should be based on research, positive thinking, and inquiry. It should not be theoretical but applicable. There should be programs and activities concerning the development of literacy at all levels of education. Teachers should motivate the students and themselves should be educated about literacy programs. Media, associations, educators, and librarians should work together to create a literate society and to give literacy education. Library science education should be modern and contemporary. Education for literacy should be a lifelong process.

Role of libraries and information centers: Libraries should develop literacy and user education programs. Libraries should be nice, inviting, bright places and should give very good service. They should be set up in easily reachable places and should be open in the evening. They should have public relations programs to make people like and understand them. Their services should be advertised. There should be library use competitions. Their role in distributing accurate, up-to-date, free information efficiently should be explained to everybody. Professional librarians should work in libraries. Librarians should be conscious of their own profession. User studies should be conducted.

Role of families: Families should be educated about literacy. They have to provide a good example. They have to be soft and loving while educating their children. They should take their children to libraries and make them love libraries and books.

Knowledge and information consciousness: People should know that they can acquire knowledge and information by reading and that knowledge is power and self-development. It is a need. It should not be forced on people, but they should get the feel of it. People should also feel curiosity for reading. There should be meetings and conferences emphasizing all these things.

Economic conditions: People should not have economic worries; without economic development, literacy cannot be widespread in society. Governments should have an adequate budget for information work.

Having a government policy: Literacy programs should have a place in national development and cultural policies. Government should form programs to turn literacy into a pleasure, to encourage reading, to make it lifelong. Government should also have an information policy to promote the transfer of

information to all individuals in society. Intellectuals and university professors concerned with information science should work on the formation of an information policy.

Social memory: Any negative ideas about literacy and information centers in the social memory should be erased by love, public relations, and marketing techniques. Society thinks that people who are not literate earn more than the literate.

The subjects' answers to the question of what they themselves will do about making society literate can be grouped as below:

Providing education: I shall provide education to primary and secondary school students about literacy, information, information centers, their use and services. I will go to their classrooms and ask about their own ideas on the above matters to make them conscious of the issues and to help make them feel important. I shall also educate parents about becoming literate. I shall motivate, inform, and direct them in the way of literacy. I shall give literacy education in my own information center. I will try to reach people personally, try my best to give them the feeling that reading is a pleasure. I shall work together with families, teachers, and educators on this matter. To be able to motivate people, librarians themselves should be well-educated on the issue of literacy.

Public relations, announcement, advertisement: I shall inform people about my profession, the usefulness of information, information centers and their services and how to use them. I shall use radio programs, arrange reading competitions, give books to the winners, bring famous people to the library to give conferences, shall open a cafe in the library. I shall use television, meetings, notices, posters, etc., to make people say "that's a place I have to go to." I shall prepare publications about my information center.

Changing the image of libraries and librarians: I shall try to change the dark, dusty, gloomy image of libraries. I shall make them inviting places so that people will be curious about them. I shall restructure the libraries. I shall build up a good information center. I shall change the image of the profession and be a smiling librarian.

Giving good service: I shall provide a very good service in my information center. People will be able to find all the sources they need in my information center. I shall help the patrons effectively and won't cause them any loss of time or money.

Marketing information: I shall set up an information enterprise and sell information.

Information policy: I shall work to create an information policy. I can do this only if I become a politician. I'll emphasize the problem as a cultural battle and work for it.

User studies: I shall conduct studies to know my potential and actual users. Then I'll try to increase their number. I'll do research on user satisfaction. I'll form collections according to my user's needs.

Economic conditions: I shall do my best to improve the economic status of libraries and librarians.

- Idealism: I am conscious of my mission and I have idealism. When the students were asked if they felt themselves prepared and ready to form a literate society, 33.78% said 'yes' and 58.11% 'no.' Factors influencing feeling prepared and ready can be cited as below:

Being conscious of one's career and believing in it. Knowing what it is all about and understanding one's duties.

Having adequate professional education.
Loving people.
Loving books.
Loving the profession.
Knowing and liking the users.
Believing in a literate society.
Having enough technical knowledge.
Having idealism and a revolutionary spirit

Factors influencing not feeling ready and prepared are given by the subjects as listed below:

- Inadequacy of education given in the university.
- Not feeling informed enough about the profession.
- Not having self confidence.
- Not having enough practice.
- Society's not valuing this profession and the low status and image of the profession.
- Worry about the future and conditions of employment.
- Difference between the theoretical education and practice.
- Being sick and tired of this profession.
- Not liking the profession.
- Not going to practice this profession in the future.
- Not having enough knowledge of psychology to work with patrons.
- Not coming from and living in a literate society.
- The profession and the services being in a poor condition today.
- Not having any motivation for this profession.

Most of the students who answered the questionnaire said that they'll develop themselves and try to do their best when they start to work in the profession.

CONCLUSION

The data that resulted from this survey shows that these students are literate in the context of functional literacy and information

literacy but not in library literacy. The main reason for this is the poor condition of information centers and their services at present. For example, most subjects read in the evenings and at weekends, but most of information centers are closed at these times (only public libraries are open on Saturdays). Another datum that supports this theory is most of the subjects having their own home libraries.

The factors that influenced literacy negatively seemed to be associated with the failure of the family, social environment, and educational system (primary and secondary education) to motivate the subjects adequately.

The answers given by the subjects show that they believe in a literate society, are ready to help in its creation, have the information and technical capacity so to do, but underestimate their own capacities and capabilities. It appears that the university education that they receive gives them technical information and the capacity to think, but does not promote self-confidence or love of the profession. Library school is not the only cause for this: the status of the profession and the lack of jobs are two further factors.

In order to help these students accomplish their mission of educating society for literacy, steps should be taken to review the general education policy and system, information policy, structure of information centers, and professional education in Turkey. Using the available literacy courses, book review hours in the media, orientation programs to make pre-school children into library users, computer literacy programs, library use courses in the secondary school education, etc., Turkey can conquer its literacy problems in the very near future, especially with the help of these enlightened and intellectual library school students.

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