



Information Literacy Skills of Rural School Students of Meghalaya: A Survey

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Abstract: Information literacy is the basis of lifelong learning, which every student must acquire the skills to understand the content, extend their research, and assume greater control over their learning. Development of such skills right from the elementary school level may yield better results whereby students become independent learners and perform better academically than students who lack information literacy skills. This study aims to assess the information literacy status of rural school students of St. Michael's Higher Secondary School, Umsning, in Meghalaya. A structured-interview schedule was used to collect data from the students enrolled in Class 7, numbering 66 only (40 girls and 26 boys), which also constitute the population of the present study. The overall findings revealed that only 22.7% of the students consult other relevant books apart from the prescribed textbooks, which shows that there is a discrepancy in the information literacy level of students in rural areas. Regarding sources of information, most or 31% of the students still consider teachers as the main source of information besides reference books, help books, and other online sources. Among the widely used reference sources, 95.45% students used the dictionaries while only 27.2% consult the atlases. Further, the study found that during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, most students used the internet for acquiring information. At the same time, few students used the internet for non-academic purposes. The study concludes that students lacked the required skills and hence suggested that information literacy skills should be incorporated into teaching methods and school curricula.

Keywords: Information Literacy, Information Literacy Skills, Information Skills, Rural School Students.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In contemporary times, information has become a necessity of human life. Every individual requires information in one way or the other. People across the globe thronged to get knowledge. Oettinger (1980) reiterated that information is an essential requirement for every human activity, and it is crucial as food, air, water, and shelter.

Information literacy plays a vital role in 21st-century education. Due to massive explosion of information resources, information is accessible not only from the traditional sources such as books, newspapers, and community experts but also from online databases, multimedia packages, and digitised government documents, among others. The amount of information from all sources, mainly the electronic, is awe-inspiring, and the quality of information, such as its authenticity, scope of coverage, and objectivity, is often compromised. The problem of information overload is not going to subside, and solutions are to be found to enable people to reduce the amount of information overload they experience. The American Library Association (ALA) (2000) infers that everyone, especially students, is faced with diverse, abundant information choices in their academic studies and personal lives due to the escalating complexity of this information environment [1]. According to Kwasowitz-Scheer, & Pasqualoni (2002), students today face a daily explosion of information resources and the challenge of using these resources effectively and responsibly. Saunders (2009) opines that as the sheer volume of information and the methods of accessing, organising, and utilising it increases, the skills necessary to find and use that information effectively also increases in complexity.

Therefore, one must know what, where, and how to acquire and use information efficiently and effectively.



1.1 INFORMATION LITERACY:

The concept of information literacy appeared in the 1970s and has since been interpreted and described in many ways by different experts.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in its manifesto Information for All Programme (IFAP, 2008), has defined Information Literacy as the capacity of people to recognise their information needs, locate and evaluate the quality of information, store and retrieve information, make effective and ethical use of data and apply to create and communicate knowledge.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) defines Information literacy as “The knowledge, the attitudes, and the sum of the skills needed to know when and what information is needed; where and how to obtain that information; how to evaluate it critically and organize it once it is found; and how to use it ethically.”

To the American Library Association, 1989 (ALA), “Information Literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognise when information is needed and can use effectively the needed information”. In today’s information society, information has become crucial to making the right decisions regarding many innovative concepts of knowledge, other distant and lifelong learning courses, etc. Information literacy is pivotal in all learning environments.

1.2 INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS:

Competency in dealing with information-related problems includes the ability to identify and access the required information available in various sources and channels and various formats, evaluate available data, and fruitful utilisation of the information with a complete understanding and appreciation of the ethical and legal issues. It is imparted through multiple programmes of instruction, education, and exploration to develop in students the skills to make effective, efficient, and independent use of the information sources, library resources, and other services available.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

In Singapore, Chan (2012) attempted a study assessing students’ information literacy (IL) skills in two secondary schools. The result suggested that students with better academic performance also have better information literacy skills, and students were less careful in judging the quality of information when considering online resources. The findings articulated that there was scope to improve students’ IL skills. It has been stated that higher-order IL skills, such as information use, synthesis, and evaluation, demand more attention, as comparatively lower proficiency levels were observed in this study.

In the study taken up by Chu, Yeung, and Chu (2012), on the assessment of secondary school students’ information literacy in Hong Kong, it was found that secondary school students could point out potential sources of information, evaluate the authorities, and develop search strategies for the needed information. However, they also failed to use the information responsibly, ethically, and legally. In Botswana, a study by Jorosi revealed that students have poor information literacy skills. Therefore, teachers need to change their teaching strategies to incorporate information sources and services and critical thinking, thus contributing to the development of information literacy skills.

Kovalik (2013) studied Information Literacy and High school seniors: Perception of the Research Process and found that students under investigation could use library resources to locate and use the information and various resources. Contenders also expressed the need to help in deciding which resources are best to use and how to identify important information from those resources. Mulla (2014), in the study information literacy for students and teachers in the Indian context, opined that once students are encouraged to try their analysis, they take responsibility for their learning and retain a lot of the data they gathered. This, in turn, creates a greater responsibility for their knowledge, which would help them become dynamic learners and thinkers who are creative, analytical, and efficient instead of mere regurgitations of facts.

In Jamaica, the study by Rodney-Wellington (2014) proved that using information literacy skills instruction can improve the information-seeking skills of students. Zawng (2017) found that the research has enhanced students’ information literacy skills and reading habits. Khongtim (2018) also proved that the students were aware of the availability and accessibility of other relevant sources of reading materials, and the use of the internet and other e-resources.

Amegashie (2020), in the study on Information Literacy among students of the University of Ghana Business School and Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration Business School, revealed that students were not information literate but agreed that information literacy is critical and helpful in academic work and research. Several recommendations include incorporating a credit-bearing information literacy programme in the course curriculum and a collaboration between librarians and faculty to facilitate the implementation of information literacy programs.



3. OBJECTIVES:

With the broad objective of investigating the information literacy skills of students, this study aims:-

- To find out the sources of information used by students under study, when the need arises.
- To determine the most preferred reference source used.
- To examine whether the students used or consulted the internet/online sources to find information.
- To identify the types of tools students use when browsing the internet.
- To find out the types of search engines mainly used by students.
- To know the purpose of using Social Networking Sites.
- To examine the types of Television Channels mostly watched by the students.

4. METHODOLOGY:

Research Site: St. Michael’s Higher Secondary School, Umsning, Ri-Bhoi District Meghalaya.

Sample – The students of class VII from sections A and B formed the study's sample.

The tool used – After ample reading of relevant literature, the researchers developed a structured-interview schedule, which provided befitting information required for the present survey. A structured-interview schedule was selected for data collection because it was considered more suitable than any other tool to collect data from students.

Analysis: The survey analysis yielded detailed data on each area investigated

Table 1: Age Distribution

Age	Number	Percentage (%)
11 years	3	4.5
12 years	36	54.5
13 years	6	9
14 years	14	21.2
15 years	6	9
16 years	1	1.5

Table1 indicates that a maximum number of students, 36 (54.5 %) are 12 years of age.

Table 2: Gender Distribution

Gender	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Male	26	39.4
Female	40	60.6

Table 2 shows that 40 (60.6 %) students are females, while 26 (39.4 %) are males.

Table 3: Consultation of Books

Consultation of Books	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Students consulting other relevant textbooks	15	22.72
Students who do not consult other relevant textbooks	51	77.27

Table 3 shows that comparatively very few students, 15 (22.72%) consulted other relevant textbooks apart from prescribed books (N=66).



Chart 1: Consultation of Books

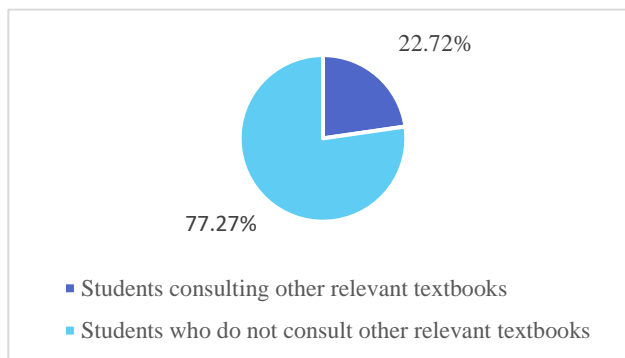


Table 4: Sources consulted by the students when in need of information for study

Sources for consulting information for the study	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Textbooks	9	10.3
Reference books	16	18.39
Help books	11	12.64
Online sources	11	12.64
Teachers	27	31
Parents	10	11.4
Friends	2	02.2
Others	1	01.1

Chart 2: Sources consulted by the students when in need of information

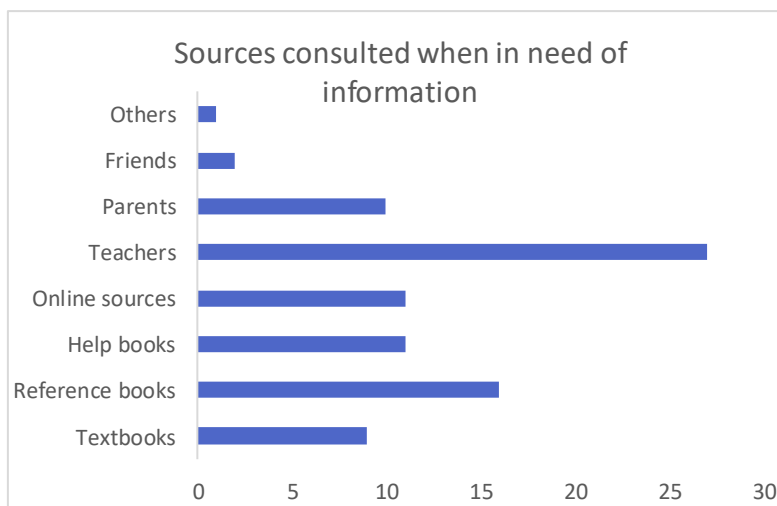


Table 4 tells us that most students, 27 (31%), prefer consulting their teachers for their study, while, reference books are their second option, 16 (18.39%). 11(12.64%) of them, get help from online sources or help books (N=66, But respondents were allowed multiple choice).

Table 5: Reference Source Used

Reference sources for study	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Dictionaries	63	95.45
Encyclopaedias	1	1.5
Atlases	18	27.2

Table 5 shows that 63 (95.45%) of the students used dictionaries as a reference source, while 18 (27.2%) used atlases and only 1 (1.5%) used encyclopaedias (Here, N=66, But respondents were allowed multiple choice).



Chart 3: Use of the Internet

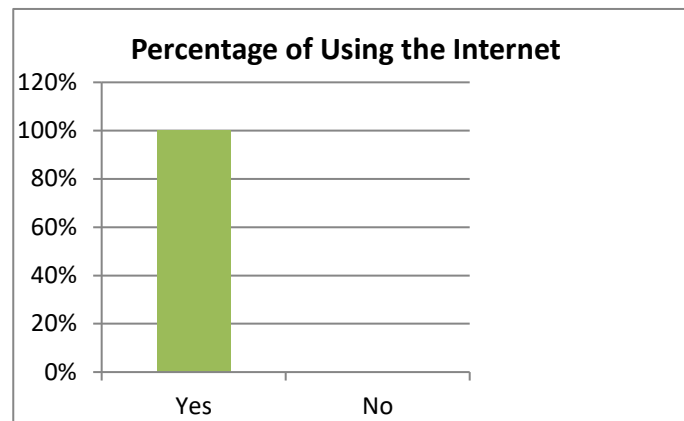


Chart 3 shows that all the respondents used the internet. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, online classes were held, and school students were compelled to use the medium.

Table 6: Tools Used for Browsing the Internet

Tools Used	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Computer	7	10.6
Mobile phone	47	71.2
Tablet	4	6
Laptop	6	9

Table 6 reveals that most of the students used mobile phones as a tool for browsing the internet (71.2%). 10.6 % used computers, 9 % used laptops, and only 6 % used tablets.

Chart 4: Tools Used for Browsing the Internet

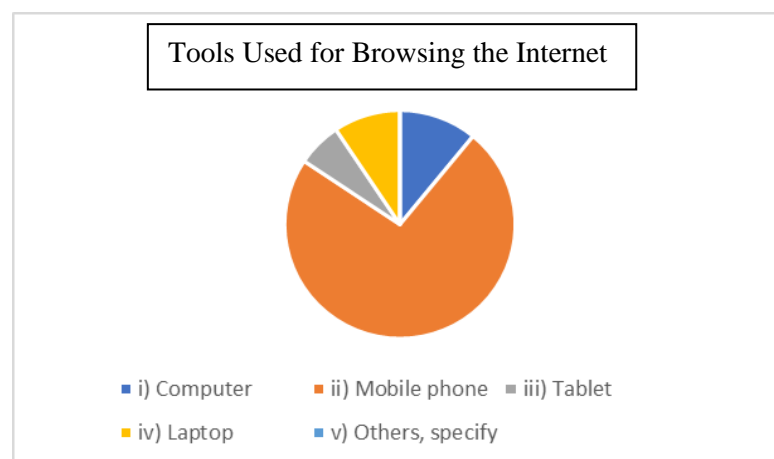


Table 7: Purpose of using the internet

Purposes for using the Internet	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Academic	47	71.2
Entertainment	32	48.5
Others	2	03

Table 7 shows that 47 (71.2 %) used the internet for academic-related works and 32 (48.5 %) used it for entertainment purposes.



Table 8: Frequency of using the Internet

Frequency of using the internet	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Once a month	2	3.03
Once a week	12	18.18
Daily	49	74.24
Others	3	4.54

Chart 5: How often do students used the Internet

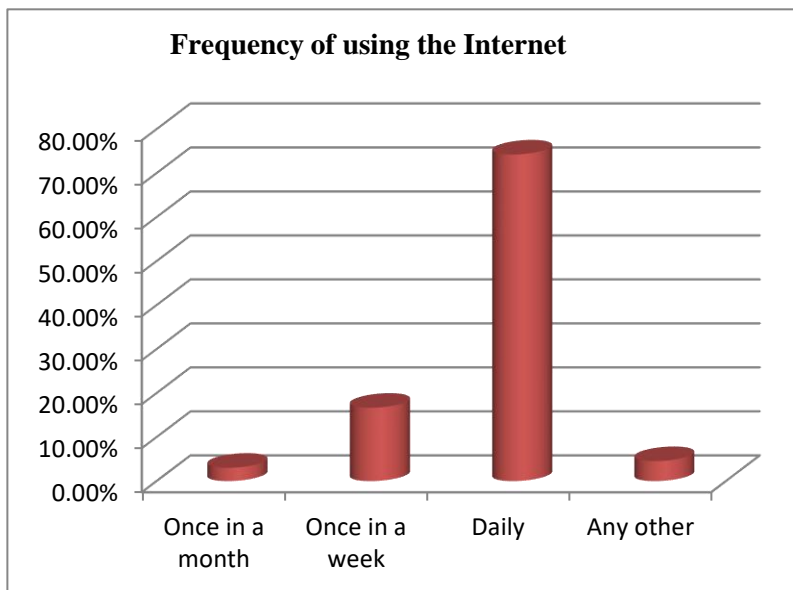


Chart 5 indicates that the majority, i.e., 49 (75.38 %) of respondents, used the internet daily, while only 2 (3.08 %) of them used it once a month.

It was also found that most of the students used the internet at home through mobile phones.

Chart 6: Search Engine Used to Browse the Internet

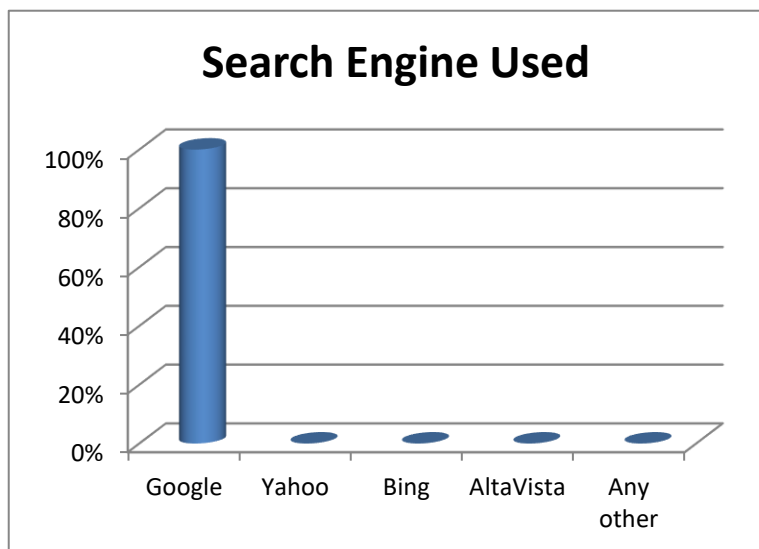


Chart 6 shows that all students used Google to browse the internet. This indicates that Google is the only search engine known to students.



Table 9: Whether the students are a member of any Social Networking Sites

Students	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Being a member of any social network	22	33.3
Not being a member of any social network	44	66.7

Table 9 indicates that only 22 (33.3%) of them are members of any Social Networking Sites, while 44 (66.7%) are not members.

Table 10: Purpose of Using Social Networking Sites (SNS)

The purpose for using social networking site(s)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
For chatting with friends	15	22.72
For posting photographs	10	15.15
For sharing information related to studies	23	34.85
To meet new friends	7	10.61
Any other	2	3.03

Chart 7: Purpose of Using Social Networking Sites (SNS)

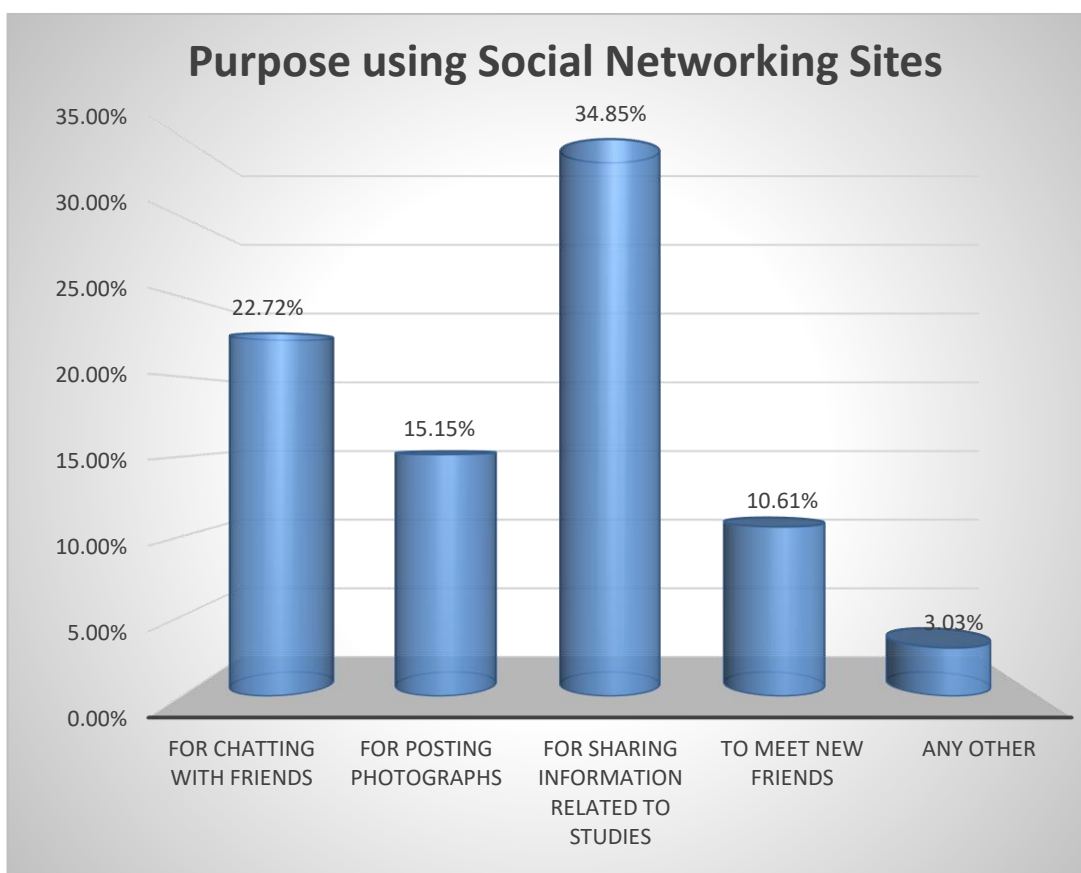


Chart 7 indicates that 22.72% of students used SNS for chatting with friends, 15.15% used them for posting photographs, 34.85% for sharing information related to studies, 10.61% to meet new friends, and 3.03% used it for other purposes.



Table 11: Watching Television during Free Time

Students	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Watch Television during their free time	62	93.9
Do not watch Television during their free time	04	06

Television is one of the information sources students can learn, expand their knowledge, and update their information, if not misusing it. Table 11 shows that 62 (93.9%) of the respondents do watch Television during their free time, while only 4 (6 %) % do not watch television.

Table 12: Different Categories of Television Channels

Categories of TV Channel		Count of students	Percentage (%)
Educational Channels	National Geographic	11	16.7
	Discovery	21	31.8
	TLC	14	21.2
	Animal Planet	27	40.9
	Fox life	13	19.7
	History TV18 channel	5	7.6
News Channels	NDTV	6	9
	BBC	3	4.5
	T7	1	1.5
	CNN	1	1.5
	PCN	6	9
	Batesi	24	36.3
Sports Channels	Ten Sports	17	25.8
	Ten Action	6	9
	Star Sports	17	25.8
	Ten Cricket	5	7.6
Entertainment Channels	Disney Channel	26	39.4
	HBO	11	16.7
	Star Movies	37	56
	Movies Now	20	30.3
	Hungama	23	34.8
	Cartoon-Network	25	37.9
	Vh1	25	37.9
	9XO	10	15.2
	MTV	12	18.2
	Pogo	19	28.8
	Any other	1	1.5



Chart 8: Different Categories of Television Channels

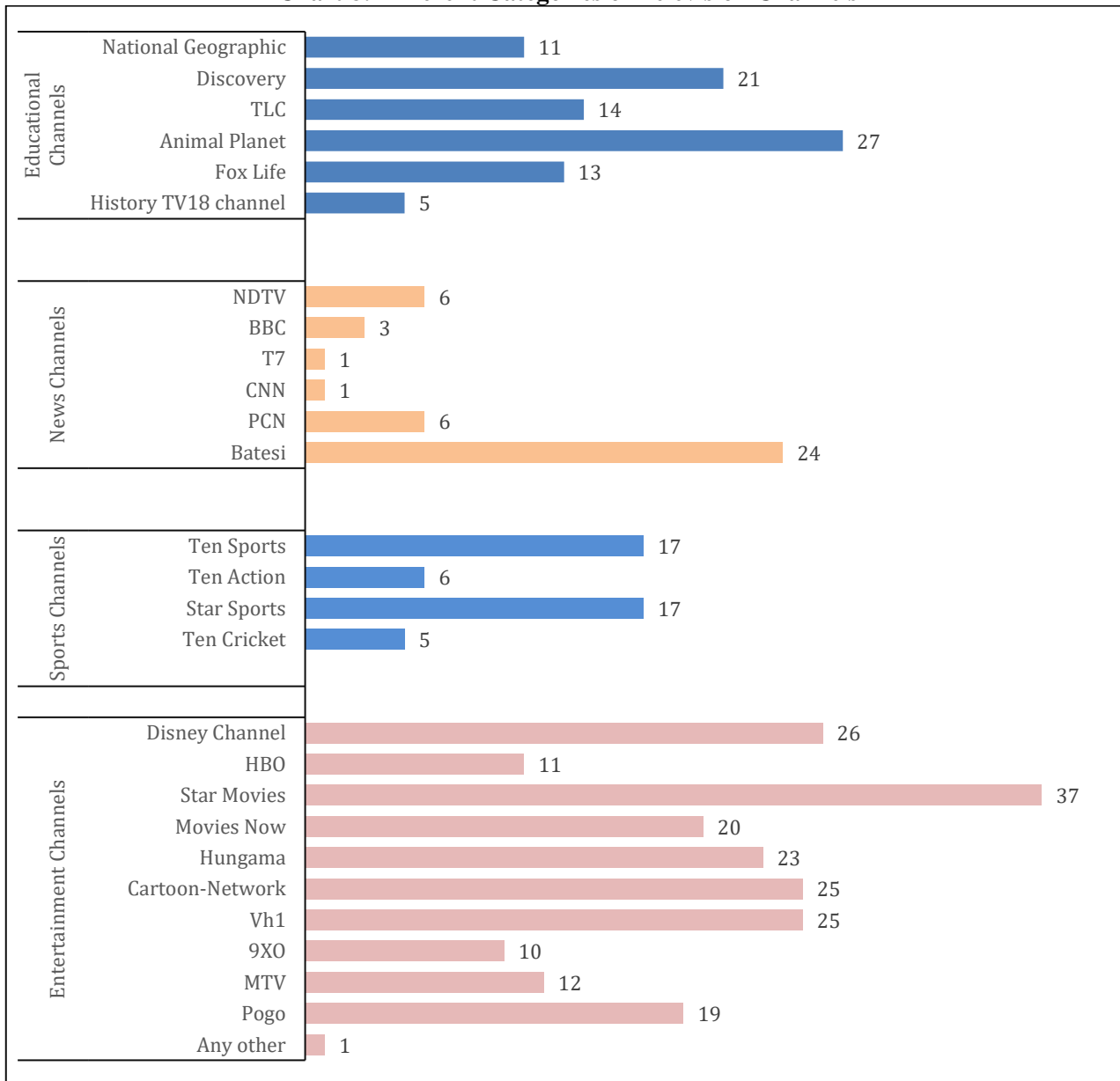


Chart 8 depicts that the most favourite Educational Channel is Animal Planet, with a count of 27 (40.9 %). Batesi is the most-watched News Channel, with a count of 24 (36.3%). Among the sports channels, most of the students watch Ten Sports and Star Sports, with an equal count of 17 (25.8 %) each. Star Movies is the most-watched Entertainment Channel with a count of 37 (56 %) (N=66, but the respondents were allowed multiple choices).

5. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS:

The study reveals the following main findings:-

- Teachers were the first option as sources of information consulted by students under study. Students also consulted textbooks, reference books, and online sources. Besides these sources, some students consult their family members. Very few students consulted help books (readymade Questions and Answers books available in the market).
- Dictionaries were the only reference source consulted by most students under study. Very few of them also use the atlases and encyclopaedias.
- The Internet was the most important study tool as all students used it mainly through mobile phones. This was because of the online classes that were held during the COVID-19 lockdown.



- Most students use the internet for academic purposes, such as; finding information for school projects. Some used it for downloading music, videos, and games.
- Students were not aware of the availability of other search engines, so they only used Google.
- 33.3% of the students used Social Networking Sites for academic purposes, for chatting with friends, and for posting photographs.
- 93.9% students watch television during their free time, and only 6% never watch it because they prefer playing games with friends. Some students never watch television because they don't have it at home. Some stayed in rented houses with their siblings who were also studying, in higher classes.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The students under study should be informed about the availability of various reference sources of information.
- Students need to be trained on how to search and access online sources of information and how to evaluate them prudently.
- Students must be aware of the availability of different useful search engines that can benefit them.
- Awareness must be conducted on the benefits of different educational and informative television channels, news channels, etc., which students should watch to widen their knowledge and update their information.
- Integrating information literacy programs as part of the school curriculum is needed to encourage and enhance information literacy skills.

7. CONCLUSION:

Information literacy skills are considered in terms of the sources turned to, when in need of the information, understanding, and use of different reference sources, knowledge and use of the online sources from the internet for getting the required information, expanding their existing knowledge and updating their information by watching the different educational and informative Television Channels. The study results revealed that the information literacy skills of the students under study are not up to the mark. In this information age, these skills are considered to be fundamental skills for students, right at the school level of education. These skills can help them to be equipped for higher education and future workplaces, to enable them to survive and become successful in life. Therefore, considering all these factors, it is high time that these skills should be assimilated into students in their education, which means at the school level.

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