

Research Article

Access and Usage of Information Resources and Digital Tools by Competitive Exam Aspirants in Mangalore University Library

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Abstract

This study examines the access and utilization of information resources and digital tools by students preparing for competitive examinations at Mangalore University Library. Using questionnaires, informal interviews, and observations, data were collected from 125 respondents preparing for exams such as UPSC, KPSC, NET/SET, KSP, IBPS, KEA, SSC, and various banking tests. The findings reveal a growing reliance on digital platforms such as Unacademy, BYJU'S, Testbook, and Oliveboard for courses and mock tests, despite limited awareness and training in using these resources effectively. While most still prefer printed materials, there is a noticeable shift toward online platforms, particularly for mock testing and current affairs preparation. The majority of respondents were female (56%) and postgraduate students (51.2%), with Science students forming the largest disciplinary group (50.4%). GK Today and Affairs Cloud emerged as the most preferred online sources, whereas the university library and coaching centers were the leading physical resources for preparation. Books remain the dominant learning medium (37.5%), followed by electronic resources (24.17%). The study highlights the need for improved digital infrastructure, dedicated library sections for competitive exam preparation, and user orientation programs to enhance awareness and effective use of available resources. It emphasizes the necessity for academic libraries to adapt to evolving student needs by integrating print and digital support systems for competitive exam aspirants.

Keywords

Competitive Exam Aspirants, Academic Libraries, Digital Resources, Information Access, E-Resources, Digital Learning Tools, Study Materials, Library Services

1. Introduction

This study investigates the information access and utilization patterns among competitive examination aspirants at Mangalore University, underscoring the necessity of diverse and trustworthy information resources for academic and professional success. It notes the evolution of university li-

braries from traditional print-centric models to hybrid environments, including digital platforms and e-learning tools. Mangalore University Library is highlighted as a crucial academic resource, providing various services alongside physical book provisions. Observations indicate a shift toward

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digital learning in preparation for competitive exams like UPSC, KPSC, NET/SET, KSP, IBPS, RRB, KEA, SSC, and Banking, with candidates using online platforms such as Unacademy and BYJU'S. Additionally, resources for mock tests and analytics, like Testbook and Oliveboard, emerge as popular tools. The study mentions other tools beneficial for quick doubt resolution and study management. However, challenges persist regarding inconsistent access to these resources, exacerbated by students' lack of awareness and insufficient training on library offerings. It advocates for enhanced library services through user orientation programs and bolstered digital infrastructure to effectively support exam preparation. The ultimate objective is to assess how aspirants access library resources and digital tools, recognize barriers to usage, and suggest improvements tailored to meet the needs of competitive exam candidates, thus enhancing their academic performance and career opportunities.

2. Review of Literature

Awareness is the ability of individuals to recognize, realize, or acknowledge that something exists. It also refers to a person's knowledge or understanding of a particular subject, situation, or trend. In their study.

JavidWagay and Sehgal (2021) Investigated the use of electronic resources by Library Science students in Kashmir, focusing on challenges and perceptions. Data from 196 participants revealed moderate skills and awareness of digital tools, with 77.55% preferring smartphones for access during the COVID-19 pandemic [14].

Similarly, Hadagali and Kumbar (2021) Examined the impact of internet use on faculty and research scholars in university libraries in Karnataka, emphasizing its significance for teaching, learning, and research. The study analyzed factors including usage frequency, access points, purposes, motivations, and preferred search engines, and provided suggestions for enhancing internet services in academic libraries. [7].

Ramesh and Kishore Kumar (2016) In a study of 218 graduate students in Karaikal District preparing for competitive exams, self-motivation significantly influenced their information-seeking behavior. ANOVA and Chi-square tests indicated a preference for resources from training centers and e-resources over print materials. The study recommended enhanced support from college faculty and librarians for these students. [11].

Thanuskodi and Kalyani (2018) explored how civil service aspirants in Chennai accessed and used information resources. The research emphasized the significance of information literacy in selecting strategic resources, particularly online. Aspirants relied on web platforms, coaching centers, and guidance from senior officers, with the study shedding light on their information competency, awareness, accessibility, and challenges [13].

Balakrishnan and Ramalingam (2019) The study examined digital literacy in 315 competitive exam aspirants in Chennai,

primarily young, urban, male undergraduates. Participants showed basic skills in scanning, using shortcut keys, and were proficient in MS Office, particularly Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, but struggled with MS Access. Their internet usage revolved around browsing, online coaching, and mock tests. The authors suggested targeted digital literacy training to mitigate skill gap [3].

Dhimmar, H. N., & Naik, B. J. (2024). University libraries in Telangana play a crucial role for users preparing for competitive exams by providing specialized materials, resources, and services. This study investigates library strategies and user feedback to highlight their contributions to academic and professional growth, particularly in the context of competitive examinations, which influence job eligibility and educational advancement [5].

Danner, R. B., & Pessu, C. O. (2013). The Indian education system is rapidly evolving, with various exams conducted to select candidates for jobs. Millions participate annually, relying significantly on public libraries for essential resources to prepare for competitive examinations. This study evaluates the role of public libraries in this context, providing an overview of the resources utilized and insights for new researchers in the field to support effective data collection [4].

Aboobacker, Y., & Sanjeevi, K. (2025). Libraries serve as essential resources for students preparing for competitive examinations, providing access to traditional and digital information, personalized services, and quiet study environments. They play a crucial role in career development, supporting competitive exam aspirants in navigating academic challenges [1].

Pradeep Kumar, D., & Maranna, O. (2024). The study examines the access and usage of electronic information resources (EIR) by students at Gulbarga University, based on a survey of 150 students with an 80% response rate. Most students are aware of EIRs and primarily access them via the library, though they encounter challenges like limited ICT knowledge and information overload. It recommends orientation programs and workshops to enhance EIR access for students [10].

Xie, X., & Lu, C. (2025). In China, a study of 31,779 students indicates that urban students outperform rural students in innovation and entrepreneurship, mainly due to lower digital literacy in rural areas. This disparity causes cognitive biases that impact information perception and reduce innovation potential, leading to significant differences in entrepreneurial intentions and skills. The study calls for policies that improve cognitive abilities and digital access to promote innovation among all students [15].

3. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To identify library resources and digital tools for competitive exam preparation.
- 2) To assess aspirants' awareness of print and digital library resources.
- 3) To study usage patterns of library resources.

- 4) To identify challenges in accessing and using library tools.
- 5) To explore preferences between print and digital resources.

4. Methodology of the Study

A study at Mangalore University Library surveyed competitive exam aspirants to evaluate their access to and utilization of information resources and digital tools. The research employed questionnaires, informal interviews, and observation to gather data from individuals preparing for exams such as UPSC, KPSC, NET/SET, KSP, IBPS, RRB, KEA, SSC and banking. Purposive sampling was used to select active library users within this demographic. Data analysis involved basic statistical methods, including percentages, charts, and graphs, to identify patterns in access, usage, preferences, and challenges.

5. Scope of the Study

This study examines how students at Mangalore University utilize information resources and digital tools in preparation for competitive exams like UPSC, KPSC, KSP, SSC, KEA, and Banking. It evaluates both print materials and digital platforms, such as Unacademy and BYJU's, and assesses the library's resources, including internet access and reading zones. The research focuses on students' information-seeking behaviors, preferences, and challenges, based on data collected from the academic year-2025. The research aims to identify patterns in resource usage and library support, noting limitations such as a small sample size and potential self-reporting biases.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

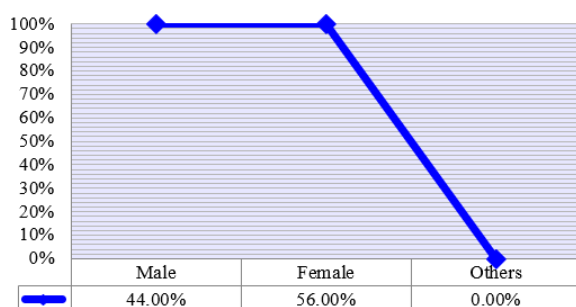


Figure 1. Genders.

The study surveyed 125 respondents regarding their preparation for competitive examinations. Female respondents comprised 56% (70 individuals), while male respondents accounted for 44% (55 individuals). No respondents identi-

fied with other genders. This data indicates a majority of female participation in competitive exam preparation within the surveyed group.

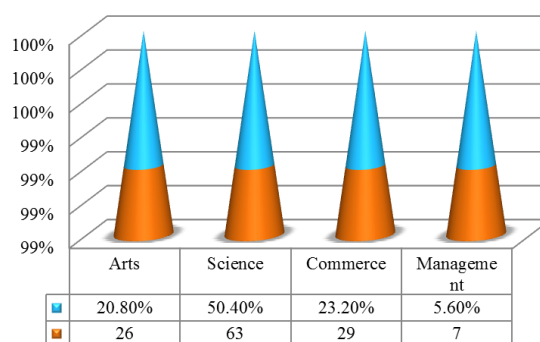


Figure 2. Different types of Departments.

Respondents preparing for competitive exams are predominantly from the Science discipline (50.4%), followed by Commerce (23.2%) and Arts (20.8%). Management students represent the smallest segment (5.6%). This distribution indicates a higher engagement from Science students and highlights the need for targeted resources across disciplines.

Table 1. Time Spent Per Day for Competitive Exam Preparation.

Time Utilized per Day	Frequency of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Up to 1 hour	28	22.40%
1 to 2 hours	15	12.00%
2 to 3 hours	39	31.20%
3 to 4 hours	14	11.20%
More than 4 hours	29	23.20%
Total	125	100.00%

The majority of respondents (31.2%) allocate 2-3 hours daily to exam preparation, while a substantial minority (23.2%) dedicates over 4 hours, signifying a highly committed segment. Shorter study periods of 1-2 hours are less common, reported by only 12% of respondents.

Table 2. User Category-wise Distribution of Respondents.

User Category	Frequency of Respondents	Percentage (%)
UG Students	29	23.20%

User Category	Frequency of Respondents	Percentage (%)
PG Students	64	51.20%
Research Scholars	28	22.40%
Others	4	3.20%
Total	125	100.00%

Postgraduate students constitute the largest group of competitive exam aspirants utilizing the library, representing 51.2%. Undergraduate students (23.2%) and research scholars (22.4%) form nearly equal, smaller segments, with the remaining 3.2% categorized as "Others," potentially encompassing diploma holders or job seekers.

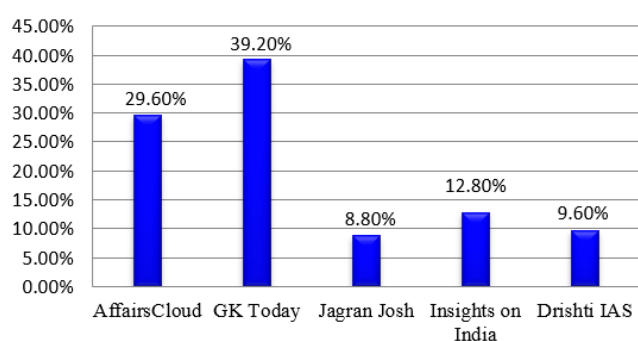


Figure 3. Preferred websites for competitive.

Table 3. Popular Online Platforms for Competitive Preparation.

Website	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
www.testbook.com	32	25.60%
www.adda247.com	23	18.40%
www.unacademy.com	31	24.80%
www.byjus.com	12	9.60%
www.oliveboard.in	17	13.60%
www.studyiq.com	10	8.00%
Total	125	100.00%

GK Today is the most preferred website for exam preparation, used by 39.2% of respondents, followed by AffairsCloud at 29.6%. Other platforms like Insights on India (12.8%), Drishti IAS (9.6%), and Jagran Josh (8.8%) are also utilized. This data underscores the significance of these online portals for aspirants and suggests that educational institutions might consider providing access to them.

Testbook and Unacademy emerge as the leading platforms for aspirants, exhibiting nearly equal popularity with 25.6% and 24.8% respectively. Adda247 maintains a strong presence, securing 18.4%. While less preferred, platforms such as Olive board, Byju's, and StudyIQ collectively represent a significant segment of the market.

Table 4. Several Types of Preferences for Competitive Exams.

Category	Exam Type	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Civil Services Exams	UPSC (IAS, IPS, IFS, etc.)	7	5.60%
	KPSC (Group A, B, C, D posts)	26	20.80%
	PDO (Panchayat Development Officer)	4	3.20%
	VAO (Village Administrative Officer)	3	2.40%
Teaching & Research	NET/JRF, SLET	35	28.00%
	TET/CTET (Teacher Eligibility Tests)	8	6.40%
	Primary & High School Teacher	5	4.00%
	PU Lecturer / Assistant Professor	20	16.00%
Banking & Financial Sector	IBPS PO / Clerk	7	5.60%
	RRB (Regional Rural Banks)	0	0.00%
	LIC / GIC / NIACL	0	0.00%
SSC, Clerical Jobs, & Police	SSC CGL	0	0.00%

Category	Exam Type	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Police & Defence Services	LDC / UDC	0	0.00%
	Railway Recruitment Board (RRB)	3	2.40%
	KSP (Karnataka State Police)	5	4.00%
	Indian Army / Navy / Air Force (NDA, CDS, etc.)	2	1.60%
	Indian Navy / Army Technical Entry	1	0.80%
Total		125	100.00%

The Teaching & Research category is the most preferred area of preparation, with 28% of respondents focusing on NET/JRF/SLET examinations. Within the Civil Services domain, KPSC exams emerged as the most popular, cited by 20.8% of those surveyed. A minimal number of respondents indicated preparation for Police/Defense and SSC-type exams. Notably, there were no recorded responses for RRB, LIC/GIC, or SSC CGL exams, suggesting a potential decline in interest or insufficient awareness regarding these examinations.

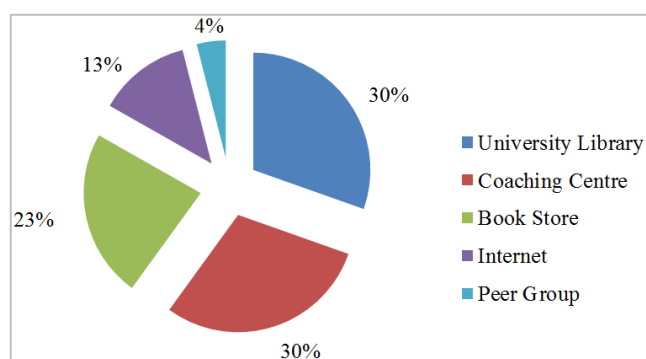


Figure 4. Sources of Information.

The University Library is the primary resource for exam preparation, used by 30.4% of individuals. Coaching Centers follow closely at 29.6%, indicating a reliance on structured coaching. Book Stores account for 23.2% of resources, while the Internet is used by 12.8%, likely due to access issues or preference for physical materials. Peer Groups have a minor role at 4%.

Table 5. Use of Sources for Competitive Exam Preparation.

Resource	Frequency of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Books	45	37.50%
E-Resources	29	24.17%

Resource	Frequency of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Magazines	18	15.00%
Mobile Apps	15	12.50%
Newspapers	7	5.83%
Online Mock Tests	6	5.00%
YouTube Videos	5	4.17%
Total	120	100.00%

Books are the primary learning resource for respondents at 37.5%, reflecting traditional material reliance. Electronic resources follow at 24.17%, indicating a growing trend towards digital use. Moderate usage is seen with magazines and mobile apps, while online mock tests, newspapers, and YouTube have lower engagement. The total number of respondents is 120, a slight drop from 125, likely due to unanswered questions.

7. Findings

- 1) The majority of respondents preparing for competitive exams are female (56%), while Males constitute 44%.
- 2) Science students represent the largest disciplinary group (50.4%), followed by Commerce (23.2%) and Arts (20.8%). Management students from the smallest group (5.6%).
- 3) Most aspirants dedicate significant time to exam preparation, with 31.2% spending 2 to 3 hours daily and 23.2% spending more than 4 hours.
- 4) Postgraduate students form the largest user group at 51.2%, followed by undergraduate students (23.2%) and research scholars (22.4%).
- 5) GK Today is the most favored website (39.2%), followed by AffairsCloud (29.6%).
- 6) Other websites like Insights on India, Drishti IAS, and Jagran Josh have moderate usage.

- 7) The majority of aspirants focus on Teaching & Research exams (such as SLET, NET/JRF) with 35 respondents.
- 8) Exams related to KPSC (Deputy Tahsildar/Group A-D posts) also have significant interest (26 respondents).
- 9) Other exams like Civil Services (UPSC), Banking, SSC, and Police/Defense have comparatively lower participation.
- 10) The University Library (30.4%) and Coaching Centers (29.6%) are the primary sources for competitive exam resources.
- 11) Books and internet usage also play important roles, with 23.2% using bookstores and 12.8% using the internet.
- 12) Mobile apps are also gaining traction (12.5%), whereas newspapers and YouTube videos see less usage.

8. Suggestions

- 1) University libraries need to enhance and modernize their collections of physical books and e-resources for competitive exams to better serve aspirants.
- 2) Workshops and training sessions should be organized to enhance aspirants' skills in utilizing e-resources, mobile apps, and online learning platforms for exam preparation.
- 3) Conduct awareness campaigns for students about university library services and resources, such as online journals, mock tests, and coaching materials.
- 4) Facilitate subscriptions or access to popular websites such as GK Today and Affairs Cloud within the library to support consistent and reliable exam preparation.
- 5) Libraries must provide resources that encompass diverse competitive exams pertinent to students from Arts, Science, Commerce, and Management disciplines.

Abbreviations

UPSC	Union Public Service Commission
KSP	Karnataka State Police Recruitment
IFS	Indian Foreign Service
IPS	Indian Police Service
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
NET /JRF	National Eligibility Test / Junior Research Fellowship
SLET	State Level Eligibility Test
TET	Teacher Eligibility Test
CTET	Central Teacher Eligibility Test
SSC	Staff Selection Commission
RRB	Railway Recruitment Board
IBPS	Institute of Banking Personnel Selection
LIC	Life Insurance Corporation
GIC	General Insurance Corporation
NIACL	New India Assurance Co. Ltd.
KPSC	Karnataka Public Service Commission
PDO	Panchayat Development Officer

VAO Village Administrative Officer

Author Contributions

Shivaraja Ramachandragouda: Writing – original draft

M. Purusothamagowda: Writing – review & editing

Umesha Naik: Writing – review & editing

Renuka: Formal Analysis

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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