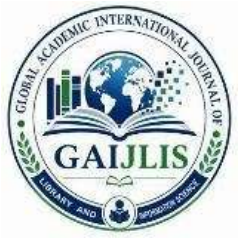
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STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING STUDENT PATRONAGE IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: A USER-CENTERED APPROACH

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Abstract

Low student patronage in university libraries remains a persistent challenge despite orientation programs designed to introduce students to library services and resources. This paper proposes a comprehensive, user-centered strategy for university librarians to transform libraries from passive repositories into dynamic, student-centered learning environments. Drawing on evidence from academic libraries across diverse contexts, the analysis identifies key factors contributing to low patronage—including preference for digital resources, inadequate infrastructure, and misalignment between library services and student needs—and presents ten interconnected strategies for addressing these challenges. These strategies encompass improving resources and services, creating attractive learning environments, embedding libraries in academic activities, implementing aggressive marketing, organizing engaging programs, establishing student ambassador networks, introducing incentives, strengthening digital presence, and improving staff-user relationships. The paper argues that increasing student patronage requires not merely awareness campaigns but fundamental institutional transformation that positions the library as an indispensable partner in student academic success and personal development. The conclusion emphasizes that modern university libraries must evolve into vibrant academic and social learning hubs that anticipate and respond to evolving student needs in an increasingly digital educational landscape.

Keywords:Strategies, Increasing, Student, Patronage and University Libraries

*Corresponding author(s) **Angereke, F. et al (2026)** agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License

1. Introduction

University libraries serve as the intellectual heart of academic institutions, providing essential resources and services that support teaching, learning, and research. Yet a troubling phenomenon persists across many institutions: despite comprehensive orientation programs designed to introduce students to library facilities and services, many students fail to become regular library users. This paradox of awareness without utilizationsuggests that the problem extends beyond mere lack of information about what the library offers. Rather, it points to deeper issues related to relevance, accessibility, user experience, and the alignment between library services and contemporary student needs and preferences.

The challenge of low student patronage is not merely an operational concern; it has significant implications for academic quality and student success. Research has consistently demonstrated that library usage correlates positively with student retention, academic achievement, and the development of information literacy skills essential for lifelong learning. When

students fail to utilize library resources and services, they miss opportunities to develop research competencies, access quality academic information, and engage in collaborative learning experiences that enrich their educational journey.

This paper addresses the question: How can university librarians transform their institutions to attract and retain student users in an era of abundant digital information and competing demands on student time? Drawing on theoretical frameworks from user experience design, educational psychology, and library science, I propose a comprehensive, user-centered approach grounded in ten strategic interventions. These strategies are designed not merely to increase library usage statistics but to fundamentally reposition the university library as an indispensable partner in student academic success, personal development, and professional preparation.

2. Understanding the Problem: Identifying Reasons for Low Patronage

Before implementing any intervention, university librarians must systematically investigate why students are not using the library. This investigation should employ mixed-methods approaches including surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions to gather both quantitative data on usage patterns and qualitative insights into student perceptions, attitudes, and barriers to library use. Such an evidence-based approach ensures that interventions address actual rather than assumed needs.

2.1 Common Reasons for Low Patronage

Research across academic library contexts has identified several recurring factors that contribute to low student patronage:

Preference for Internet Resources: Contemporary students have grown up in a digital environment and often default to search engines such as Google and Google Scholar for their information needs. The convenience, speed, and familiarity of these platforms frequently outweigh perceptions of the library's value, particularly when students believe they can find adequate information without library resources.

Lack of Awareness of Available Services: While orientation programs provide initial exposure, many students quickly forget what they learned or fail to recognize how library services apply to their specific academic needs. This is particularly true for specialized services such as research consultations, interlibrary loan, and subject-specific databases that may not be emphasized during general orientations.

Unfriendly Library Environment: Library spaces that feel sterile, unwelcoming, or overly restrictive can discourage student use. Factors such as excessive quiet rules, unfriendly staff interactions, or physical spaces that feel institutional rather than inviting contribute to negative perceptions that deter repeat visits.

Outdated Resources: Students who encounter dated textbooks, irrelevant journals, or insufficient coverage of contemporary topics may conclude that the library lacks the current information they need for their coursework and research.

Inconvenient Opening Hours: Library hours that do not align with student study patterns particularly limited hours on weekends, during evenings, or during examination periods create access barriers that drive students to alternative study locations.

Poor Internet Connectivity: In an era where most library resources are accessed online, unreliable Wi-Fi or insufficient bandwidth frustrate students and undermine the library's value as a technology-enabled learning space.

Competition from Alternative Study Spaces: Students increasingly study in cafés, student centers, residence halls, and other informal spaces that offer amenities such as food, comfortable seating, and social interaction that traditional libraries may lack.

Perceived Lack of Relevance: When students perceive that library resources and services do not directly support their specific courses, assignments, or career goals, they are less motivated to invest time in learning to use them effectively.

2.2 The Importance of User Research

Understanding these factors requires systematic

user research. Librarians should employ various methods to gather comprehensive data:

- **Online surveys** distributed through learning management systems and email can reach large numbers of students efficiently, capturing quantitative data on usage patterns and satisfaction levels.
- **Semi-structured interviews** with student users and non-users provide deeper insights into motivations, barriers, and suggestions for improvement.
- **Focus group discussions** enable exploration of shared experiences and generate rich qualitative data about student perceptions and needs.
- **Observation studies** examining how students actually use library spaces—whether for individual study, group work, browsing, or other purposes—reveal patterns that students themselves may not articulate.
- **Usage analytics** from library systems, including database access logs, circulation records, and website analytics, provide objective data on resource utilization patterns.

This user research should be ongoing rather than a one-time activity, enabling librarians to track changing needs and preferences over time.

3. Strategic Interventions for Increasing Student Patronage

Building on an understanding of why students do not use the library, the following ten interconnected strategies offer a comprehensive approach to transforming university libraries into vibrant, student-centered learning environments.

3.1 Improve Library Resources and Services

The foundation of any effective library is a collection that meets the academic needs of its users. University librarians must continuously evaluate and update both print and electronic collections based on student needs, curriculum requirements, and emerging research trends.

Collection Development: Librarians should work closely with faculty to identify essential resources for courses and programs. This includes analyzing syllabi, consulting subject specialists, and monitoring student requests to ensure that collections support current teaching and learning needs.

Digital Resource Investment: Subscriptions to relevant databases, e-books, and e-journals are essential in the contemporary academic environment. These resources provide 24/7 access to scholarly content, meeting student preferences for digital formats and remote access.

Technology Infrastructure: Reliable Wi-Fi connectivity throughout the library and access to up-to-date computers, printers, and scanners are non-negotiable expectations of modern students. Regular maintenance and technology upgrades demonstrate institutional commitment to student success.

Mobile and Remote Access: Developing mobile library applications and ensuring seamless off-campus access to electronic resources enables students to use library services regardless of their physical location. This is particularly important for part-time and commuter students.

Extended Services: Beyond traditional circulation and reference services, libraries should offer services aligned with student needs, such as research consultations, writing support, citation management assistance, and data management guidance.

3.2 Create an Attractive Learning Environment

The physical library environment significantly influences student decisions about where to study. Libraries that feel welcoming, comfortable, and conducive to various learning activities attract and retain users.

Comfortable Reading Spaces: Providing a range of seating options—from soft seating for leisure reading to ergonomic chairs for extended study sessions—accommodates different user preferences and needs.

Diverse Study Areas: Students require different environments for different purposes. Designating quiet study areas, collaborative group study rooms, and informal social learning spaces allows the library to serve multiple functions

simultaneously.

Technology-Enabled Spaces: Group study rooms equipped with display screens and collaboration tools support project-based learning. Individual study carrels with power outlets and good lighting accommodate technology-intensive study.

Atmospheric Improvements: Good lighting, comfortable temperature control, proper ventilation, and attractive aesthetics (including artwork, plants, and pleasing color schemes) contribute to a positive user experience.

Cleanliness and Maintenance: Regular cleaning and prompt maintenance of facilities communicate that the library values its users and their comfort.

Thoughtful Space Planning: The layout should facilitate intuitive wayfinding, reduce noise conflicts between different zones, and maximize natural light where possible.

3.3 Embed the Library in Academic Activities

Library usage increases significantly when students perceive library resources as directly relevant to their academic success. Integrating library services and resources into the curriculum positions the library as essential to learning rather than optional.

Course Integration: Collaborating with lecturers to design assignments that require use of specific library resourcessuch as database searching, scholarly article evaluation, or citation of specific sourcescreates structured opportunities for students to learn and apply library skills.

Librarian Participation in Academic Events: Library staff should participate in departmental seminars, orientation sessions, and faculty meetings to demonstrate their role as academic partners and build relationships with faculty.

Course-Specific Information Literacy Sessions: Offering targeted instruction sessions linked to specific courses ensures that students see the direct applicability of information literacy skills. These sessions should be timed to coincide with research assignments.

Embedded Librarianship: Where feasible, librarians can be embedded in specific courses or departments, attending classes and offering office hours within academic departments to provide research support at point of need.

Integration with Learning Management Systems: Placing library guides, research assistance, and resource links directly within course pages in the learning management system reduces barriers to access and reminds students of available support.

3.4 Use Aggressive Marketing and Advocacy

Awareness of library resources and services must be continuously reinforced through strategic marketing. In an environment of information abundance and competing demands on student attention, libraries must actively promote their value proposition.

Social Media Presence: Active engagement on platforms popular with students including Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTokenables libraries to share updates, promote resources, and connect with students where they spend significant time.

Regular Updates: Sharing new arrivals, database trials, library tips, and research guides through email newsletters and WhatsApp updates keeps the library in students' awareness.

Visual Marketing: Attractive posters strategically placed around campus in academic buildings, residence halls, and student centerscatch attention and reinforce library messaging.

Branded Materials: Library-branded items such as bookmarks, pens, and notebooks distributed during events serve as constant reminders of the library's availability.

Targeted Communications: Segmenting communications by discipline or academic level ensures that students receive information about resources most relevant to their needs.

Campus Partnerships: Collaborating with student affairs, academic departments, and campus communications offices expands reach and integrates library messaging into broader institutional communications.

3.5 Organize Engaging Programs

Events and programs transform the library from a passive resource repository into an active, engaging space that students want to visit for reasons beyond academic necessity.

Reading Competitions: Encouraging reading through competitions builds community, promotes library collections, and fosters a culture of reading. Competitions can be themed around specific genres, authors, or current events.

Book Exhibitions and Fairs: Showcasing new arrivals, faculty publications, or themed collections creates visual interest and discovery opportunities that browsing in the stacks may not facilitate.

Research Clinics and Workshops: Offering hands-on workshops on topics such as literature searching, citation management, systematic reviews, and avoiding plagiarism equips students with valuable skills while demonstrating library value.

Quiz Competitions: Librarythemed quiz competitions with academic and fun elements attract students and reinforce library-related knowledge in an engaging format.

Library Week Celebrations: Annual library week events create a focal point for library promotion, enabling multiple activities and programs within a concentrated period.

Career and Entrepreneurship Talks: Inviting professionals to speak about career paths, entrepreneurship, and professional development positions the library as a place for holistic student development.

Study Skills Workshops: Offering workshops on time management, exam preparation, and effective reading supports academic success while introducing students to library resources and services.

3.6 Establish Student Library Ambassadors

Peer influence is a powerful force in student behavior. Student library ambassadors can leverage their connections and credibility to promote library services among peers.

Recruitment: Recruit enthusiastic students from different faculties to serve as library ambassadors. These students should represent diverse academic backgrounds and year levels to reach varied audiences.

Training: Provide comprehensive training on library resources, services, and communication strategies so ambassadors can effectively represent the library.

Peer Promotion: Ambassadors promote library services among their peers, share library updates in their networks, and serve as approachable points of contact for students with library questions.

Feedback Collection: Ambassadors can gather informal feedback from fellow students, providing libraries with valuable insights into student perceptions and needs.

Event Support: Ambassadors assist during library events, facilitating activities and helping to create a welcoming atmosphere.

Recognition: Recognizing ambassadors through formal acknowledgment, certificates, and small tokens of appreciation maintains motivation and demonstrates the value placed on their contributions.

3.7 Introduce Incentives

Incentives motivate students to engage with the library, creating positive reinforcement for usage behaviors that may otherwise seem optional.

Recognition Programs: Awards for the "Most Active Library User," "Best Research Project," or similar categories publicly celebrate library users and create aspirational models for others.

Certificates of Participation: Providing certificates for students who complete library orientation, workshops, or programs offers tangible recognition of their engagement.

Faculty Recognition: Collaborating with academic departments to recognize library engagement during faculty events, award ceremonies, or in publications demonstrates institutional endorsement.

Competition Prizes: Small prizes—such as book tokens, stationery, or gift certificates—during library competitions create excitement and incentivize participation.

Raffles and Drawings: Students who check out materials, attend library events, or complete library surveys can be entered into drawings for attractive prizes.

Academic Benefits: Where possible, linking library engagement to academic recognition—such as extra credit in courses—creates powerful incentives aligned with student goals.

3.8 Strengthen Digital Presence

Contemporary students are digital natives who expect seamless online access to information and services. A strong digital presence is essential for reaching students who may never physically enter the library.

User-Friendly Website: The library website should be intuitive, mobile-responsive, and organized around student tasks rather than library administrative structures. Clear navigation, effective search functionality, and prominent links to key resources are essential.

Online Tutorials and Videos: Short, engaging video tutorials on topics such as database searching, evaluating sources, and using citation tools enable students to learn at their own pace, on their own schedule.

Virtual Reference Services: Offering reference assistance through chat, email, or video conferencing meets students where they are, providing support without requiring a physical visit.

Mobile Access: Ensuring that all library resources and services are accessible via mobile devices is increasingly essential as students rely on phones and tablets for academic work.

Social Media Engagement: Maintaining active social media presence with regular, engaging content builds community and promotes library resources.

Digital Exhibitions and Displays: Online exhibitions of special collections, new acquisitions, or themed materials provide access to library content for those unable to visit physically.

3.9 Improve Staff-User Relationships

The quality of interactions between library staff and users significantly influences student perceptions of the library as welcoming and useful.

Friendly and Approachable Staff: Library staff should be trained in customer service skills, maintaining a welcoming demeanor and avoiding intimidating or unwelcoming behavior.

Responsive Service: Responding promptly to student inquiries and requests, whether in person, by email, or through virtual channels, demonstrates that students are valued.

Proactive Assistance: Library staff should actively offer assistance to students who appear confused, rather than waiting to be approached. This is particularly important for students who may feel intimidated by library environments.

Approachability: Creating an atmosphere where students feel comfortable asking questions, regardless of how basic they may seem, encourages continued engagement.

Commitment to Excellence: A culture of continuous improvement and service excellence should permeate all library interactions.

Professional Development: Investing in staff training in communication skills, user service, and cultural competence enables staff to serve increasingly diverse student populations effectively.

3.10 Foster Collaboration with Academic Departments

Strong relationships with academic departments ensure that library services align with program needs and that faculty actively encourage student library use.

Liaison Librarians: Designating librarians to serve as liaisons to specific departments builds relationships, enables tailored services, and

ensures departmental awareness of library resources.

Curriculum Consultation: Librarians should participate in curriculum development processes, ensuring that students gain the information literacy skills they need and that library resources align with program requirements.

Faculty Training: Offering training to faculty on library resources empowers them to recommend library services to students and integrate them into their teaching.

Resource Requests: Establishing clear processes for faculty to request new resources ensures that collections respond to teaching and research needs.

Collaborative Events: Co-sponsoring events with academic departments—such as research symposia, visiting speaker series, or student poster sessions—builds relationships and demonstrates library commitment to academic mission.

4. Implementation Considerations

4.1 Phased Approach

Implementing all ten strategies simultaneously is rarely feasible or advisable. A phased approach allows for careful planning, resource allocation, and evaluation of effectiveness.

Phase 1: Assessment and Foundation (Months 1-6)

- Conduct user research to identify specific barriers and preferences at the institution
- Address basic infrastructure issues (Wi-Fi, seating, opening hours)
- Implement user-friendly website improvements
- Begin staff training in customer service

Phase 2: Service Enhancement (Months 7-12)

- Update collections based on assessment findings
- Launch targeted marketing campaigns
- Establish student ambassador program
- Initiate course integration efforts with interested faculty

Phase 3: Program Development (Months 13-18)

- Launch engaging programs and events
- Implement incentive programs
- Expand digital presence
- Strengthen faculty partnerships

Phase 4: Continuous Improvement (Ongoing)

- Evaluate programs and services
- Adjust strategies based on feedback and data
- Sustain successful initiatives
- Identify emerging student needs

4.2 Resource Allocation

These strategies require investment of financial resources (for collections, technology, facilities, and programming), human resources (staff time for new initiatives), and institutional commitment. Librarians should develop business cases for investment, demonstrating how increased student engagement with library resources supports institutional strategic goals such as student retention, academic achievement, and graduate outcomes.

4.3 Assessment and Evaluation

Ongoing assessment is essential to determine which strategies are effective and to justify continued investment. Metrics should include both quantitative measures (library usage statistics, gate counts, database access, program attendance) and qualitative feedback (student satisfaction surveys, focus groups, user experience studies). Return on investment analysis can demonstrate the value of library resources and services to institutional stakeholders.

5. Conclusion

The challenge of low student patronage in university libraries requires a fundamental reimagining of the library's role in student life. Simply increasing awareness through orientation programs is insufficient when students perceive the library as irrelevant, inaccessible, or unwelcoming. The ten strategies outlined in this

paper—improving resources and services, creating attractive environments, embedding libraries in academic activities, using aggressive marketing, organizing engaging programs, establishing student ambassadors, introducing incentives, strengthening digital presence, improving staff relationships, and fostering academic partnerships—offer a comprehensive, user-centered approach to library transformation.

The modern university library must evolve from being a passive storehouse of books to becoming a vibrant academic and social learning hub. This transformation requires not only changes in resources and facilities but a fundamental shift in mindset: from seeing libraries as collections to seeing them as services; from focusing on what libraries have to focusing on what students need; from expecting students to come to the library to taking the library to where students are.

By understanding students' needs, improving services, leveraging technology, and creating engaging programs, librarians can significantly increase student patronage and utilization of library resources. The ultimate goal is not merely higher usage statistics but a library that genuinely enhances student academic success, supports lifelong learning, and contributes to the intellectual and personal development of the university community.

The strategies proposed in this paper are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Improved staff-user relationships make marketing more effective; engaging programs attract students who then discover valuable resources; student ambassadors promote services developed in response to user feedback. Implementing this holistic approach positions the university library not merely as a place to access information but as an indispensable partner in the educational journey.

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