Assessing Learners' Needs and Library Responsiveness of Textbooks and Course Readings

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Abstract — This paper is aimed at assessing learners' needs and library responsiveness of textbooks and course readings at Cantho University, Vietnam. Underpinned by the conceptual framework defined by Reitz, this study was conducted using quantitative data from 444 learners of bachelor, master and doctorate degrees [13]. Findings indicate that learners' needs were at the high level ($M = 4.25$) while the responsive level of library textbooks and course readings were relatively low ($M = 3.92$) with 51%, 44% and 52% for bachelor, master and doctorate students, respectively. With regard to books for further reading, this library could satisfy 39.7% of learners' needs. These findings provide library leaders with insightful views of their current collections of textbooks and course readings for training programs and ways to increase their responsiveness. The findings also serve as a reference for further studies related to qualified training programs.

Key words — assessment, course readings, responsiveness, satisfaction, textbooks

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks and course readings play an important role in teaching and learning with their supports to achieve desired course learning objectives. In Vietnamese universities, textbooks and course readings are the criteria to be considered in internal and external quality accreditation procedure. Given that their crucial roles in higher education environment, institutions have always focused on subscription and compilation of textbooks, lecture notes, journal articles and online resources. In particular, university boards required the academics to enclose textbooks and the reading lists in their course syllabus. Contemporaneously, their academic libraries have to subscribe those learning materials for the learners. Their collections of instructional materials are keeping on growing. However, assessment of the needs and responsiveness of this source are still open. Therefore, a comprehensive study of these contents at Cantho University, Vietnam is an urgent requirement to help the institution and the library to have timely and appropriate policies to collect, supplement and disseminate this learning resource.

Research findings may help the institution have more practical evidence to adjust library budget of collection development. Moreover, library leaders may benefit from the research to innovate and increase satisfactory level of library services on instructional materials. Also, research findings may be viewed by other libraries to optimize their service efficiency for the learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have indicated the important role of textbooks and course readings in helping learners achieve their learning outcomes (e.g., high results in learning). In particular, Moulton points out that the majority of students had positive perceptions of the usefulness of the instructional materials in their learning process [10]. Half of them explored textbooks to better understand their teachers' lectures. Hutchinson and Torres emphasize the essential role of the course readings for both learners and teachers [4]. Learners view textbooks as a guide, helping them organize learning inside and outside the classroom, implementing activities and home assignments, self-study, and preparing for examinations. Meanwhile, teachers believe that textbooks are used to save time, orient lessons, guide discussions, direct homework, and facilitate their practices. A study by Junco and Clem found out a statistically significant relationship between the utilization of instructional materials and test scores [6]. The time students spent reading textbooks is an influential indicator of learning outcomes. Moreover, Ibragimov and his co-authors affirm that course readings can be integrated with

fundamental and in-depth knowledge [5]. Textbooks are a systematic combination of texts, illustrations, and tools to help learners acquire knowledge such as questions, exercises, examples, summaries and conclusions. Similarly, Lebus claims that instructional materials support the curriculum, conduct learning activities and master knowledge [9]. This implies the idea that textbooks and course readings could improve the equity in education since all learners could access the same instructional materials. According to Wardani, Basthomi, and Sunaryo, textbooks and course readings function as the main agents in imparting knowledge to learners [16]. One of their basic functions is to selectively and easily organize the amount of knowledge available to learners. These authors claim that the library resources are developed through existing conditions to meet the needs of students and faculties. In other words, textbooks and course readings are set as priority in the library acquisition policy [16].

Ngulube emphasizes that textbooks and course readings mainly serve learning objectives in most institutions and provide basic information for their education programs [11]. Kirkham believes that choosing suitable instructional materials for disciplines is crucial to help students grasp course knowledge and provide them with up-to-date information [7]. Curriculum Committee of Hong Kong Ministry of Education state that textbooks and course readings as useful resources drive student learning [15]. In particular, textbooks are not only teaching tools for teachers but also learning materials for students' self-preparation of homework. Quality teaching materials are available in both print and electronic forms to support the learner-centered curriculum as it provides basic knowledge of the subject and useful learning methods to learners. Libraries in Western countries have their own policies to serve textbooks and course readings. If the teacher chooses a book as the core of the subject, the book label in the library collection will be assigned a repository code for the course in that semester. Students are then allowed to access this textbook in the library or have very limited loan time (about 2 hours). In the next semester, if students do not register the course, that textbook will return to its normal code [14].

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This study was underpinned by conceptual framework of textbooks, course readings, information need and responsiveness [13]. In particular, textbook is a book-based publication intended for students who take a course or prepare for examination. Textbooks differ from other commercial publications with the same name in that they are sometimes published with workbooks, lab manuals and / or with instructional manuals. Course readings can be understood as the reading list identified by the academics or coordinators to support the courses. Course readings may consist of book chapters, journal articles and online resources. Information need is the need to find out the answer about what people do not know. In this study, information need or need of learning materials can be understood as the state of the learner that needs to be met to compensate or satisfy the lack of knowledge for a certain content or problem in learning. Responsiveness is a determining scale of satisfaction of a certain need in life. Specifically, in this study it is the scale of the satisfaction level for the textbooks and course readings in higher educational institutions.

Quantitative approach through online survey was used to collect the data for this study. The survey was designed and sent to university learners via emails. Currently, there are 37,313 undergraduates, post-graduates and doctorate candidates [2]. As suggested by Krejcie and Morgan, the minimum sample of this research is 380. In this study, 444 responses were collected, which exceeds 16.8% of the intended figure [8]. Online survey data were transformed into SPSS and analysed. SPSS functions such as frequency, percentage, and mean were run to examine learners' needs and responsive levels of textbooks and course readings.

FINDINGS

1) *Demands for library textbooks and course readings*

The demands for library textbooks and course readings were investigated from two sources: the course syllabus and research online survey data. In terms of course syllabus, Cantho University (CTU) has 141 disciplines with 3 educational levels (Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees) and 9,261 courses. CTU policy regulates each course should have one textbook and at least two items in the course reading list. Based on this regulation, the number of required textbooks is 9,261 titles and 18,522 items in the course readings. However, lecturers recommend the course learners to read 25,976 items in the course syllabus. This demand has 7,274 items higher than the university requirement. In particular, the number of items read by master students is the

highest one (n= 4,015). Standing at the second and third positions are the demanded items for tertiary learners (n= 3,259) and doctoral candidates (n= 482) respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: Demands for Textbooks and Course Readings

Level	Principles	Courses	University policy		Demands from the course syllabus (Items)	Assessment (Items)
			Textbooks (Titles)	Course readings (Items)		
Bachelor	98	8,104	8,104	16,208	19,467	↑3,259
Master	43	1,157	1,157	2,314	6,329	↑4,015
PhD	19	134	134	268	750	↑482
Total	141	9,261	9,261	18,522	25,796	↑7,274

Source: Library statistics (5/2020)

In addition to the demands for textbooks and course readings proposed in the course syllabus by lecturers, the actual needs of learners about this learning resource are also investigated. Five-levels scale was being used with (1) Totally disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree and (5) Totally agree. According to Hoang and Chu, the average value (Mean) is considered at [3]:

1.00 – 1.80:	Totally disagree
1.81 – 2.60:	Disagree
2.61 – 3.40:	Neutral
3.41 – 4.20:	Agree
4.21 – 5.00:	Totally agree

Table 2. Needs of Textbooks and Course Readings

Needs	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		Mean	Rank
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
1. Use of textbooks and course readings	6	1,4	3	0,7	53	11,9	258	58,1	124	27,9	4,11	2
2. Use in case of requirement	15	3,4	93	20,9	114	25,7	179	40,3	43	9,7	3,32	10
3. Use textbooks and course readings provided by lecturer (not from the library)	20	4,5	130	29,3	130	29,3	139	31,3	25	5,6	3,04	12
4. Only listening to the lecturer	107	24,1	217	48,9	80	18,0	34	7,7	6	1,4	2,13	13
5. Textbooks and course readings are useful in learning	9	2,0	3	0,7	43	9,7	201	45,3	188	42,3	4,25	1
6. Textbooks and course readings are useful for future jobs	10	2,3	4	0,9	62	14,0	218	49,1	150	33,8	4,11	2
7. Self looking for textbooks and course readings at the library	12	2,7	31	7,0	141	31,8	206	46,4	54	12,2	3,58	8
8. Helping from the library staff	27	6,1	74	16,7	174	39,2	146	32,9	23	5,2	3,14	11
9. Use textbooks and course readings at the library (not at home)	24	5,4	61	13,7	159	35,8	149	33,6	51	11,5	3,32	10
10. Textbooks and course readings in Vietnamese	10	2,3	13	2,9	85	19,1	237	53,4	99	22,3	3,91	4
11. Textbooks and course	16	3,6	57	12,8	171	38,5	159	35,8	41	9,2	3,34	9

readings in other languages (English, French, Russian...).												
12. Use textbooks and course readings before and during the semesters.	5	1,1	8	1,8	87	19,6	247	55,6	97	21,8	3,95	3
13. Use textbooks and course readings before examinations	21	4,7	56	12,6	64	14,4	202	45,5	101	22,7	3,69	7
14. Use printed textbooks and course readings	8	1,8	11	2,5	92	20,7	243	54,7	90	20,3	3,89	5
15. Use e-textbooks and course readings	9	2,0	15	3,4	103	23,2	228	51,4	89	20,0	3,84	6

Source: Data from the survey in 2020

Data from Table 2 illustrates the learners' needs for the textbooks and course readings. With the highest votes ($n = 389/444$; 87.6%), the learners agreed that textbooks and course readings are very useful in the learning process (Mean = 4.25). This can be affirmed that the majority of learners at CTU consider this learning source introduced in the course syllabus by teachers as a guideline for improving their own understanding and deepening their knowledge. Without this resource, the learners' professional knowledge will be unsustainable, unable to keep up with the trend of industry development. Therefore, it is inevitable that learners care about the usefulness of textbooks and course readings in learning and research. This is also an issue that should be paid attention to by the library to have a right policy and to collect appropriate materials in order to better serve the learners.

With the same Mean score 4.11, the learners' use of textbooks and course readings and their benefits for future jobs ranked the second position in their table of demands. In particular, with 258 agreeing votes (58%) and 124 strongly agreeing responses (27.9%), the student's demand for using textbooks and course readings is quite high. This is also considered as the source of backbone knowledge of specialized subjects. Similarly, learners rated this learning source very useful in accumulating knowledge and experience for future jobs with 368 agreements and strong agreement votes (82.9%). This proves that learners are very interested in accumulating knowledge in the learning process to serve professional work after graduation. In addition, the very disagree and disagree proportion of learners' responses to 'only listening to the teacher in class' was very high ($n = 324$; 73%). This means that learners believe listening to lectures in class is not enough, they need to read more textbooks and course readings from the syllabus to improve knowledge and expertise. However, nearly 30% of learners still subjectively think that just listening to the teacher is enough. This may be their subjectiveness and somewhat confident in their knowledge.

Ranking the third position is the learners' need to use textbooks and course readings before and during the semesters. With the average score (Mean = 3.95) and 77.4% of votes at agree and strongly agree, learners are interested in using textbooks and course readings to gradually accumulate knowledge, without waiting until the end of the semesters. This is similar to 202 respondents agree (45.5%) and 101 strongly agree (22.7%) that textbooks and course readings need to be used before examinations to get better scores. This is consistent with the judgment by Nguyen if a teacher's request is not accompanied by an assessment, most students will not do it [12].

With Mean from 3.41 to 4.20, the learners' need to use textbooks and course readings in Vietnamese, both printed and electronic, and self-looking for this source at the library got high votes of agreement. More specifically, with 53.4% agreeing and 22.3% strongly agreeing, learners still prefer to use Vietnamese language than other languages (English, French, Russian ...). Foreign language materials only reached a consensus level of 45%, less than 75.7% in Vietnamese. This is also the premise for library attention in supplementing textbooks and course readings. In fact, language is not a big barrier for most students, but psychologically, they still prefer to use their native language because it is more familiar than other languages. In addition, the need to use printed and electronic textbooks and course readings has similar amplitude with each other. For printed ones, the total of agreeing and strongly agreeing is 75%, and for electronic ones, it is 71.4%. This small difference shows that

learners need to use both forms. This is also a considerable issue that the library should collect both electronic and printed textbooks and course readings. To the modern trend, learners like to use electronic documents through smart and convenient devices at anytime, anywhere, but a large number of learners are still prefer traditional printed forms. Moreover, 206 learners (46.4%) agree and 12.2% strongly agree that learners have a need to find materials in the library by themselves. With this average number (58.6%), learners do not have high confidence in searching for information. This may be due to subjective factor that they have not actively participated in the information literacy program held at the library. This may be caused by the objective factor that the library marketing is not good enough to the learners. This finding may lead to a suggestion that learners should actively participate in information literacy courses at the library. It is very important to equip learners with information searching skills for study and research. This is similar to Bui's advices that in addition to acquiring knowledge in class, students also need to know how to look for materials at the library or on the Internet by themselves [1]. Furthermore, that learners should ask for help from the library staff received high votes ($n = 320$; 72.1 %). This can be figured out although the learners have high interest and use of library resource, their skills and knowledge of information literacy are not properly equipped. Therefore, the training sessions on information-seeking should be held to support the learners at the library.

With 159 medium (35%) and 149 agreeing votes (33.6%), learners are interested in using textbooks and course readings inside the library. In fact, the good learning environment at the library has attracted more learners to study in the library higher than studying at home. Moreover, learners have the need to use textbooks and core readings according to the requirements of the instructors. With 114 medium (25.7%) and 179 agreeing votes (40.3%), learners are still passive in the process of using textbooks and course readings. The learners only use this learning source whenever the teacher recommends. Similarly, the demand of using textbooks and course readings provided by lecturers scores at an average (Mean= 3.04). About one third of the learners ($n = 139$; 31.3%) agreed that students only use materials provided by lecturers without using textbooks and course readings at the library. This finding proves that 2/3 of the research participants are not only interested in the textbooks and course readings provided by the lecturers, but also refer to other external sources of the same majors at the library to improve their professional knowledge.

Moreover, findings also show that female learners have a higher demand for using textbooks and course readings than men (Table 3). Out of a total of 258 learners who agreed that they need to use textbooks and course readings, 138 were female (31.1%) and 120 males (27%). Similarly, of the 27.9% ($n = 124$) learners strongly agree that they use textbooks and course readings, 16.4% ($n = 37$) is for female and only 11.5% ($n = 31$) for men. The reason for the gender difference in the need to use textbooks and course readings may be due to more women (57%) participating in the survey than men (43%). In addition, it is also possible that women are typically more diligent than men in the sector of social sciences and humanities.

Table 3. Needs of Textbooks and Course Readings by Gender

Gender	Use of textbooks and course readings											
	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male	4	0,9	1	0,2	19	4,3	120	27	51	11,5	195	43,9
Female	2	0,5	2	0,5	34	7,7	138	31,1	73	16,4	249	56,1
Total	6	1,4	3	0,7	53	11,9	258	58,1	124	27,9	444	100

Source: Data from the survey in 2020

Similarly, learners in the sector of natural sciences have a higher demand for using textbooks and course readings than students in the social sciences sector (Table 4). In particular, 220 students studying in the natural sciences sector agree ($n = 153$; 34.5%) and strongly agree ($n = 67$; 15.1%) that they have the desire to

use textbooks and course readings (49.6% totally). Meanwhile, only 162 (36.4%) learners from the social sciences sector agreed and strongly agreed with 105 (23.6%) and 57 votes (12.8%) respectively.

Table 4. Needs of Textbooks and Course Readings by Principle

Principles	Use of textbooks and course readings											
	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Natural sciences	4	0,9	3	0,7	28	6,3	153	34,5	67	15,1	255	57,4
Social sciences	2	0,5	0	0	25	5,6	105	23,6	57	12,8	189	42,6
Total	6	1,4	3	0,7	53	11,9	258	58,1	124	27,9	444	100

Source: Library statistics (5/2020)

In summary, CTU learners have a good understanding of the important role of textbooks and course readings in their studies and future careers. The study also shows that learners have a high demand in using textbooks and course readings. Specifically, female and the natural sciences major learners have a higher demand for using this source than male and the social sciences major ones. This need exists before and during the semesters even before the exams. Especially, learners have the need to use Vietnamese materials, both printed and electronic. These findings help library have more evidence to develop additional policies, training strategies, and promote proprietary resources.

2) Satisfactory level of textbooks and course readings

Overall, the responsiveness of CTU library for textbooks and course readings was below average (47.7%). This finding shows that CTU library has not met the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Training about learning materials for students (80%). More specifically, 98 training disciplines at the tertiary level of CTU require 19,467 items, in the meanwhile, the library possesses 9,475 items, reaching the rate of 51%. Similarly, 1,157 master courses require 5,340 items. The responsive level of the library is 2,367 items (44%). At the doctoral level, the highest level in the academic system at CTU, the responsive level of textbooks and course readings is 52% (Table 5). These findings show that CTU library needs to supplement more learning materials for all educational levels, especially for master students.

Table 5. Satisfactory Levels of Textbooks and Course Readings by Degree

Levels	Needs	Satisfaction	%
Bachelor	19,467	9,475	51
Master	5,340	2,367	44
PhD	730	382	52
Total	24,807	11,842	47.7

Source: Library statistics (5/2020)

Considering each type of learning materials, the responsiveness to the demand for books has increased gradually with 30%, 44% and 45% for Bachelor, master and doctoral level respectively (Table 6). Meanwhile, journals and government documents reach 100% responsiveness at all training levels. The study was unable to determine the responsiveness of the other documents because they were teachers' own books, and the documents accessed via URLs and links on the Internet.

Table 6. Satisfactory Level by Types of Learning Materials

Levels	Books			Journals			Government documents			Other s
	Needs	Satisfaction s	%	Need s	Satisfaction s	%	Need s	Satisfaction s	%	Needs
Bachelor	18,638	5,707	30	124	124	100	385	385	100	272
Master	5,031	2,259	44	140	140	100	22	22	100	158
PhD	634	286	45	55	55	100	6	6	100	36
Total	23,669	7,966	39.7	319	319	100	413	413	100	430

Source: Library statistics (5/2020)

The online survey finding shows that 62.4% (n = 277) of the participants agree and 72 (16.2%) strongly agree on the satisfaction about textbooks and course readings. In addition, Mean score 3.92 indicates that the learners' satisfaction was generally rated at scale 4 'satisfaction'.

Table 7. Learners' Satisfaction on Textbooks and Course Readings

Scale	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Satisfaction on library textbooks and course readings	3	0,7	6	1,4	86	19,4	277	62,4	72	16,2	3,92

Source: Data from the survey in 2020

CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study indicate that the actual need for textbooks and course readings at CTU was found to be relatively high. However, the library can actually meet 47.7% for all types of documents and 39.7% for books. For each educational level, the library can meet 51%, 44% and 52% for students of Bachelor, Master and doctoral degree in general and 51%, 44% and 45% for books, respectively. Meanwhile, the learners' needs for other types of documents such as journals and government documents were not much. This necessitates the library to allocate more textbooks and course readings for the learners. In particular, it is recommended that the University administrators or executives should provide more budget or financial support for Master students' learning resources.

The findings from the online survey show that learners had a very high demand for textbooks and course readings (Mean= 4.25). However, their satisfaction on this learning source is lower (Mean= 3.95). There is a real need for learners to access and use textbooks and course readings to improve, accumulate and communicate knowledge and experience for their personal growth and future ideals. The findings also show that female learners had a higher demand for using this learning source than men did. Similarly, learners in the natural sciences sector had a higher demand for using textbooks and course readings than did students in the social sciences sector. In particular, learners need to use this learning source before and during the semesters instead of examination period. It is noteworthy that learners have the need to use materials in Vietnamese, both printed and electronic forms, and self-search for the materials at the library instead of receiving support by the library staff. Although the learners had high interest in and used this learning resource in the library, their skills and knowledge to seek for information were not properly equipped. Therefore, the learners should fully participate in the information literacy training programs organized by the library staff, and thereby, becoming more confident in information search and self-study.

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