

Students' Information Behaviour Along Their University Studies

A Case Study in Two Departments of The University of
Bucharest, Faculty of Letters – part two

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Abstract:

This study is the continuation of the part one. It is an excerpt of the practical research whose main objective was to illustrate the way in which students use the information and documentation resources in college, both for educational and research activities, and for administrative and extra-curricular ones. To carry out this research, students from two departments – the Department of Administrative Sciences and the Department of Communication Sciences of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest – were considered for the bachelor's degree in Managerial and Administrative Assistance (MAA) and Information and documentation Sciences (IDS), and for the Master's degree in Information and Document Management (IDM) and Information Management in Contemporary Society (IMCG).

Keywords: case study, information behaviour, students, information, information resources, access to information, information management

1. Introduction

We envisaged a case study at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Letters[1] to illustrate the concrete way in which students use the necessary information and documentation resources considering the students from two departments – the Department of Administrative Sciences and the Department of Communication Sciences of the Faculty of Letters for the bachelor's degree in *Managerial and Administrative Assistance (MAA)* and from the *Information and Documentation Sciences (IDS)*, and for the Master's degree in *Information and Document Management (IDM)* and in *Information Management in Contemporary Society (IMCS)*.

The period of application and distribution of the questionnaires was between January and March 2020[2]. As a refresher from first part, it worth mentioning that the questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 434 people[3], representing students from the mentioned majors enrolled in the academic year 2019-2020. Following the application of the questionnaires, 324 responses (74.65%) were obtained, of which 234 from undergraduate students and 90 from Master's students.

The **purpose** of applying these questionnaires was to highlight the informational behaviour and the degree of satisfaction of the students in the use of information and documentation resources in the university environment.

The main objectives of the research consisted in the analysis of the use of information and documentation resources in the university environment; in getting to know the intellectual work techniques in elaborating scientific papers and the difficulties encountered; in investigating the impact in the use of traditional resources versus digital resources; and in identifying concrete ways to optimize the services providing information resources.

The **research methodology**, in accordance with the assumed objectives, was based on a quantitative analysis, and the instrument used to gather information was the questionnaire[4].

The structure of the questionnaire is as follows:

The first set includes four general questions regarding the use of information resources, the reason why they are used, the resources used to create a work (report, study, license, dissertation), the knowledge of intellectual work techniques in the creation of scientific papers and the difficulties encountered.

The second set includes five questions that aim to highlight users' interest in print resources, the frequency of visits to the library, the time spent in the library, the experience in the library, and the need for the librarian's help.

The third set includes six questions asking users' opinions on the use of digital resources and of the Internet, the existence of databases, and the problems related to the use of databases.

The fourth set includes five questions, of which three are formulated to obtain answers on a scale from 1 (Very satisfied) to 6 (Do not know/Do not answer). The goal was to quantify the respondents' satisfaction with the information resources offered within the university, the documentation and research skills acquired in college, the results obtained in college reflecting the assimilation of knowledge and the acquisition of specific skills, the difficulties encountered in using information resources, and users' opinion regarding the initiation of a course in information and documentation technology.

In addition to these categories, the questionnaire also contains an open-ended question allowing respondents to write comments or make suggestions. The answers were completed by ticking one or more answers to closed questions.

2. Representation and Interpretation of the Results

The recorded data, taken from the answers included in the 324 questionnaires completed by students and master's students, were processed using the *Microsoft Excel* program from the *Microsoft Office* suite. The result was a set of 20 spreadsheets, completed with the data from the questionnaire. The results obtained were presented for each year of study separately (undergraduate and master's). To carry out a more complex analysis, graphs were developed, allowing the comparison between years of study, and facilitating the highlighting of the evolution of the students' informational behaviour in college[5].

The next six questions represent the third category of information requested by the questionnaire and consider the use of digital resources, the use of the Internet, and the existence of databases and issues in the use of databases.

How often do you use digital resources?

The goal of question number 10, *How often do you use digital resources?*, was to identify the frequency of use of digital information and documentation resources in learning and research activities.

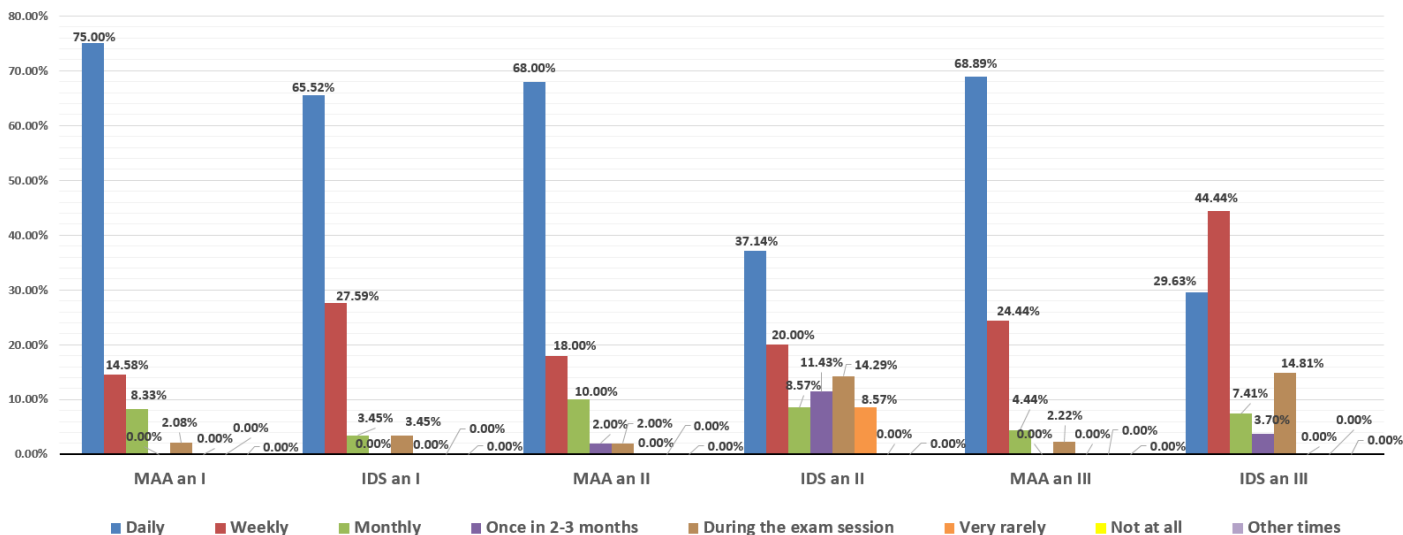


Figure 1. Comparative study of undergraduate students' use of digital resources

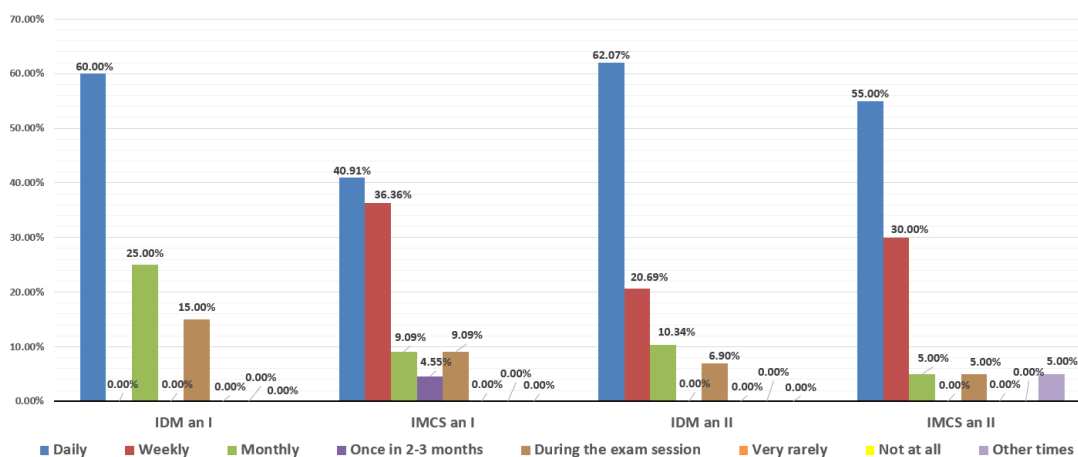


Figure 2. Comparative study of Master students' use of digital resources

Where do you use the Internet?

The goal of question number 11, *Where do you use the Internet?*, was to identify the place of use of the Internet in accessing information and documentation resources in digital format.

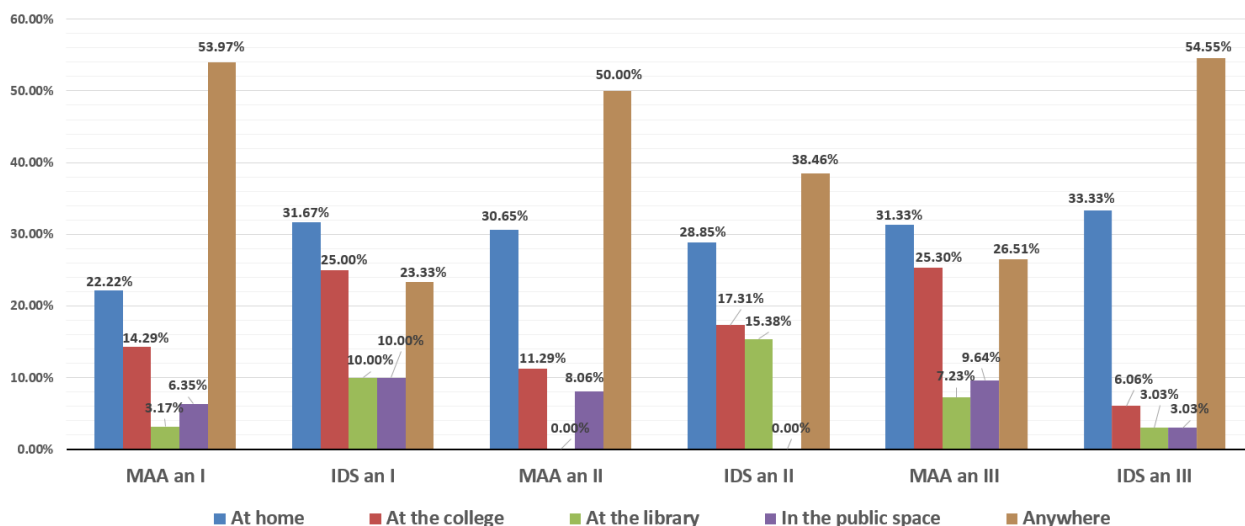


Figure 3. Comparative study of where undergraduate students use the Internet

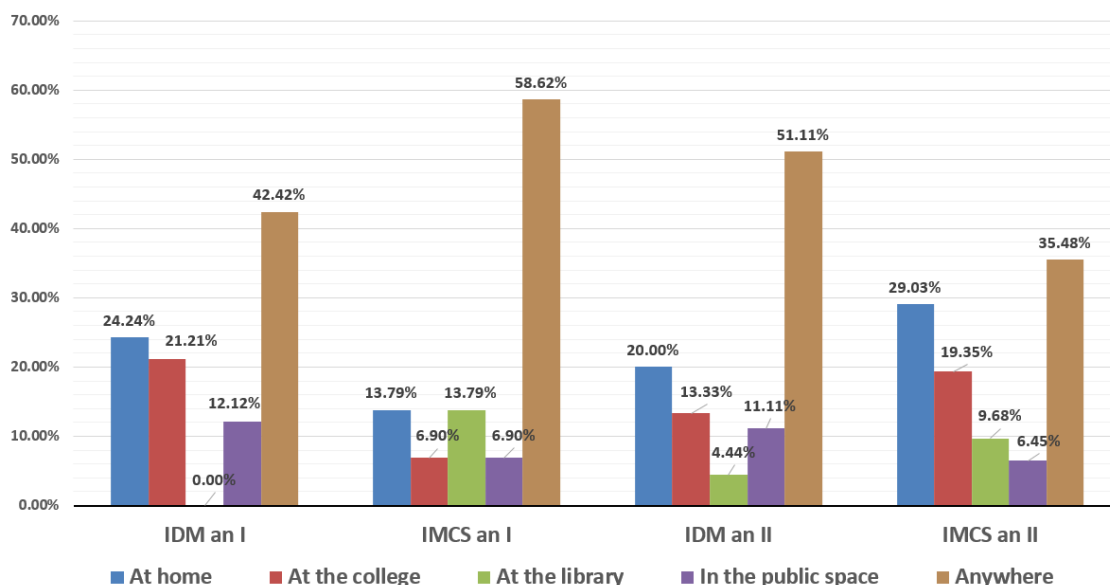


Figure 4. Comparative study on where Master students use the internet

Are you aware of the existence of databases?

The goal of question number 12, *Are you aware of the existence of databases?*, a closed question, was to identify the extent to which students are familiar with the existence of scientific databases.

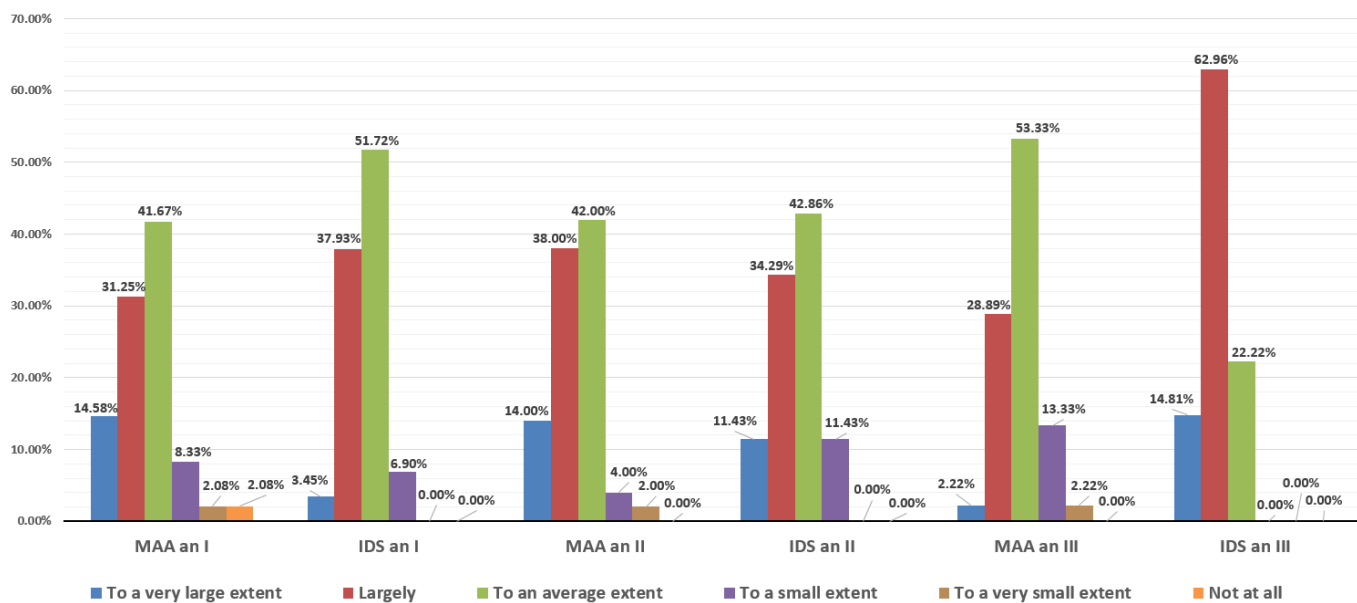


Figure 5. Comparative study of database knowledge of undergraduate students

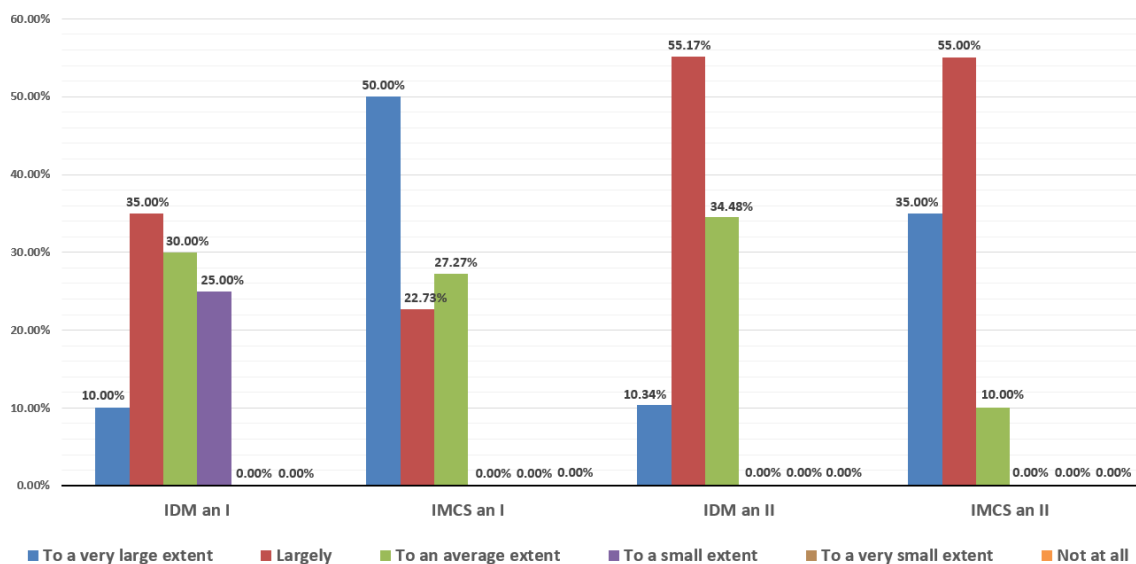


Figure 6. Comparative study of database knowledge of Master's students

How did you find out about databases?

The goal of question number 13, *How did you find out about databases?*, was to identify the ways in which students were informed about the existence of scientific databases.

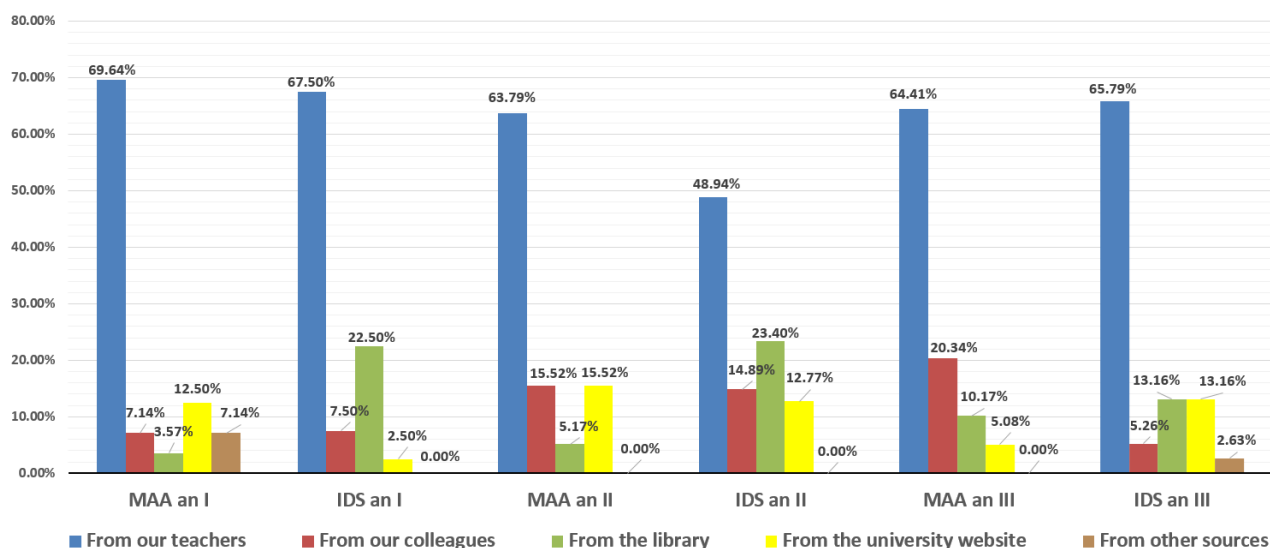


Figure 7. Comparative study on how undergraduate students found out about databases

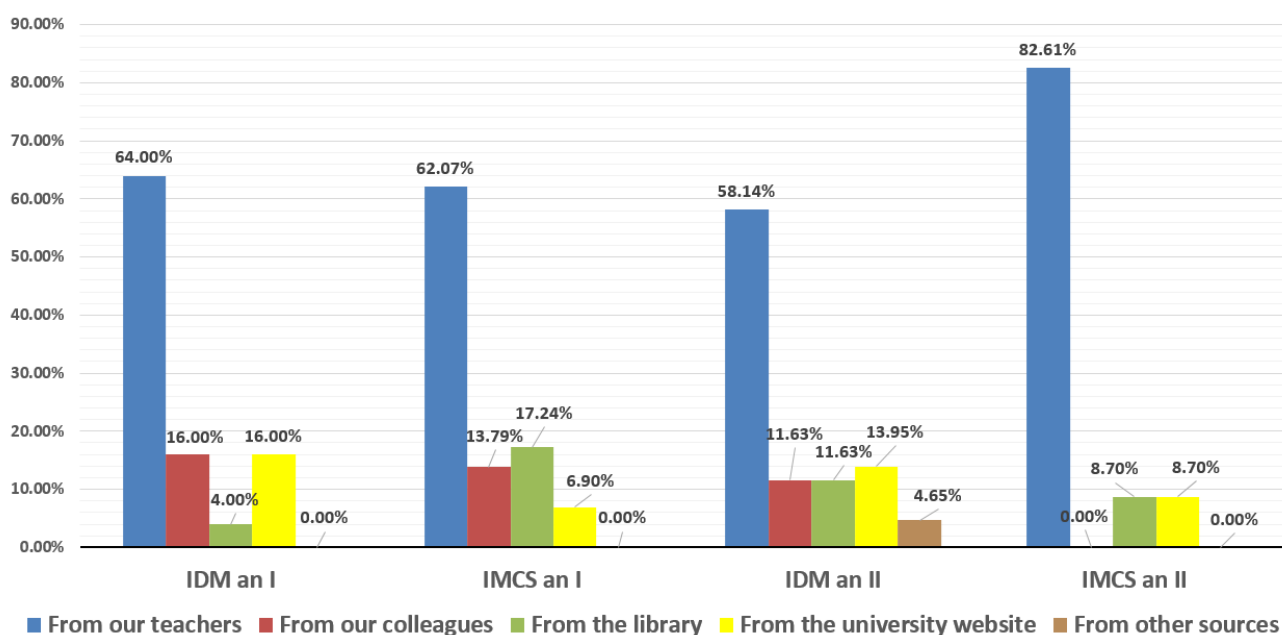


Figure 8. Comparative study on how Master's students found out about databases

How often do you access databases?

The goal of question number 14, *How often do you use databases?*, was to identify the frequency of use of databases by students for their educational and research activities.

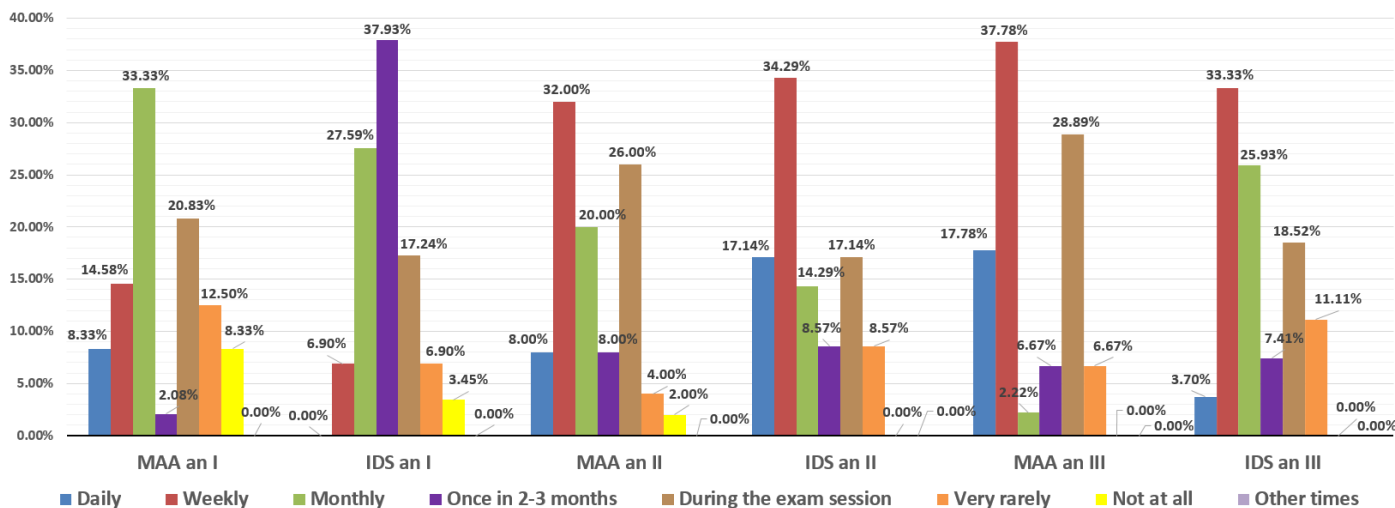


Figure 9. Comparative study on the frequency of database access by undergraduate students

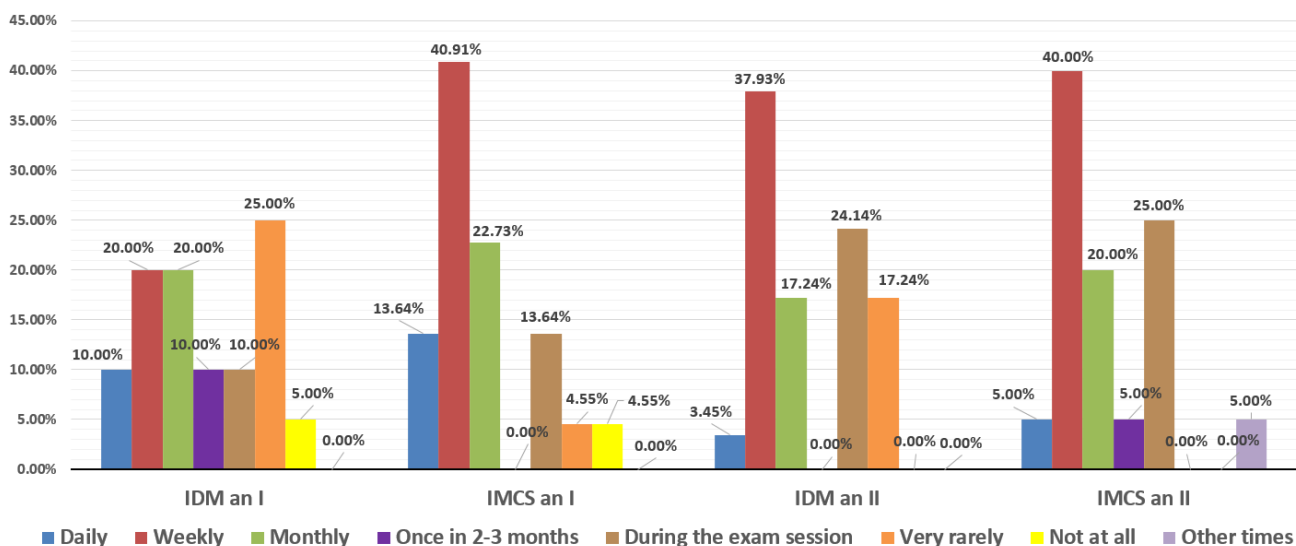


Figure 10. Comparative study on the frequency of database access by Master's students

What problems have you encountered using databases?

The goal of question number 15, *What problems have you experienced in using databases?*, it was aimed to identify the problems encountered by students when using databases.

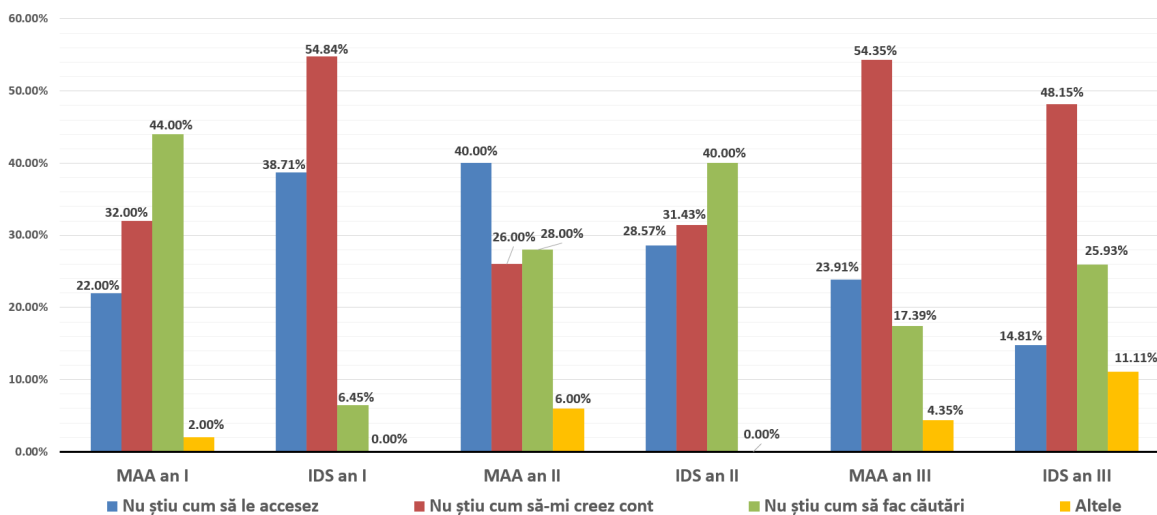


Figure 11. Comparative study of problems encountered in the use of databases by undergraduate students

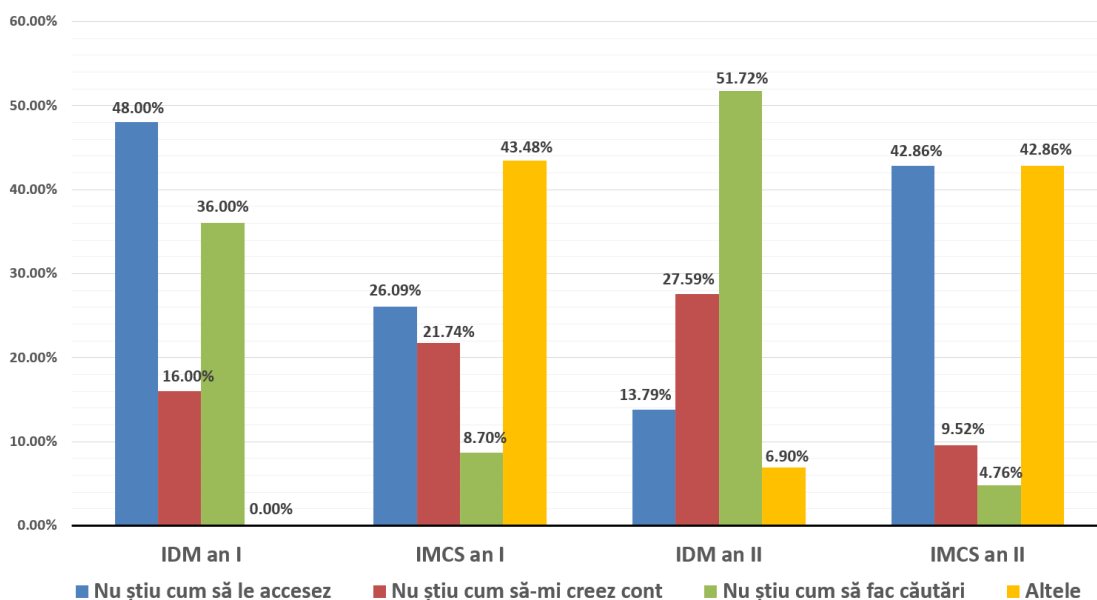


Figure 12. Comparative study on the problems encountered in the use of databases by Master's students

The following five questions represent the fourth category of information aimed at respondents' satisfaction with the information resources offered within the university, the documentation and research skills acquired in college, and the results obtained in college reflected in the assimilation of specific information and documentation knowledge and skills.

Are you satisfied with the information resources offered at the university?

The goal of question number 16, *Are you satisfied with the information resources offered at the university?*, was to assess the degree of satisfaction with the use of the information and documentation resources offered by the university to students along their professional training.

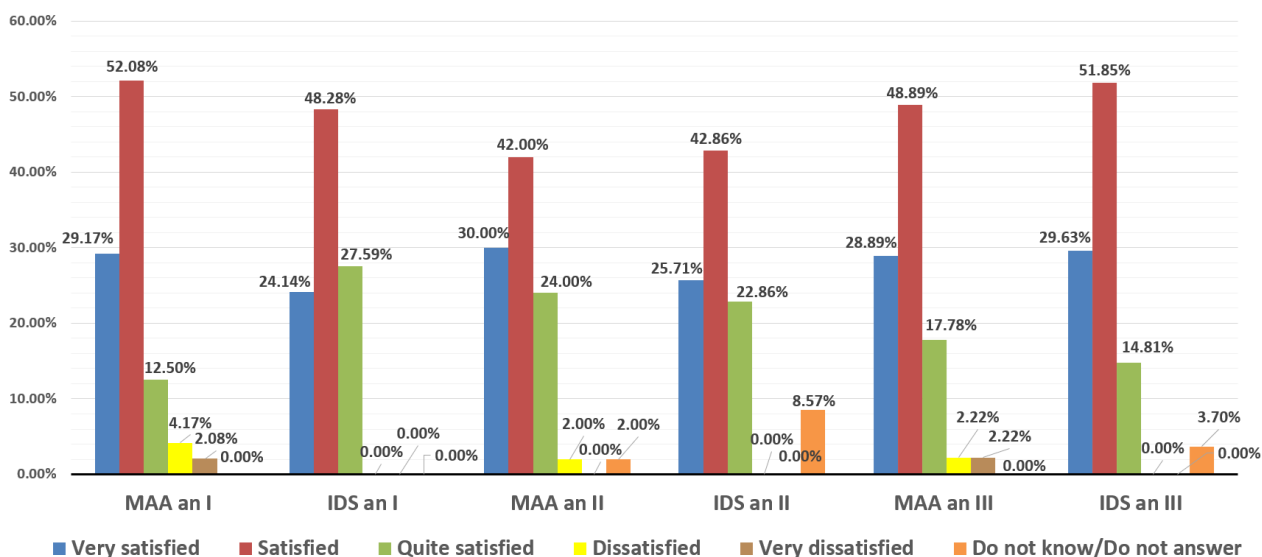


Figure 13. Comparative study of the undergraduate students' satisfaction of using the information resources offered by the university

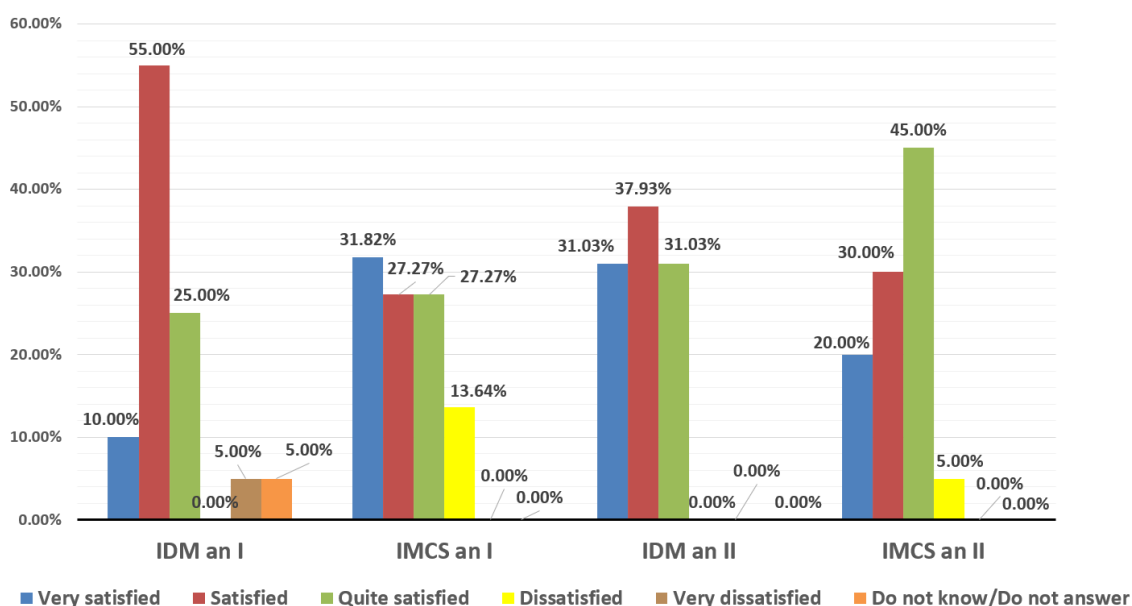


Figure 14. Comparative study of the Master's students' satisfaction of using the information resources offered by the university

What difficulties do you encounter in using the information resources offered at the university?

The goal of question number 17, *What difficulties do you encounter in using the information resources offered at the university?*, was to identify the problems arising in using the information and documentation resources offered at the university.

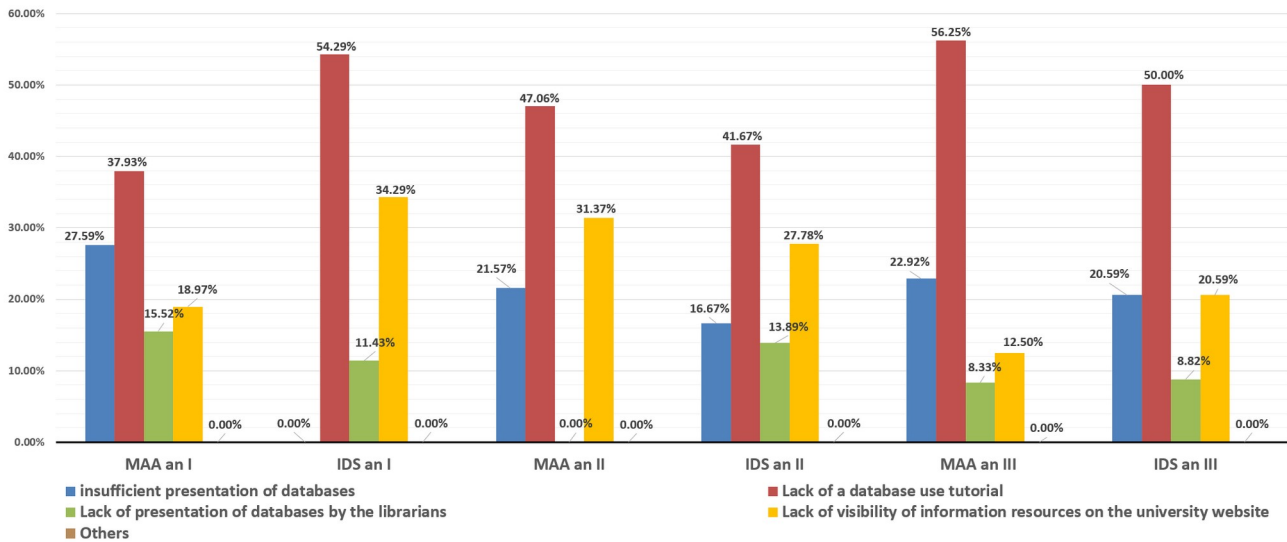


Figure 15. Comparative study of the difficulties encountered by undergraduate students in using information resources

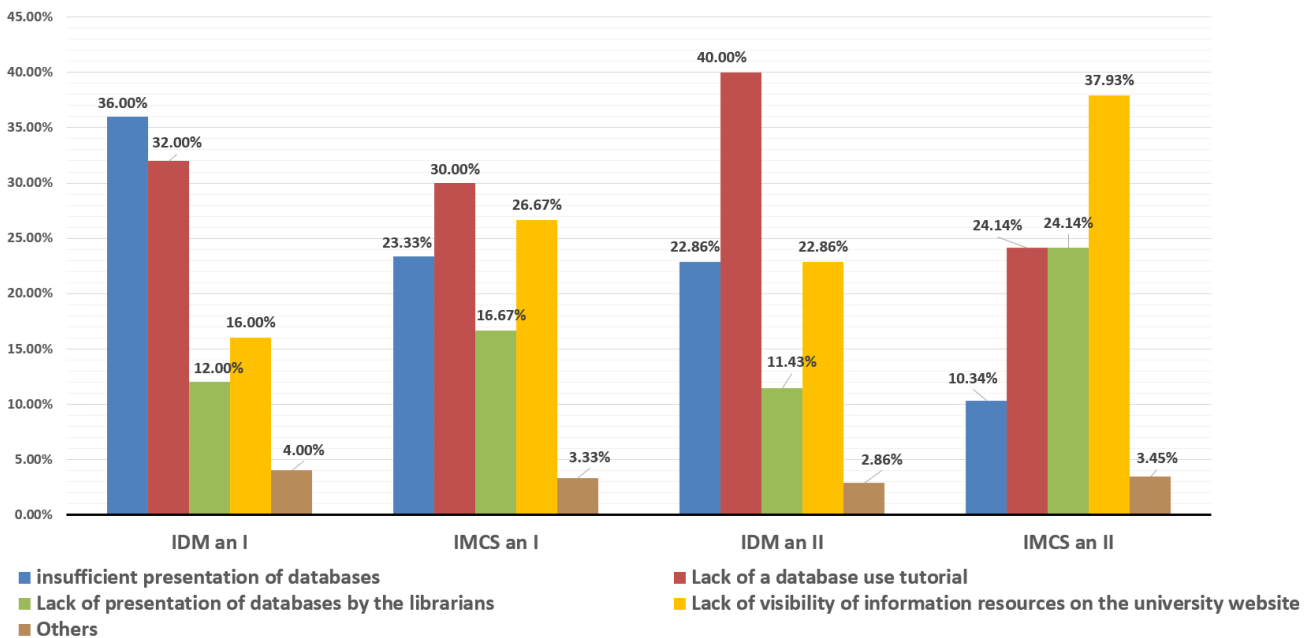


Figure 16. Comparative study of the difficulties encountered by Master's students in using information resources

Do you think an introductory course in the technique of information and documentation is necessary?

The goal of question number 18, *Do you think an introductory course in the technique of information and documentation is necessary?*, was to find out the students' opinion regarding the introduction of a practical course or seminar allowing them to acquire the theoretical knowledge and practical skills of database use.

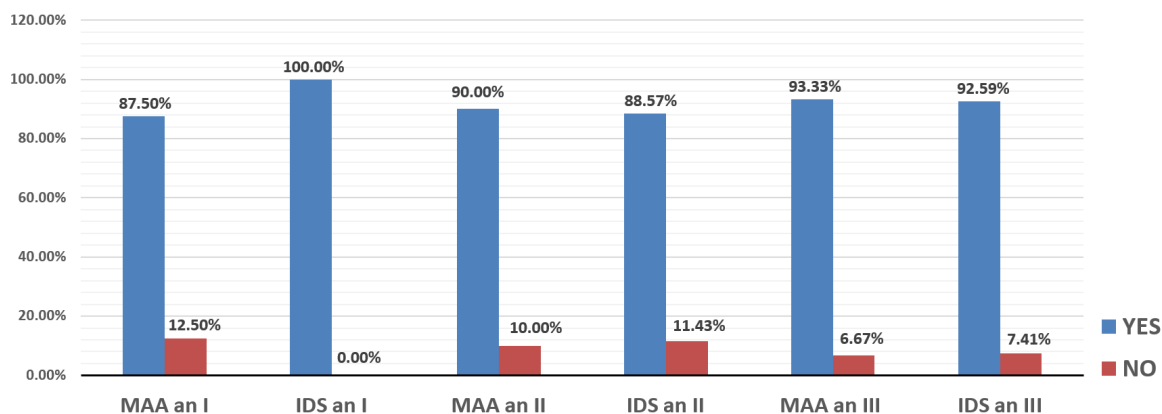


Figure 17. Comparative study on the opportunity of starting a course in information and documentation technology for undergraduate students

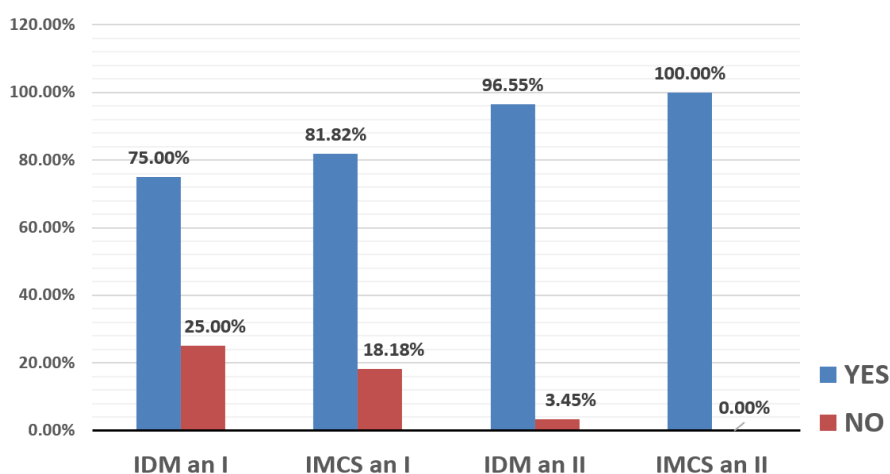


Figure 18. Comparative study on the opportunity of starting a course in information and documentation technology for Master's students

To what extent do you think the documentation and research skills acquired in college will be useful to you in your future professional activities?

The goal of question number 19, *To what extent do you think the documentation and research skills acquired in college will be useful to you in your future professional activities?*, was to assess the theoretical knowledge and practical research and documentation skills accumulated in college as a professional acquisition that could be used throughout life.

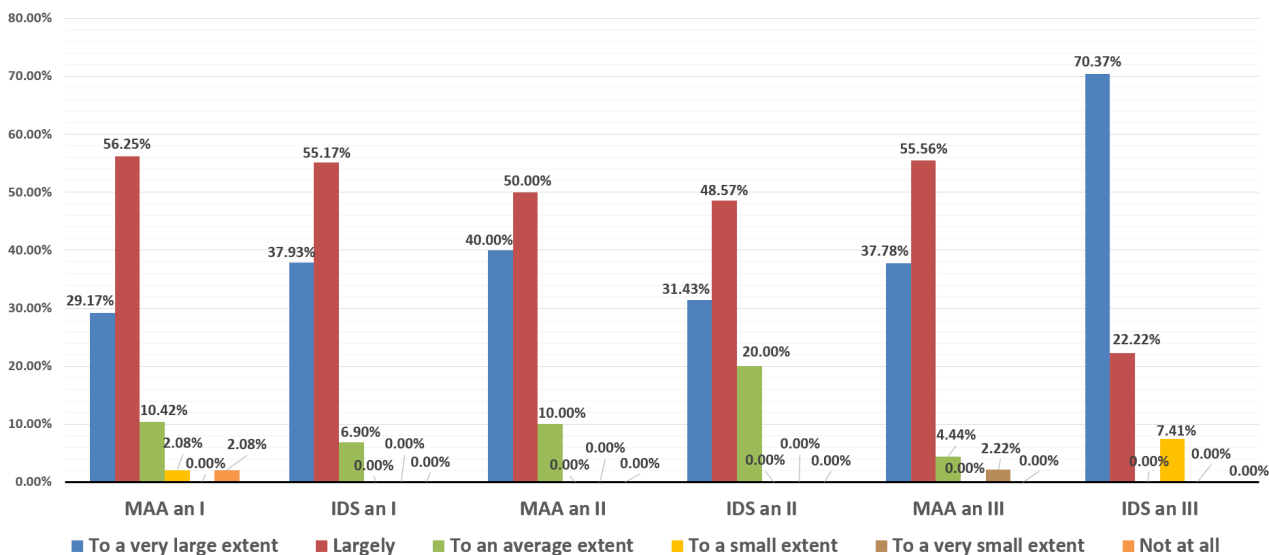


Figure 19. Comparative study on the assessments of undergraduate students related to the satisfaction of acquiring documentation and research skills for future professional activities

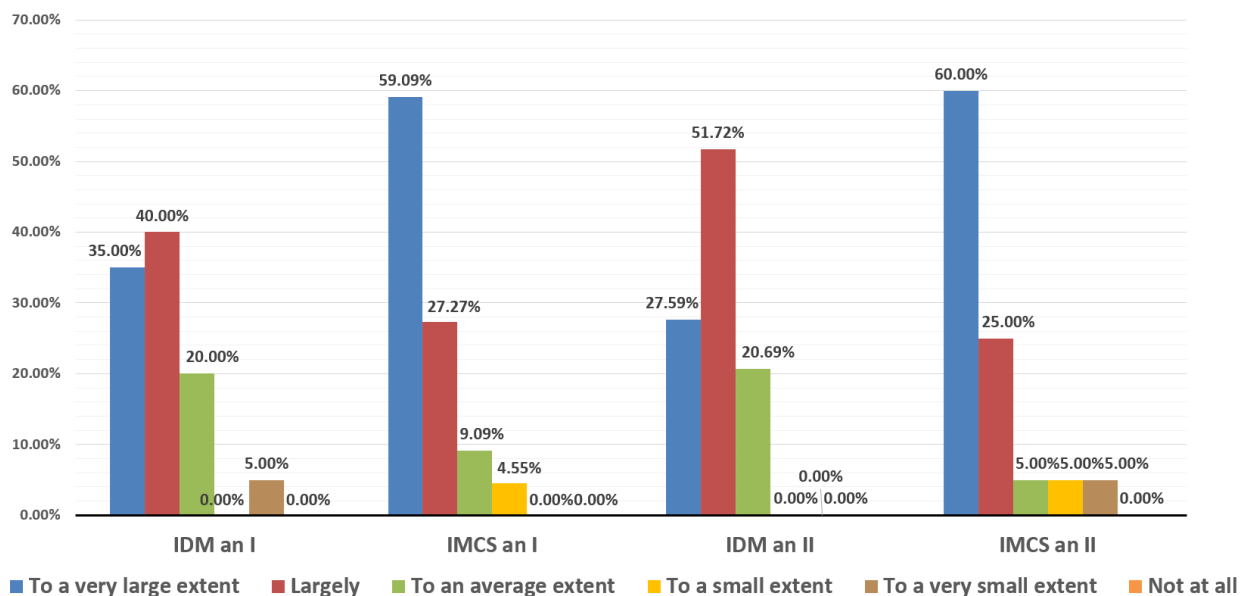


Figure 20. Comparative study on the assessments of Master's students related to the satisfaction of acquiring documentation and research skills for future professional activities

Do you consider that the results obtained in college objectively reflect your effort to assimilate knowledge and acquire specific skills?

The goal of question number 20, *Do you consider that the results obtained in college objectively reflect your effort to assimilate knowledge and acquire specific skills?*, was to assess the degree of self-evaluation of the results obtained in college in accordance with the specific information and documentation skills.

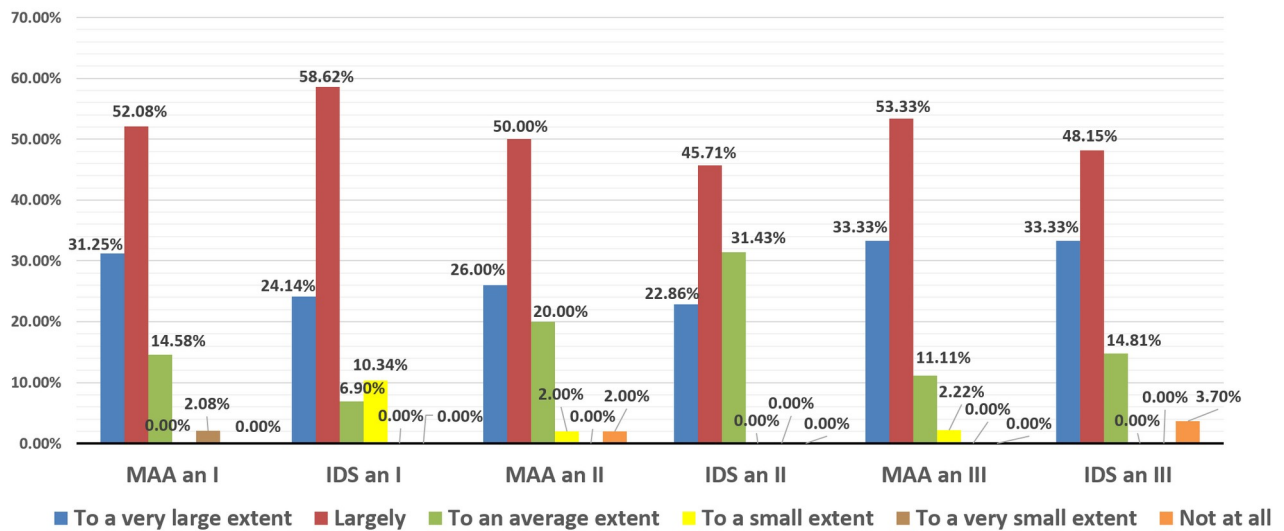


Figure 21. Comparative study on the relationship between the results obtained by undergraduate students in college and the skills in information and documentation acquired

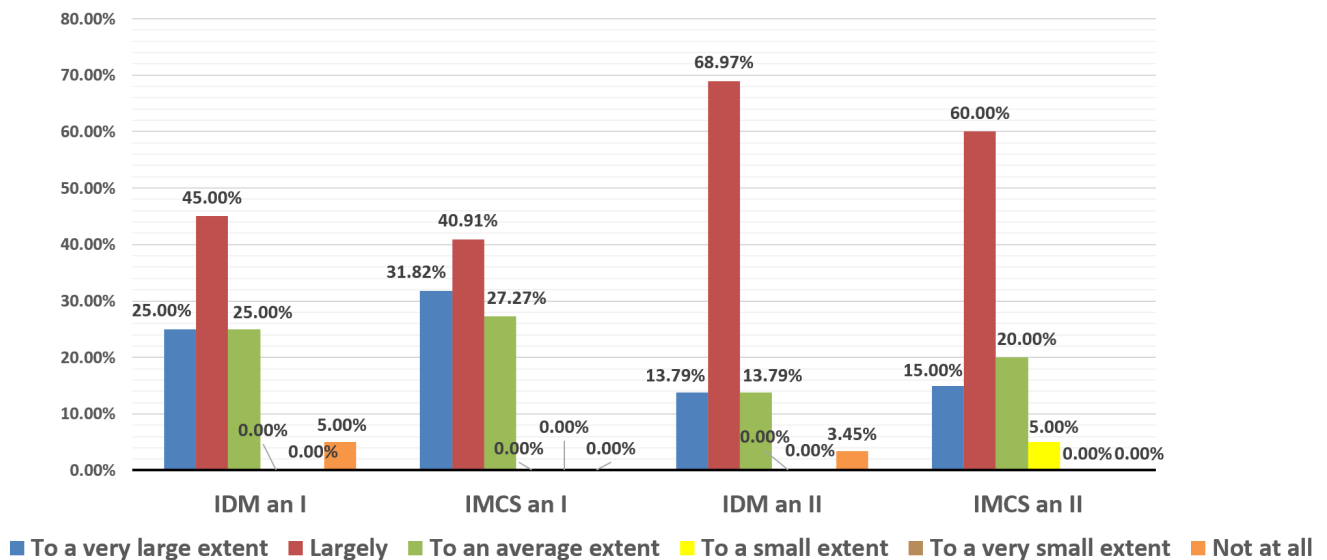


Figure 22. Comparative study on the relationship between the results obtained by master's level students in college and the acquired information and documentation skills

Finally, if you wish, you can support some of your answers. Also, please make suggestions that could contribute to improving access to information.

In point no. 21 of the questionnaire, students were given the opportunity to make suggestions regarding information and documentation in the university environment and to support some of their answers with arguments.

3. Evaluation and Conclusions of Practical Research

College students understand that learning and being able to document quickly and accurately are essential skills both for their individual progress and, later, indirectly, for progress in community service.

The ever-increasing role of information, regardless of the support it is provided on, has generated increased expectations among undergraduate and graduate students, regarding the effectiveness and quality of information and documentation resources, as well as the suitability of information products to their specific needs.

Given the accuracy of the data collection, we believe that the responses of the surveyed students should be taken seriously.

The synthesis of the data obtained by applying the questionnaire allows the following conclusions regarding the third category of questions:

- The data presented show that more than half of students in each year and level of studies use digital resources “daily,” while printed resources are used “weekly;”
- Students access the Internet from “anywhere” and spend many hours a day online, being prone to documenting themselves on the Internet for making reports and scientific papers, etc.; the Internet is the main source of information for them; the impact of the Internet can be appreciated as positive due to the quick access from anywhere to digital information resources in any field;
- Students are aware of the existence of databases “to an average extent;” the lack of information about connection and search, as well as the lack of signalling these resources by teachers, contribute to their insufficient use;
- Most undergraduate and Master’s students selected the option “from the teachers” when asked where they found out about the existence of databases;
- Databases are largely accessed “weekly” by both undergraduate and Master’s students; this is explainable considering the necessity or obligation to make reports in the field of their specialization;
- Students highlighted problems in using databases, such as: they do not know how to create an account or do searches, especially for students at the IMCS Master’s level I and II year, namely website blocking, access problems, Internet operation, access limitation, interface, access speed, filtering and searching, etc.

From the fourth category of questions, we note that:

- Most students, both undergraduate and Master’s, are satisfied with the use of the information and documentation resources offered at the university;
- Students encounter difficulties in using information resources, mainly because of the “absence of an instructional tutorial;” many students appreciate that going through a tutorial on using databases would improve their quality of information and documentation;
- Most students consider it particularly important to start a course in information and documentation techniques;
- Students appreciated “to a great extent” the acquisition of information, documentation, and research skills in college as useful in their future professional activities;

- Students also consider that the results obtained in college reflect “to a great extent” the effort made to assimilate knowledge and to acquire specific skills.

Their answers and suggestions should be considered in improving access to information resources at the University of Bucharest. Below are some of the most suggestive answers:

- “Access to all databases for students in Letters, Communication, etc.,”
- “Introduction of an optional training course in the use of databases;”
- “More information about databases, databases presentation to be made in several disciplines, a more interactive website;”
- “Some tutorials to explain much better how to use databases;”
- “Information should be transmitted to the students primarily by the specialized staff of the College (librarians);”
- “Using the Internet during the courses;”
- “More teachers’ emphasis on databases;”
- “Using the Internet and computers during classes for educational and informative purposes;”
- “Finding out information from a teacher or from the secretariat;”
- etc.

To note that the students are interested in the use of the Internet and databases in the teaching-learning activity, both by the teachers in the course and by them in practical activities. The main impediment in successfully accessing and using digital resources, including databases, is insufficient theoretical knowledge and limited access and use skills. It is not by chance that the students, in an overwhelming percentage, pleaded for the introduction of a specialized discipline in finding information on specialized platforms.

Notes

[1] The present research is part of the doctoral research “Information and documentation resources in university education”, publicly supported on September 9, 2022 at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Letters. We chose to separate and present this research study in two parts to comply with the page requirements of this publication and because we felt that a synthesis of the research would affect the full understanding of the results.

[2] The research results consider the period up to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and highlight how both traditional and digital resources are used.

[3] Figure taken from the annual research report and confirmed by the secretariat of the Faculty of Letters.

[4] More information on the purpose, objectives and methodology of the research is presented in the first part of the study published in RRBSI, vol. 19.

[5] The presentation and interpretation of the research results for the first two categories of responses were made in the first part of this study. In the second part, we present the results from the last two categories of questions.

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