

Enhancing the quality of reference services through insights of international students at a medical university library in Taiwan

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Object

In response to the internationalization of higher education, TMU has been actively recruiting international students in recent years, and the number of international students has reached 391 in 2022 academic year, accounting for 6.5% of students. The Library's English language services are essential for international students to study and adapt to the new environment. This study analyzes the types of questions of international students by referring to the consultation records and conducted a questionnaire to understand their ways to seek answers and suggestions for the reference questions, so as to optimize the provision of relevant information services in the future.

Results

At the end, 75 responses were received, resulting 19.2% response rate. The survey findings indicated that international students primarily engage in writing papers (71.8%) and reading materials (70.4%) within the libraries. When utilizing e-resources, the most prevalent issues encountered is the inability to get needed article full-text (47.6%). Surprisingly, only 50.7% of them sought assistance from library staff, with others attributing their hesitation to consider the issues as minor (46.8%) or capable of self-resolution (43.7%), leading them not to engage with library staff.

Method

This study adopted the research methods of content analysis and questionnaire survey. We first analyzed questions asked by international students in our libraries' reference consultation forms in the past 6 academic years (2017.8-2022.7). According to the analysis of the consultation records of international students, 85.5% of them consulted at the reference service desk, and the most common questions were EndNote, printing devices and Turnitin. We then formulated an online questionnaire, which was emailed to all TMU international students in June 2023. The questionnaire includes background information (country, college, degree, seniority), frequency of use of library space / purpose and issues encountered when using the libraries / whether assistance was sought, frequency of use of e-resources / issues encountered when using e-resources the / whether assistance was sought, and services that need to be enhanced by the libraries (website, staff, signage, database training sessions, promotion activities, etc.)

Conclusions

The results of the study showed that the channels for international students to try to solve problems were librarians, classmates and library websites (Figure 1), and they also believed that the library should provide more English library instruction and e-resource training sessions, English promotion activities and clearer information for various services on website, so as to effectively reduce the barriers for them to use library resources(Figure 2). In the future, more lecture, training sessions and events will be delivered in English, service descriptions on the website will be optimized, reference consultation channels will also be promoted, so that international students can use the library services more conveniently.

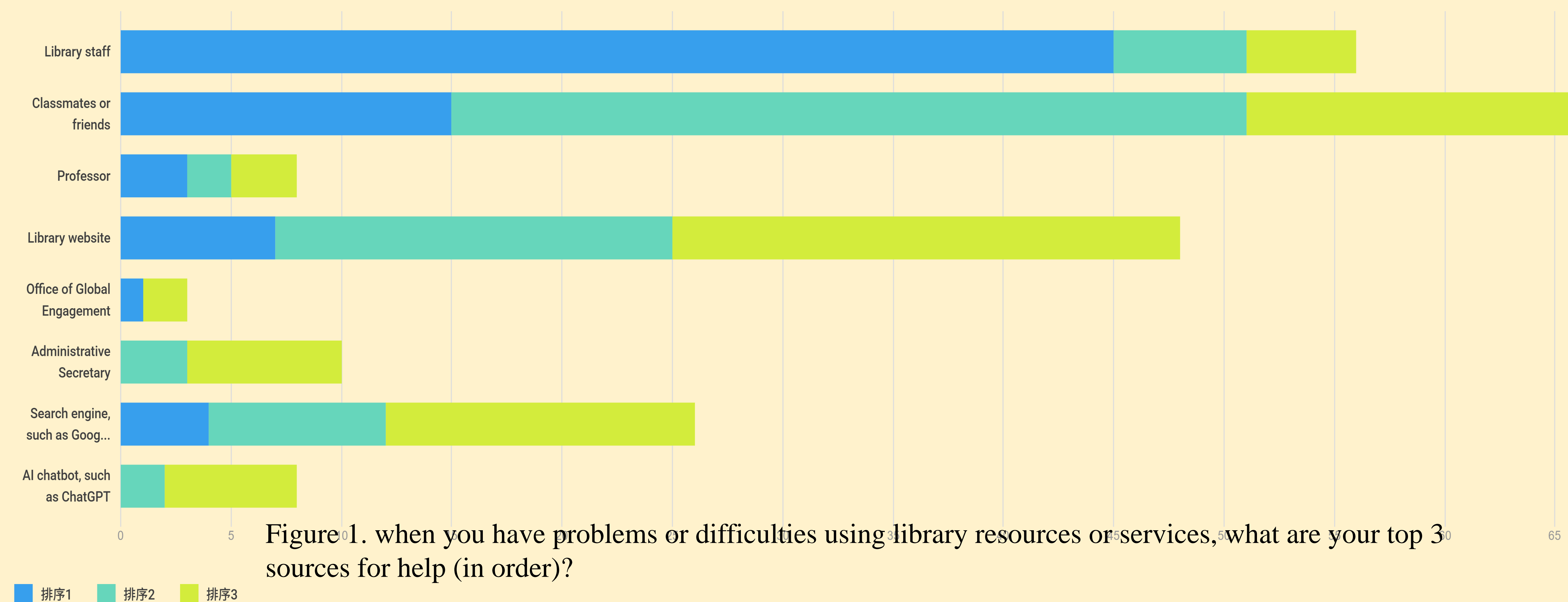


Figure 1. when you have problems or difficulties using library resources or services, what are your top 3 sources for help (in order)?

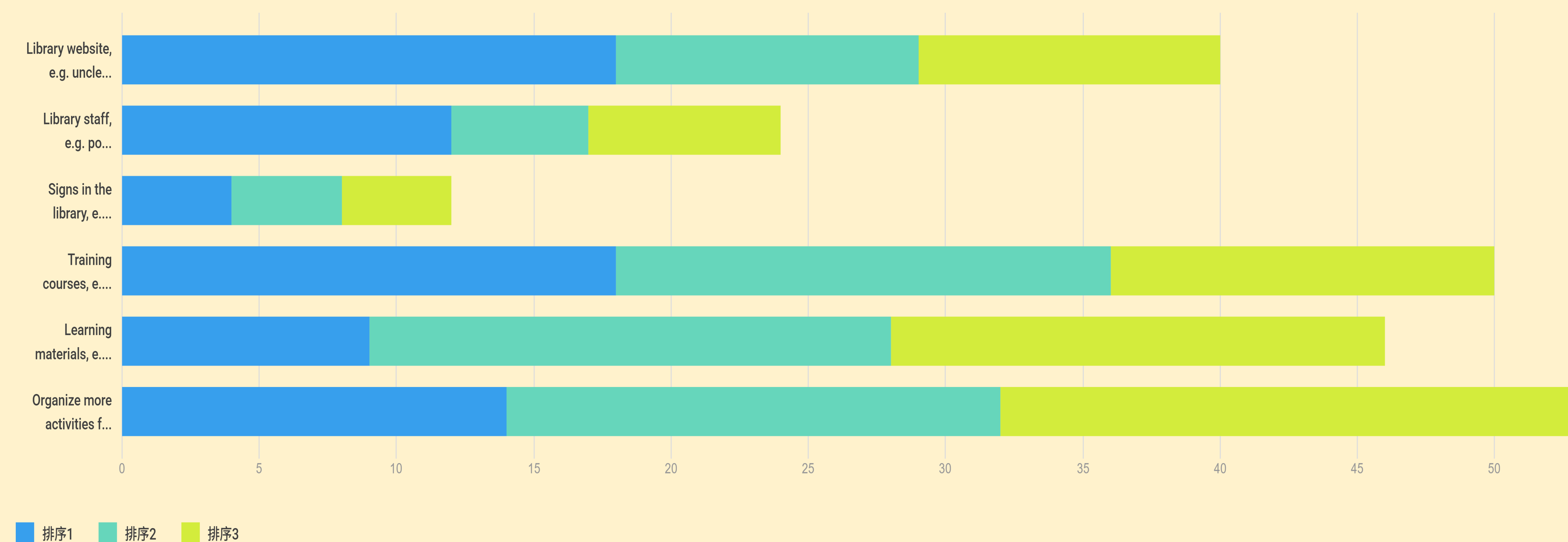


Figure 2. Which three items (in order) do you think the library should prioritize to reduce or solve the problems encountered by international students?