

Exploring First Year Undergraduate Students' Information Literacy Skills: Experience at the Faculty of Management, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

How information literate is the new comers to the Faculty of Management and what information literacy skills do they bring when they come to university? For university libraries, understanding students' prior knowledge provides a foundation on which to introduce appropriate learning activities and design information skills development programmes for them. This survey was conducted to measure and analyze the entry-level information literacy skills of first year Management students. The data was gathered during the first week of first semester and all the students who entered the Faculty of Management, University of Peardeniya, Sri Lanka in 2017 were surveyed. This paper presents the results of the survey which can be used when planning information literacy programs for undergraduates.

Keywords: Information Literacy, New Entrants, Sri Lanka, Undergraduates

1. Introduction

How information literate are the first year students, and what information literacy skills do they bring to university? In the university environment, information literacy is a fundamental capability supporting learning and needs to be developed in the first year of study. Information Literacy (IL) and learning are interconnected. In general, awareness of how to find and how to use information are called IL (Lupton, 2008).

Shapiro and Hughes (1996) defined information literacy as "A new liberal art that extends from knowing how to use computers and access information to critical reflection on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure and its social, cultural, and philosophical context and impact". Information literacy is becoming an important component of education at school and university levels (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2007). Because of the complexity of the information environment, individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices in their academic studies, in the workplace, and in their personal lives. Therefore, to be information literate individual is of importance in today's information driven

society. Focus should be placed on developing students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills because it is not just finding information that is important, but what they intend doing with it.

Most incoming undergraduate students do not possess adequate information skills to complete course work that university education requires. Lack of exposure to school and public libraries and limited access to resources are the main reasons for majority of students entering the university lacking even the basic library and information skills. Students without these crucial skills will find it difficult to cope successfully with their academic courses or research assignments. Assessment of information literacy level of undergraduate students, academics in collaboration with university librarians can develop integrated information literacy initiatives to ensure that students graduate with the required information skills and proficiencies. Knowledge of skill levels of the incoming students enables librarians to adopt appropriate strategies for developing information literacy skills.

This paper examines the information literacy skills of first year Management students in the University of Peradeniya (UOP).

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2. Review of Related Literature

Although information literacy has been researched and practiced in many countries, there have only been a few studies of information literacy in Sri Lanka.

Students come to university with “a range of prior knowledge, skills, beliefs and concepts that significantly influence what they notice about the environment and how they organize and interpret it” (Bransford, 2000). Most academic librarians are of the view that information skills of incoming first year students are limited in terms of expected capabilities for university research (Ellis & Salisbury, 2004; Hufford, 2010; Russell, 2009).

Academic librarians can identify skill gaps based on their experience of working with first year students. Some of the areas identified include understanding scholarly information types and finding journal articles (Bernath & Jenkin, 2006; Hartmann, 2001), developing sophisticated search strategies, and evaluating and critically thinking about information retrieved (Crawford & Irving, 2007). Guise and others (2007) examined research skills of new entrants to the university and concluded that they were unprepared to meet the needs of first year research requirements. Likewise, Russell (2009) identifies significant gaps in “information competencies that students demonstrate during high school to university transition”. For example, they lack an understanding of what constitutes quality scholarly information; they have difficulty evaluating information retrieved, and when faced with an array of interfaces and search methods, they prefer more familiar methods like Google. Rowland (2008) also identified Google as ingrained “coping behaviour” for university students that is preferred, because it is familiar, simple, and obviates the need to develop sophisticated search strategies.

If information skills are the building blocks that make information literacy possible (Bruce, 2008), then, information literacy needs should be developed among new students to enable them to engage with scholarly information and research. First year students are like “immigrants to a new country” (Orme, 2008), and they need to understand the central role that scholarly information plays in the academic community.

Many studies indicate that first year students are not comfortable with more complex Boolean or advanced searches and are unclear about how to use these when conducting a search. However, such complex skills may

not generally be required in first year. (Smith & Hepworth, 2007) Schein and others (2012) conducted a study with high school students and first year college freshmen and they found that students could not distinguish between a journal and a book when given a citation, identify keywords in a thesis, or distinguish between a popular magazine and scholarly journal. Alades and others (2014) conducted a study on library use characteristics of undergraduates in Nigeria University of Science and Technology. One of the objectives of the study was to find out the relationship between the school and university library use of undergraduates and they concluded that the experience of school library use and library instruction programs positively influence university library use. Ukpebor and Emojorho (2012) found that students are not taught information literacy skills from secondary schools and they have little knowledge about it and their understanding of search strategies is inadequate.

In the Sri Lankan context, only a few studies on university new entrant's information literacy skills have been reported. Mashroofa (2012) conducted a study of new comers in three Sri Lankan universities (Jaffna, Eastern and South Eastern) to examine the students' characteristics and information seeking behavior and their needs and wants and she recommended that the information literacy programs should be offered as a course module. Kumara (2014) conducted a study to investigate the level of using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by university new comers at the University of Moratuwa of Sri Lanka. The results revealed that there was a trend towards a higher ICT usage by university freshmen as digital natives.

3. Methodology

Questionnaire was the main instrument used to gather data for the study and it was distributed among new entrants (n=151) to the Faculty of Management, University of Peradeniya in the first week of February 2017. The questionnaire was close-ended, and it was divided into two (2) sections; section A on Demographic data, and section B on previous library use and information sources used by the new entrants. 124 students responded to the survey (82% response rate) of which 53% were female while 47% were male.

The data were analyzed using SPSS software package version 17.0.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Learning Information Literacy from Secondary School

The new entrants were asked to indicate whether they have attended any information literacy program conducted in the secondary school; 23 (18.5%) of them responded yes and the majority of 101(81.5%) had not attended any information literacy program at the secondary school.

The respondents were asked whether school teachers suggested additional reading to become familiar with a subject, other than the notes they gave in classroom and 66 (53%) of the respondents said 'yes' and 58(47%) said 'no'.

In response to a question on whether they were taught how to use the library and Internet, 58% of students mentioned that their teachers encouraged use of library and Internet.

4.2 Use of Computers

Because computer literacy or digital literacy is part of being information literate, it was decided to get information on how experienced incoming Management students are with the use of computers.

More than half of all respondents had used computers before coming to the university and 56(45.2%) had not used computers. 60% of the students had computers at home (Table 1). More than half the new entrants had accessed World Wide Web and used E-mail (Table 2) before entering the university.

Table 1. Places of accessing computers (multiple choices allowed)

Sl. No.	Place of access	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Home computer	42	61.8
2.	School IT center	31	45.6
3.	School library	21	30.9
4.	Cyber café	15	22.0
5.	Friend's house	11	16.2
6.	Public library	10	14.7
7.	Other place	14	20.6

Table 2. Use of Internet

Internet use	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Email	65	52.4	59	47.6
WWW	72	58.0	52	42.0

4.3 Access to School Libraries

Also 78% of students had used the school library before entering the university. More than half the students, however, had not attended any library skill development programme while in school (Table 3).

Table 3. Library skill development course attended

Sl. No.	IL course attended	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Primary school conducted	11	8.8
2.	Secondary school conducted	23	18.5
3.	Teacher librarian conducted	09	7.3
4.	Teachers conducted	06	4.8
5.	IL experts conducted	10	8.0
6.	Others conducted	06	4.8
7.	Not attended any	64	51.7
	Total	124	100

4.4 Use of School Library Facilities

The library facilities used by the students before entering the university are shown in the Figure 1. Clearly, most used the school library just to borrow books.

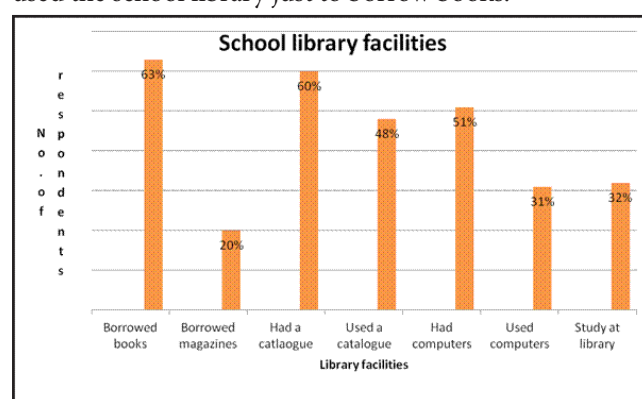


Figure 1. Use of school library facilities.

4.5 Sources of Information Use

Students were asked whether they felt that they needed to read books other than the notes given by the teachers

in the school and interestingly 98% of students felt that they needed to. The other information sources used by students are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Sources of information used (multiple options allowed)

Sl. No.	Sources	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Tuition class provided all needed materials	108	87
2.	Borrowed from my friends/relatives	86	69
3.	Used online materials	83	67
4.	Asked from knowledgeable people	77	62
5.	Used Wikipedia	73	59
6.	Purchased from bookshops	34	34
7.	Used public library	27	22
8.	Used some other library	10	08
N=124			

4.6 Public Library Use

Only about one third of all new entrants were members of a public library. Most of them did not see the need to become a member of any public library. A third indicated that there was no public library in their community (Table 5).

Table 5. Reasons for not being a public library member

Sl. No.	Reason	Frequency	Percentage
1.	No public library	17	20.7
2.	Library is too far	11	13.4
3.	No need to become member	48	58.5
4.	Do not know	05	6.1
5.	Other	01	1.2
	Total	82	100

Table 7. Experience with library catalogue

Sl. No.	Experience	Yes		No	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Used card catalogue	54	43.5	70	56.5
2.	Used online catalogue	11	8.8	113	91.2
3.	Locate items in catalogue	09	7.2	115	92.8
4.	Can find the given book in library	05	4.0	119	96.0

4.6.1 Resources Used at Public Library

The respondents who used the public library were asked to indicate the resources they used in the public library and the results are presented in Table 6. Public libraries are still seen primarily as a facility to read fiction, magazines and newspapers.

Table 6. Public library resources used (multiple responses allowed)

Sl. No.	Resources	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Fiction	32	76.1
2.	Non- fiction	27	64.3
3.	Reference sources	24	57.1
4.	Magazines	21	50.0
5.	Newspapers	17	40.5
6.	Audio visual Material (Video/CD etc.)	03	7.1
7.	Internet	02	4.7
N=42			

4.7 Experience with Library Catalogues

In order to examine prior experience with library catalogues, four questions were asked in the questionnaire namely how often have you used a card catalogue, how often have you used an on-line catalogue, are you able to locate items found in the catalogue in the library and if given a specific call or shelf number, will you be able to find it in the library. The results for the questions are listed in Table 7.

The results established that majority of students have not used a card catalogue (56.5%) or an online catalogue (91.2%) before entering the university.

4.8 Reading Habits

A sizeable proportion of students entering the university (46%) mentioned that they were not in the habit of reading regularly. The reasons indicated are tabulated below (Table 8).

Table 8. Reasons for not reading (multiple options allowed)

Sl. No.	Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
1.	No time for reading	45	36.3
2.	No access to reading materials	24	19.4
3.	Not interested in reading	21	16.9
4.	No need seen for reading	12	9.7
5.	Busy with school curriculum	11	8.9
6.	No reason	05	4.0
7.	No response	06	4.8
	Total	124	100

4.9 Reading Materials Used

All respondents were asked to indicate the type of materials they have read during their school time and the results are reflected in Table 9.

Table 9. Type of material read (multiple options allowed)

Sl. No.	Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Text books	79	63.7
2.	Prescribed reading materials	62	50.0
3.	Newspaper	61	49.2
4.	Fiction	52	41.9
5.	Non fiction	48	38.7
6.	Magazines	32	25.8
7.	Other	16	12.9
N=124			

Clearly, the students' reading is largely confined to textbooks and prescribed reading material.

5. Conclusion

The new entrants to the Faculty of Management have varied levels of information literacy skills and do not possess adequate library and information skills required for academic success in the university. Even though most of them mentioned they did not attend any information

literacy program conducted at the secondary school, more than half of them were instructed by the school teachers to read books in order to become familiar with a subject, other than the notes given by them. Further it is revealed that more than half of the students claimed that their teachers encourage using the library and the Internet for information retrieval which gives some basic knowledge on information literacy. Of the respondents, more than half of them had access to computers prior to joining the university and they are familiar with searching the World Wide Web and send / receive e-mails.

The results revealed that just about a third of respondents used their school library but most of them did not attend any information or library skill development program before entering to the university. Their use of school library was largely limited to borrowing books. Most students also did not have any prior experience of using other kinds of libraries, e.g. public libraries. Most students had not used either card catalogue (56.5%) or online catalogue (91.2%) and 93% of them felt they will not be able to locate the items found in the catalogue in the library and 96% mentioned they will not be able to find the items given a specific call or shelf number.

6. Recommendations

While the present study is limited to new entrants to a particular university, it is most likely that the situation will not be very different in other universities or with students in other disciplines. This clearly suggests the importance of well designed information literacy programmes for new entrants to universities. Integrated information literacy programs create many positive outcomes for students and faculty, and many academic institutions are working to integrate information literacy competencies into their curricula. Successful initiatives lead to benefits such as better-developed research assignments and better use of the Library's collection (Raspa & Ward, 2000; Rockman, 2003).

It is recommended that a comprehensive IL course for the new entrants be introduced and after completing IL course in their first year of study, students need other information literacy initiatives during the rest of their study years to sharpen the skills. Academics should integrate information literary programs into their curricula. Collaboration between academics and university librarians is necessary to ensure effective

learning and the implementation of information literacy competencies and proficiencies, critical thinking and lifelong learning.

It is also recommended that there should be a link programme between secondary and tertiary educational institutions to develop and improve information skills of the new entrants in the transition period which is required for success in the university environment.

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