

F-08: Critical evaluation of the user friendliness of CDS/ISIS and INMAGIC

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The User Friendliness of search interfaces of 2 Text Retrieval Packages (TXT) used in libraries in Sri Lanka: Micro CDS/ISIS (Version 3.0) and INMAGIC (Version 7.1), were studied.

The sampling method used was Stratified Random Sampling. The user community was divided into 3 categories: Experts, Intermediates and Novices, depending on their competency level of computer literacy. Different percentages were used in selection of the sample, according to the strata of user community, to obtain an equal number of representations: Experts-18%, Intermediates-9%, Novices-4.5%.

The methodology for the study of the search interfaces was, end-user behaviour by direct observation using True Comparison Group method.

Performance of each user group at every stage of the search module was evaluated, during the first search session, in terms of user friendly features offered by each search interface. Performance of the model users was evaluated using measures of search in progress, and outcome.

45 attributes were checked against each package. The friendliness was measured on the weight obtained for clearness of each attribute (Certainty) and for intermediary help used (Uncertainty) in searching the model database. The performers were given 3 pre-checked searches and 9 search attempts.

Search results were also evaluated according to the number of hits, false drop levels and zero number of hits, within the range of the search tries allowed. In subject searches, CDS/ISIS obtained the higher number of relevant hits, but in author and title searches its false drop levels was higher than INMAGIC. INMAGIC had a higher number of false drop levels and zero number of hits, mainly due to syntax errors.

It was observed that the user friendly features inherent in a search module had a significant effect on user behaviour, regardless of the competency level of the user. But competency of the user affected the performance when the search interface did not provide systematic help to the user, in the form of, online tutorial, online help, language used and help/error messages.

In conclusion, INMAGIC was easy-to-learn but not very easy-to-use. CDS/ISIS was neither easy-to-use nor easy-to-learn. Both search interfaces were not user friendly.