

INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION, AN IMPORTANT TOOL TO EDUCATE THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY USERS

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Rezumat: În prezent, societatea are de a face din ce în ce mai mult cu un mediu digital, al cărui impact poate fi observat în toate sectoarele vieții sociale și economice și care a influențat de asemenea și pregătirea universitară. Astfel, este necesar să se introducă în procesul de formare, indiferent de domeniu, un curs de alfabetizare în domeniul informării și documentării pentru dezvoltarea cunoștințelor teoretice și a aptitudinilor practice referitoare la fabricarea, prelucrarea și comunicarea informației. Biblioteca universitară joacă un rol important în domeniul cercetării științifice, oferind sprijin educațional pentru universități în atingerea obiectivelor acestora. Instruirea privind alfabetizarea în domeniul informării trebuie să fie unul dintre cursurile oferite de către bibliotecile universitare al căror scop este acela de a-și educa utilizatorii să facă față unei societăți bazate pe cunoaștere. În această lucrare am încercat să demonstrăm importanța alfabetizării în domeniul informării și documentării ca un instrument important în informarea utilizatorilor bibliotecii universitare despre colecțiile sale, servicii și alte activități, cu scopul de a-i stimula să folosească biblioteca pentru a-și consolida și dezvolta procesele de învățare și cercetare științifică. De asemenea, bazându-ne pe chestionarele completate de studenți de la Universitatea Valahia din Târgoviște am încercat să obținem un feedback privind așteptările lor referitoare la utilizarea bazelor de date online.

Cuvinte cheie: alfabetizarea în domeniul informării, bibliotecă universitară, baze de date online, societatea cunoașterii.

Abstract: Currently, the society faces increasingly more and more with a digital environment, whose impact is observed on all sectors of social and economic life, influenced also the university training, too. Thus, it is required to introduce in training, whatever field, an information literacy course to develop theoretical knowledge and practical skills concerning the construction, processing and communication of information. The university library plays an important role in the field of scientific research providing educational support for universities in achieving their objectives. Information literacy instruction must be one of the courses offered by the university libraries that aim to educate their users on how to become literate to cope with knowledge-based society. In this paper we try to demonstrate the importance of information literacy instruction, as an important tool to inform academic library users about its collections, services and other activities, in order to stimulate them to use the library for supporting and developing their learning and scientific research processes. Also, based on questionnaires completed by students from Valahia University of Targoviste we try to obtain a feedback from them regarding their expectations concerning the utilization of the on line databases.

Keywords: information literacy; academic library; on line databases; knowledge society.

1. Introduction

Due to the diversification of information technologies, to the speed with which are produced changes in the Internet search tools and to the plurality of ways to access information, the specific users in higher education are faced with a growing production of information. To cope with current challenges, they must have certain specific skills that require training in the information literacy, because the new technologies create opportunities for learners but they must be approached critically and used correctly. According to one of the many definitions given to the “information literacy” concept, we think that the following one is most covering: to be able “to identify, through whatever channel or medium, information well fitted to information needs, leading to wise and ethical use of information in society.”[1]

Information literacy became a necessary requirement for academic students in the knowledge society and academic libraries are able to cultivate them in this area. In this context librarians must be part of this process to inform and empower learning with technology that enables users to access information in its many forms and formats—real and virtual—and use it responsibly. As the availability of online databases grew and users need special training, librarians become even more concerned about training students in using libraries and information and a report of

the American Library Association provides an excellent rationale for academic librarians to integrate information literacy programs into the curriculum.

In this situation, academic libraries have a crucial role in forming an information culture to their users so they have to be able to know the library offer, to be familiar with its services, to learn how to access information, to know how to use various sources of information. To obtain feedback from users of Valahia University of Targoviste Library, in terms of accessing online databases, a service increasingly sought and appreciated, we have initiated a research among them, based on questionnaires. These were distributed to a sample of 237 students, Ph. D. students and master students. The purpose of this study was mainly to find out which on line databases are accessed by specific users of the library, in the context in which the university must take a conclusive decision about purchasing them. Also, this research provides a basis for further investigations into the aspects of service which students consider being important in their overall experience, and the changes that libraries must need to make to meet expectations of its users.

In this paper we try to demonstrate the importance of information literacy instruction, as an important tool to inform academic library users about its collections, services and other activities, in order to stimulate them to use the library for supporting and developing their learning and scientific research processes.

2. The Role of the Academic Libraries in Information Literacy Instruction - a Romanian Perspective

The academic libraries plays an important and active role in the field of scientific research as a starting step and is one of the basic elements that support universities in achieving their objectives related to scientific research and quality management. So, information literacy instruction must be one of the courses offered by the university library that aims to educate its users how to become information independent. The academic library must provide courses related instruction, tutorials and other methods to support their users' development of information literacy skills.

Nowadays it is known that the way in which a library can be instructive is larger than the traditional understanding [2]. Many information literacy courses have to encourage the collaboration between faculty (department) and the academic library with the goal of helping users to develop these skills, to enable them to recognize various information sources and to use information in a right and suitable way.

The ability to learn how to learn is a key characteristic of those who are information literate: "know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them." [3] Talking about what kind of skills must provide an information literacy course for our students the most specialists said: critical thinking skills, problem solving, decision making. All three of these phrases refer to cognitive skills that are necessary to create new knowledge and to learn how to learn, a characteristic key of those who are information literate. But teachers cannot prepare their students to be information literate unless they themselves understand how to find and use information because they are to use information so that others can learn from them. The information-literate teacher will also be able to select and use resources most appropriate to multiple intelligences and learning styles [4] and their students have to get a set of abilities allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge to practical work [5]:

- identify their information needs;
- plan research strategies based on the research question;
- know and locate all kind of library resources, not only print one but also electronic ones;
- select the most adequate resources for their research needs;
- distinguish among library catalogs, on line databases and World Wide Web: to make the

difference between an academic on line database and a search engine;

- how to search for information using a variety of strategies;
- how to locate and access information through by developing appropriate search techniques and using information and communication technologies: use multiple keywords or descriptors to make more efficient their searching;
- compare and evaluate the obtained information from different sources;
- to use and communicate information properly by citing references in research papers, by building a coherent and standardized bibliographic system, by respect towards the law relating to copyright;
- to synthesize, based on accumulated knowledge, a paper that adds value to the field under study.

An another purpose of this paper is to examine this phenomenon in the context of higher education, by assessing the quality of current information literacy strategy documentation and exploring the application of corporate strategy concepts and techniques to this emergent field of professional practice. Analyzing this aspect in Romanian universities it is observable that only a small proportion of Romanian students use the library, and this fact depends upon the faculty expectations. Many times they don't know what information is available, they have difficulty determining the information they need and the quality of it, they are unable to compare and evaluate alternative information. Therefore, it is imperative that librarians work collaboratively with academics. Also, the information literacy instructions are not comprehensive in all academic libraries, not many universities offering required lectures that inform students about the importance of libraries and libraries' departments, the practical training of online access to databases through Internet etc.

3. The Role of Librarians in Supporting Information Literacy Instruction

Education for information culture is a responsibility of all libraries. It is necessary a strategic approach of it and, also, a collaboration between the structures info-documentary experts and ones from the area of education, technology and other disciplines, to develop programs to promote information culture. It should be seen as an ongoing process that requires interaction of all involved parts.

The librarian support includes working directly with teachers to develop their understanding of the role of the academic library. This is accomplished through a good collaboration between the two parts, presenting library activities in mutual meetings, stating expectations of teachers regarding library, and serving as a model by effectively using the library and its information literacy program. Librarians address these needs by teaching workshops and open seminars for faculty using the facilities offered by the Internet and using more and more on line databases in their research activity. In their turn professors are beginning to restructure their courses and teaching methods by using networking facilities and start to cooperate with librarians in developing their curricula.

The librarian must support teachers' roles by building up information skills and discovering how to integrate them into the course. In this role, librarians encourage faculty in the establishment of learning priorities which ensure that students develop the abilities that will allow them to be information independent in this digital world. The university communities need to understand this, and in turn to support the librarians' effort.[6] We must reconsider our role as academic librarians in the knowledge society and we need to build relationships with all educational factors, encouraging and supporting them to integrate an information literacy course into curricula. The question is what practical steps academic librarians can take to become more a part of the educational mission. They have to know and understand the university organization; to identify the university councils, the Senate and working groups which are involved directly in academic program and make lobby for librarian membership in these committees; to take a leadership role in providing information literacy courses for all specialties in the university.

Also, the librarians must involve in curriculum planning and cooperative teaching with faculty to help students develop information skills.

In many foreign universities librarians are equal partners with faculty in the instructional process, a model which not functions very well in Romanian university environment. There the library instruction is compulsory, being a required part of the general curriculum and the students have to pass a test to assess library skills before they graduate. From this point of view the librarians must become involved in curriculum planning. So, there are some directions on which librarians must:

- demonstrate need for such training;
- integrate library instruction into the curriculum;
- expand their collaboration with faculty in building the curriculum;
- be flexible to accommodate the range of the curriculum and disciplines, as well as a diversity of faculty and students;
- help students understand the role of the library in the information world;
- facilitate the integration of electronic information into the curriculum;
- prepare a brochure explaining the concept of information literacy, goals and objectives for the information literacy program, and a basic checklist for evaluating information;
- begin to experiment with various faculty members to develop the most effective way to teach basic information skills;
- must stay somewhat ahead of the technology developments so they can be the first to teach new information formats and networks;
- developing criteria to measure information literacy outcomes.

In Romania librarians hoped to be seen like partners in the educational and teaching process, a hope that wasn't fully realized in most universities. It is up to the librarian to take steps to change this by serving on curriculum committees, attending planning meetings, and sharing ideas for integrating the information literacy into the curriculum. The higher Romanian education has not yet embraced the concept of integrating information literacy instruction into the curriculum. Reasons for this include such factors as the faculty's control of the curriculum, individuality and autonomy of each institution regarding curriculum and educational outcomes, and the status of librarians within higher education. At this time there is an interest within Romanian library associations to bring information literacy into the universities curriculum, and this may be one way to ensure information skills as an important learning outcome of higher education.

4. Using On Line Databases: the Questionnaires' Interpretation

Valahia University of Targoviste Library has made extensive efforts to measure users' expectations, satisfaction and reactions to on line data bases provided to improve its service quality. Thus, the outcomes of the research will become a reference tool for library administrators and specifically the policy makers in the higher education sector, allowing them to make decisions to raise the quality of the information literacy development programs to strengthen the knowledge of the wider user community [7] and to decide which databases are more appreciated by users in order to purchase them.

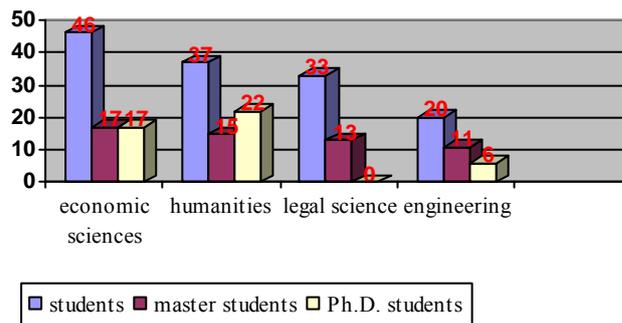
Structured questions in the questionnaire were 28 in number, mostly related to the quality of online databases consulted. Each scale was scored using seven point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (total disagree) to 7 (total agreement). The data for this study were gathered in May 2011 from 237 individuals: 136 students, 56 master students, 45 Ph. D. students. The determinants for evaluating quality of on line data bases were selected based on the opinions of professionals in

the field of librarianship, being developed by members participating in the project "Evaluation of the quality and performance of online libraries." Its specific objectives were the development of the methodological framework for assessing the quality and performance of online libraries; developing and improving their assessment systems; supporting and improving the performance management libraries online.

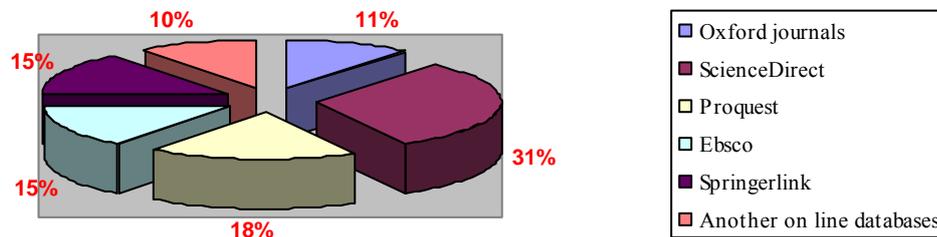
Among the data that the questionnaire attempt to obtain were:

- accessibility of necessary information to achieve a specific task
- relevance of information provided by the online databases
- clarity and unity of the information provided by the online databases
- completeness of information provided by the online databases
- presentation of the online databases interface in terms of usability and performance
- utility of services provided by the online databases
- the degree of contentment and satisfaction concerning the results obtained by using the online databases
- Intention to use such information resources in the future

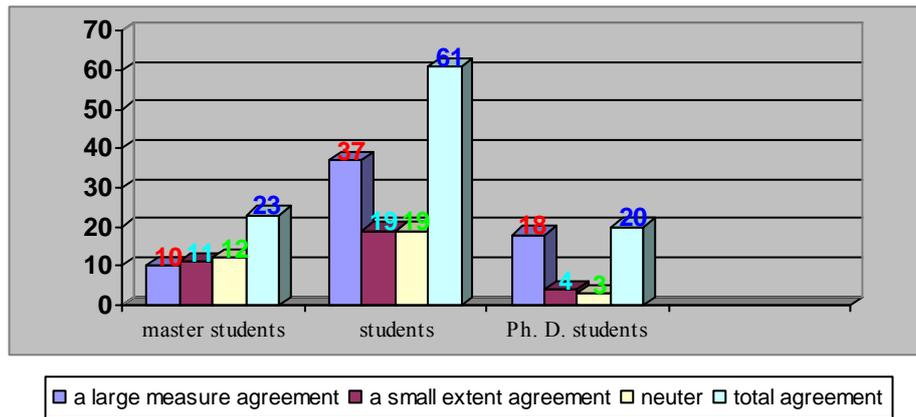
The questionnaire was designed so that by completion can be identified different profiles of respondents, a fact illustrated below:



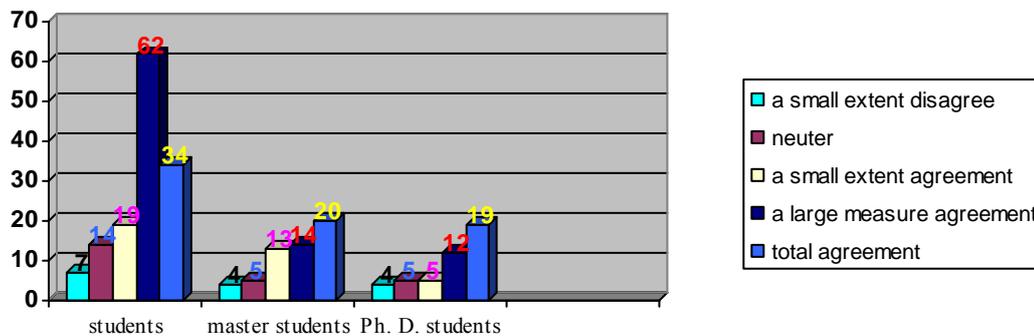
Subjects were also asked what types of on line databases prefer in their educational and research activities. Concerning the preferences in terms of the types of on line databases consulted the situation is as follows:



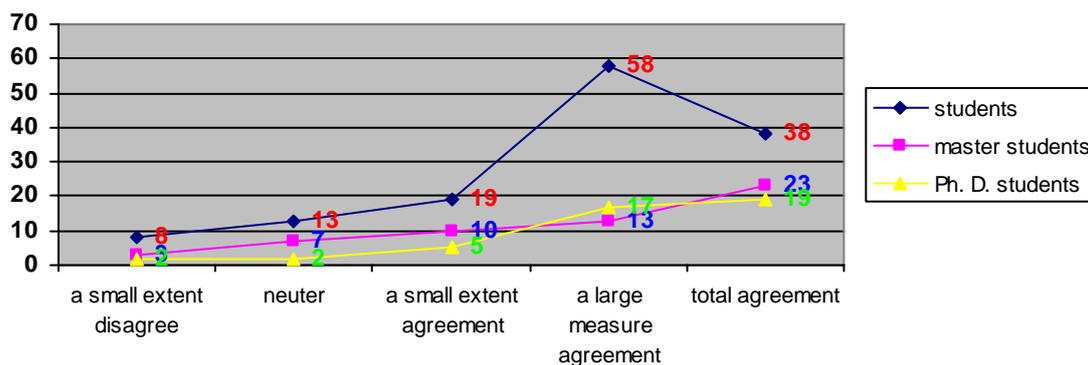
It is seen that the Science Direct database has gathered the most support from those asked who considered it an easily accessible database that meets their diverse research needs. Among Ph. D. students and Master students, Oxford Journals database was reckoned to be much closer to their demands. Regarding the availability of specific information needed to carry out scientific studies, respondents belonging to all three educational levels, have been totally agree with this feature of online databases, noting that the searched information was readily retrievable.



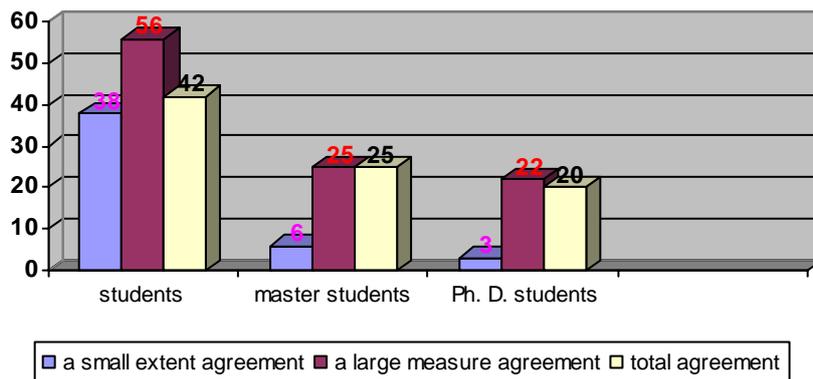
In terms of relevance of information provided by the on line databases most respondents agreed with this, which means that their assessment of this point of view is positive. Should be noted that the relevance depends on the database consulted and the level of the respondents.



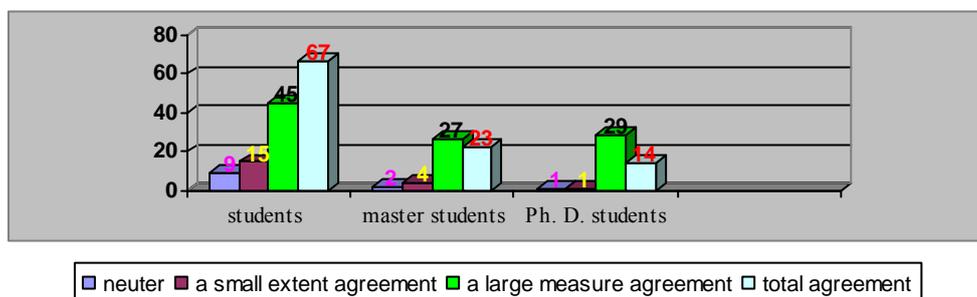
Clarity and unity of the information provided by online databases was assessed in a positive way by all respondents which mean that the information is presented consistently and clearly.



The degree of contentment and satisfaction with the results obtained by using online databases is positive, which demonstrates their usefulness in the educational process and research.



In close connection with the degree of satisfaction is the question about the intention to use in future such information resources, the answer in this case being one satisfactory, showing an increasingly openness to these new types of information, presented electronically.



The conclusions were formed on the main research question, which pursued to test a model for evaluating online databases, leading to the involvement of officials dealing with library and information science into a complex profitable operation of these types of information sources utility.

The results of this study indicate three major findings. First, on line databases characteristics (in terms of relevance and system quality) can directly influence the perceived usefulness of them. Secondly, system quality can influence positively both perceived usefulness and the perceived ease of databases' use. Thirdly, according to easily finding the desired information at the right time, it portrays the intent to use in the future some on line databases. These three findings highlight the importance of on line databases usage for research and study. Thus, respondents from all three educational levels have appreciated the relevance, usefulness, convenience, accessibility of online databases, intending in the future to use them in research or learning.

The research will be further extended to other university libraries throughout the country. This will make possible a global analysis of the way „information literacy” is understood by users, and will enable initiating actions meant to improve information literacy skills.

5. Conclusions

The university libraries and implicitly all educational structures faced with challenges due to the new information and communication development and changes that affect every program and process. In present educational reforms are taking place in Romania to improve educational outcomes and these developments causing major changes. Curriculum reform is necessary because students and employers are demanding improved educational outcomes to ensure better individual and business productivity. In this context librarians must maximize their potential to be in the position to assume their role in the teaching and learning process.

Each university has to develop educational strategies and learning resources to help students

develop information literacy skills. It is necessary to have an active and continuing program concerning information access, developed and supported by the faculty's makers, librarians and other information providers because we must be willing to promote and share our experience in this information age in support of our institutional educational mission.

In conclusion, information literacy is now one of the most essential skills in our universities because it implies three very important linked steps: becoming aware of your own information needs, being able to perform efficient information retrieval, being able to evaluate and use the results obtained. There is evidence in information behaviour research, as well as the authors' own research, which can help understand the nature of information, and information literacy, within different disciplines [9]. Making use of the research evidence may also be useful in opening up a dialogue with academics and stimulating them to reflect on their own practice.

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