

USER ATTITUDE TOWARDS ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC INFORMATION RESOURCES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A CROSS FACULTY ANALYSIS

K.Dehigama¹ and W.G.A.Dharmarathne²

¹Library, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

²Library, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Sciences, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

¹kdehigama@yahoo.com and ²ajanthad@pdn.ac.lk

ABSTRACT: University of Peradeniya Library Network (UoPLN) is among the pioneers in application of Information Technology in the field of Library and Information Science. UoPLN provides access to wealth of e-resources and invests heavily on user training. University community is trained and instructed to access electronic information resources through orientation programmes, workshops and seminars conducted by the library. In the light of widespread availability of e- resources, users are encouraged to make optimal use of them. The study is aimed to investigate the attitude of undergraduates of University of Peradeniya library towards access to electronic resources available in the Faculty libraries of Allied Health Sciences and Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science. Under quantitative approach, cross sectional survey design was employed as the research method. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data. Study reveals that there is a lack of ICT skills among first year students. Level of awareness about e-resources among undergraduates up to third year is very low. Final year students of the both faculties prefer accessing e-format over printed formats. Users clearly indicated that the requirement of access to information within the time convenient to them and wishes to access to information from their homes and hostels. The study concludes with the recommendation of providing specific awareness programmes to selected groups. More vigorous training is suggested to students with low ICT skills. Also it is recommended libraries to revive modes and timing of providing access to e-resources.

Keywords: Electronic Information Resources, University of Peradeniya Library Network, Undergraduate Students, Attitude, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science

1. INTRODUCTION

Ceylon University College Colombo established in 1921, indicated the commencement of University level education in Sri Lanka. It was shifted to Peradeniya in 1942, creating University of Peradeniya. Seven faculties moved to Peradeniya step by step (Jayasuriya, 2011) and a library was established with a view to cater faculty of arts as well as entire user universe of the university. However, there was a call for faculty oriented library system due to the nature of the location of different faculties in the university. Accordingly, a separate library was established in each faculty forming a Library Network (Dehigama,2014). Faculty libraries are running under direct supervision of the Chief Librarian and headed by a Senior Assistant Librarian. With the establishment of Faculty of Allied Health Sciences in 2008, number of health libraries increased into four, namely, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science (FVMAS), Faculty of Dental Sciences and Faculty of Allied Health Sciences (FAHS). Out of these four faculties both FVMAS and FAHS though small in student number, contribute enormously towards local as well as international health sector by providing graduates with array of skills.

University of Peradeniya Library Network (UoPLN) was among the pioneers in application of Information Technology in the field of Library and Information Science. While using of modular based CDs-ISIS commenced in 1992, library launched its automation project in 2002 using off the shelf integrated Library Management Software Package; Alice for Windows (Dehigama, 2014).

Digitization project was initiated in 2012 with a prime objective of enabling users to access documents at a mouse click regardless of the location. Research publications of the University of Peradeniya, abstracts of university thesis, publications provided by the teaching faculty were included in this Institutional Repository. UoPLN also provide access to wealth of ERs through its web site. Accordingly, they are trained and instructed to access ERs effectively through library orientation programmes, workshops and seminars. Hence, optimal use and access to available e-resources are expected.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In global scale, it is widely accepted that access to information as a right of human being. However, an access to information by laymen or public is not a familiar phenomenon to Sri Lanka until, the occupation of Europeans in Sri Lanka. Although Sri Lanka has inherited an indigenous tradition of libraries from ancient times and these libraries were restricted for laymen and mostly accessed by Buddhist monks and privileged ranks of the society. However, the scenario changed with introduction of new library system in the modern day concept in 1877 by the Europeans with the establishment of the Museum Library in a form of reference library which was open to the public (Piyadasa, 1985). Laying the bedrock for the progress of library development, Gregory, the first governor of British rule, highlighted that “The object of library is to give some information to those who seek it...Immediate access to books of references is most desirable”(Piyadasa, 1985, p. 86-87). This emphasizes on providing access to a library, more than a century back, can be considered as the first landmark in Sri Lankan information history, because as mentioned above, though there is evidence of libraries in ancient Sri Lanka, they were not accessible to the public.

After more than a century of introducing the concept of access to the Sri Lankan field of information, the term access came to light in different backdrop when introducing e-initiatives. The e-Sri Lanka project that was launched in 2005, aimed to “provide access to diverse and unrestricted sources of information and means of communication” (Nenasela, n.d). The government of Sri Lanka has invested significantly to increase the usage of ICT through many programmes with a view to foster digital literacy, to promote usage and provide equal access to ICT based services among communities in Sri Lanka (Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka, 2009). As a result of these efforts, in 2011 fifteen percent of population had access to internet (International Telecommunication Union, 2011) and digital literacy stood at 16 percent by 2009 (Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka, 2009). Having this upward trend as a backdrop, the government of Sri Lanka aims to provide access to correct, consistent and effective information through Information Communication Technology (ICT) development projects (Nenasela, n.d.). The support of government and the price reduction in ICT tools and their widespread availability have led the digital literacy rate growing steadily over the years (Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka, 2009). Under this growing trend and the emphasis of providing access to e- information, it is vital to explore how libraries of Sri Lanka are making a contribution by providing access to information, with special reference to Electronic Information Resources (EIR) available in the libraries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Development of digital technologies and rapid development of electronic publishing changed the perceptions and practices related to access the resources in libraries. Under this contexts, users increasingly expect to access information

in a single search, regardless of the source (Waibel & Erway, 2009). Digitisation/electronic publishing appears to be providing a stable solution in responding to user requirements by providing access to EIR.

EIRs includes e-books, e-journals, e-newspapers, full text databases, statistical, reference and indexing and abstract databases and any other materials available electronically that are likely to be the alternative to the printed materials. EIR are defined as “ material that requires computer access, whether through a personal computer, mainframe, or handheld mobile device. They may either be accessed remotely via the Internet or locally” (IFLA, 2012).

In the wake of digital technologies, principals of preservation such as, longevity, choice, quality, integrity and access have profoundly changed (Conway, 2000). Improving access is one of the major purposes behind digitisation (Astle & Muir, 2002; Bultmann, Hardy, 2005). Several surveys show, increased access turned out to be the top criterion in selecting resources for digitisation (Astle and Muir, 2002). More than a decade ago, in 2004, Singh and Gautam focusing on access to information through electronic media, states that there is no value of availability of information, if there are not accessible. On global scale many studies have been carried out to examine the users attitude towards access to information. Some of the findings include frequency of access to EIR is low (Natarajan, 2010), and access is restricted by lack of awareness, lack of computers and slow downloading (Igbo and Imo,2010; Omotayo,2010; Natarajan, 2010)

A probe into literature published on the theme in Sri Lanka, show that there is a lack of research on the proposed theme. For example Dharmaratne (2014) studies information seeking behavior of the academic staff of the faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya. While use of EIR by Postgraduates were surveyed by Peiris and Peiris (2012) and how undergraduates of Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya reap the benefits provided by electronic resources in the light of Information Communication Technology was studied by Dharmaratne (2008). Another study has been carried out to explore the information resource preferences of undergraduates of Agriculture, Arts, Engineering and Science Faculties of University of Peradeniya (Wijetunge, 2014b). Although, the scope of aforementioned studies are diverse from each other as well as different from the proposed study, all the studies as a whole recommends more training for respective users . However, in a recent study, providing an insight into information seeking behavior of FVMAS, FAHS and Faculty of Dental Science undergraduates of University of Peradeniya, Wjetunge (2014a) finds users are motivated to use search engines and Wikipedia over scholarly digital resources. Therefore, study suggest for further research to assess the factors behind motivation for using Wikipedia and search engines. Above literature review show that studies are focused on the information seeking behavior of the users, use and satisfaction level of users and preferences of using EIR of different user communities of University of Peradneiya. However, there is no particular study confined to explore the attitudes of undergraduates representing FVMAS and FAHS towards ER in terms of access.

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Under this background this research is taken up to examine attitudes towards access to EIR available at the two Faculty libraries of UoPLN. Accordingly the study was confined to the undergraduate students of Faculties of Veterinary Medical and Animal Science (FVMAS) and Faculty of Allied Health Sciences (FAHS) Students.

2. METHODOLOGY

Cross-sectional survey design under quantitative approach was employed in the study. Questionnaires were considered as the most appropriate instrument to collect data from students since interviews are difficult to arrange due to time constraints of students. Structured questionnaire has been administered among the total student universes of the two faculties, in order to obtain forthright, independent and anonymous answers. 759 duly completed questionnaires were selected for the study. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as tables, charts, graphs, percentages and frequency distribution.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

It was target to survey all 923 undergraduates of the both faculties. However, 36 students from both faculties, who were out of the university due to personal, medical and academic reasons could not be achieved .Therefore, 887 questionnaires were administered.. 521completed questionnaires were received from FAHS, while 281 were received from FVAS, constituting 802 of total completed questionnaires. Accordingly, out of the 594 questionnaires distributed in FAHS 521 received representing 87% response rate. In FVMAS out of 293 questionnaires administered 281 received representing 95% response rate. 26 and 17 questionnaires were rejected respectively from FAHS and FVMAS due to incompleation.

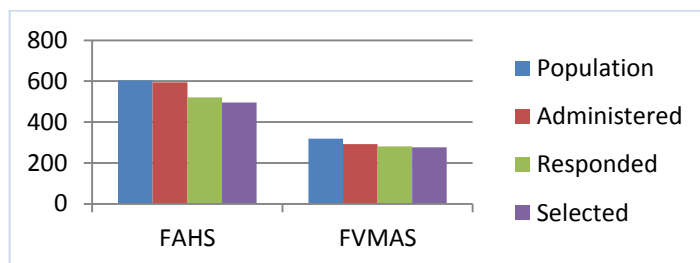


Figure 1 Demographic and user response

Basically, access to any electronic resource is restricted due to lack of ICT skills. In the study it is revealed that majority of first year students of both faculties have less Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills (figure 2 and 3).

65% FAHS and 59% FVMAS first year students indicated accessing to EIR is not important to their academic work. Hence, lack of ICT skills, coupled with above attitude provides the reason as to why majority of first year students do not use EIR. This scenario provides directions for future research on learning ICT facilities of these students while they were in school and their environment; rural, urban vice versa

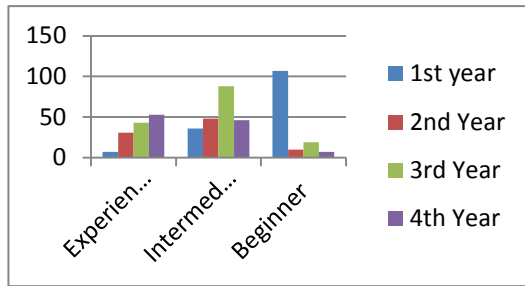


Figure 2. ICT Skills- FAHS

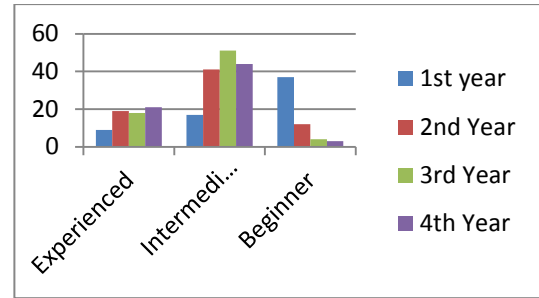


Figure 3 ICT Skills-FVMAS

A growing trend of accessing EIR through library web site could be identified among final year students of the both faculties (Figure 4). They prefer accessing e-format over printed formats (figure 5). 98% percent of the respondents agree that they have participated in the library orientation programmes and other workshops conducted by the library. However practicing skills learnt and accessing the available resources regularly are essential steps to reap the benefits of services provided.

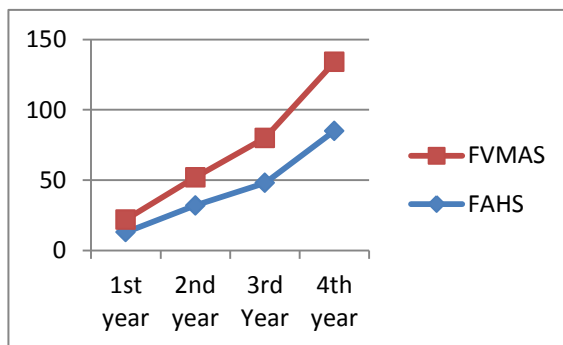


Figure 4. Library Web site access

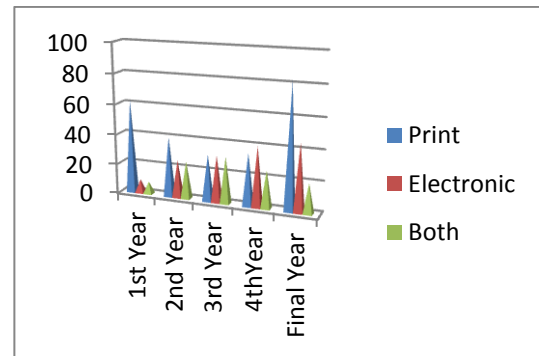


Figure 5. Preference of Format

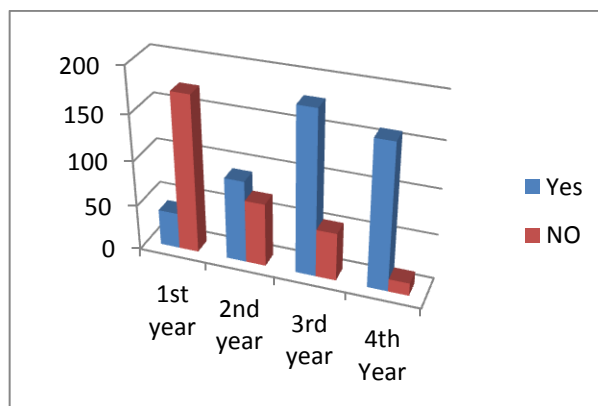


Figure 6 .Awareness about the ERs

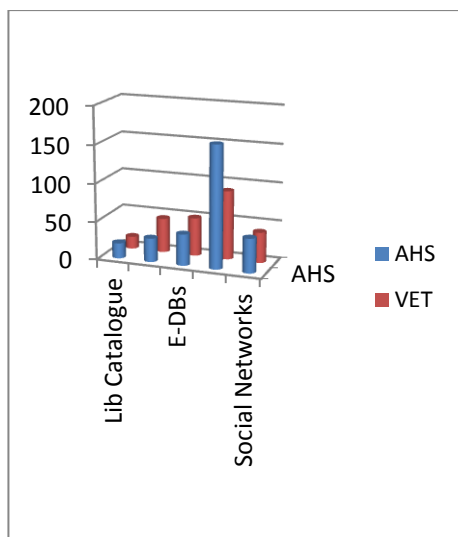


Figure 7. Purpose of using library computers

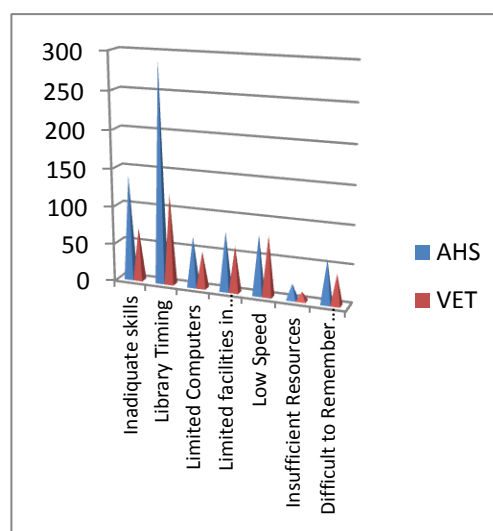


Figure 8. Challenges and problems faced in accessing

Students were asked whether they were aware of the available EIR. It is striking to know that 81% of the both faculties are not aware of EIR. 41% of total census were not aware of the EIR (Figure 6). This indicates lack of awareness must be the major reason behind less access to EIR. While users are unaware of the EIR, they use library computers for accessing email mostly. Survey revealed that 33% of the total census use library computers to access email while only 27% access library catalogue, e-journals and e-databases (Figure 7).

Majority of students find computers available in the library are not sufficient and access to internet is not provided during the weekends and after 4 p.m. Students also find it difficult to remember passwords. Users clearly indicated the requirement of access to information within the time convenient to them and wish to access information outside the library, especially from homes and hostels.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of the study was to investigate the attitude of undergraduate students of Faculties of Allied Health Sciences and Veterinary Medical and Animal sciences of University of Peradeniya towards the access the EIR provided by the UoPLN. Upon the basis of findings strong user oriented hands on training are recommended, as majority of the first year students from both faculties are lack of ICT skills. Better ICT skills are a must for effective handling of EIR, Therefore, in order to raise the awareness in accessing EIR, more vigorous campaigns are of dire necessity. Concluding, it can be suggested to both libraries to revive modes and timing of providing access to EIR. Future research is required to identify particular group of students who are indeed in need of training, in order to improve ICT skills.

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