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The Importance of Information Literacy Skills for the Effective use of Electronic Resources by Faculty of the University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho, Ghana

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Abstract

The university education system aims to preserve and enhance human knowledge by strengthening the research abilities of students, resulting in the promotion of independent learning. These goals cannot be achieved without the help and intervention of an information specialist, as well as faculty. Knowledgeable navigators (e.g. librarians and lecturers) have to locate and evaluate information before passing it on to their students for use. This study sought to examine the link between information literacy skills (ILS) and library patronage. A questionnaire survey was used to collect data from 120 faculty members at the University of Health and Allied Sciences in Ho, Ghana. This method was used because of its potential for generalising findings to a larger population. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21 was used to analyse the data into frequencies and percentages. Findings revealed that respondents mostly use the library to access print materials. It was revealed that while faculty do have information literacy skills, continuous training is necessary to keep up with the changing information environment. As a result, management is encouraged to provide academic librarians with the necessary resources to present periodic seminars and training on searching strategies.

Keywords: Information Literacy Skills, faculty, academic library, e-databases, navigation, University of Health and allied Sciences

1. Introduction

An effective and efficient university education programme is one that increases the chances of its students to find a job and advance their careers, as well as contribute to accelerated national development. Tertiary institutions also aim to preserve and enhance human

knowledge by strengthening research abilities, resulting in the promotion of independent learning. Achieving the above cannot occur in a vacuum, and is linked to positive interventions and constructive help from information specialists and faculty members. Information-seeking among students is often characterized by confusion, vagueness and sometimes embarrassment (Rieh, Kim, and Markey (2012) resulting in poor research methods and writing that is unsupported by academic sources (Colby, 2012). Faculty is needed to help these learners to be able to search for the right materials. To achieve this, the faculty themselves need to have the necessary information literacy skills. In other words, faculty members have to know how to search for, access and evaluate information themselves, before they can pass this on to students.

E-resources have become an integral part of academic library collections and e-databases are considered indispensable to teaching and learning as well as research processes. The study by Bar-Ilan, Peritz, and Wolman (2003) on the awareness and use of electronic resources by faculty at Israeli universities indicated that the use of e-resources was already widespread and that more than 50 per cent of the respondents found electronic services to be a catalyst for their academic work. This study therefore seeks to establish whether faculty of the University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) in Ho, Ghana are information literate and whether they are able to pass on this knowledge to their students.

2. The University library

The library of the University of Health and Allied Sciences was established in 2013 for the benefit of students, faculty, researchers and the community within which it is located. The library comprises print and electronic sections. There are currently 9224 volumes of print materials. The electronic section is integrated with the University of Ghana library, which is also supported by CARLIGH. This synergy helps the UHAS library to access, manage and disseminate literature online in electronic form, including high-quality, peer-reviewed

journals, articles, databases, and e-books to meet academic pursuits at all levels. Usage of library services and satisfaction of library patrons can be scientifically measured and this study is a test case.

3. Problem Statement

The academic success of students depends on several factors. Key among these is the resourcefulness of the faculty in terms of relevance and currency of information in their field of study. The resourcefulness of faculty in accessing relevant information depends on the availability of information and the ability to access the available information. Hence, the need to establish whether faculty members of UHAS have the necessary ILS to access the information that is made available to them to facilitate teaching and research. The goal of every library is to make current information available to faculty and students in a timely manner. When this available information is not accessed by the target population, it is rendered void, an assertion supported by Floyd, Colvin, and Bodur (2008) who argue that the primary goals and objectives of an institution cannot be realised without the ILS competency of its faculty.

4. Purpose

The information age and its far-reaching technological developments have changed the ways in which users relate to and use information, making information literacy an essential skill and competency that impact the daily lives of individuals living in an information society. The intent of this study was to examine the level of competency of UHAS faculty in using the subscribed e-databases.

5. Significance of the study

Examining the ILS competency and usage of subscribed e-databases of UHAS faculty is of much concern to the Library because it could lead to an increase in the usage of the electronic

resources. This will lead to more value for money since a lot of resources were put into creating the electronic resources of the library. This study also brings to light the importance of the resources to the faculty of UHAS hence getting the university management to consider making available more resources to the library. It informs the university management on how much or less investment has been made in the area of electronic data and internet bandwidth. Academic librarians and Information professionals of the university will strategize their service delivery for the attainment of the desired goals. Also, faculty and students will have a renew interest in ILS improvement for academic and professional development.

1.5 Research Objectives

The use of e-databases by faculty members has a greater significance to teaching, learning and research processes. The specific objectives of this paper are;

a) To determine the ability of faculty in accessing e-databases for relevant information

b) To find out the ILS competency level of faculty

c) To investigate how often faculty access e-databases

d) To identify faculty searching strategies

e) To find out if there is need for continuous training

The study attempted to answer the following research questions.

a) Are you able to access e-databases?

b) How often are you able to access e-databases?

c) What searching strategy do you use?

d) Which ILS are you conversant with?

Is there any need for training on how to access the e-databases?

1.6 Limitation of the study

The scope of the study is narrowed to a single public university in Ghana. Albeit the data is representative, it limits itself to the faculty on one campus and dealt with 50 participants. Extending the selection of participants to other campuses or increasing the sample size would alter the results of the study.

6.   **Literature review**

It is reported in the study of Mumtaz (2000)that information literate faculty perform better in terms of the quality of student papers, projects and research work. The changes brought about by the information revolution created a demand for information dissemination, which directly or indirectly led to the improvement of learning and pedagogical skills (Higgins & Thompson, 2002). Use of electronic information resources has a great significance in the research and learning process (Omar, Shaffril, D'Silva, Bolong, and Hamzah (2015). The impact of electronic resources on teaching and research is widely recognized by many researchers and as such, e-resources have become a widely accepted scholarly resource for both students and faculty.

Julien and Boon (2002) observe that information literacy skills, "enables one to make efficient and effective use of information sources, and that an information literate person today should possess specific online searching skills, which include the ability to select appropriate search terminology, construct a logical search strategy, and evaluate information appropriately". (McNeill, McNeill, & McNeil, 2003)   reiterate that: "effective decision making (in health care delivery) relies on timely and accurate information". This is also applicable to all academic endeavors.

Faculty members need to remain up to date on trends in searching for information, as well as teaching and learning, even more so than students. Locating information from an e-library requires ILS and there are specific standards that an information literate individual must meet. Bent and Stubbings (2011) agree that information literate people demonstrate awareness and have certain skills to gather, use, manage, synthesize and create information ethically.

7. Methodology

Questionnaires were distributed to 120 faculty members from four schools at UHAS, namely, the School of Nursing and Midwifery (SONAM), the School of Basic and Biomedical Sciences (SBBS), the School of Allied Health Sciences (SAHS) and the School of Public Health (SPH) to collect data. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect the required data from the participants as it was convenient for both the participants as well as for the researcher. The researcher distributed the questionnaires directly to faculty members. Once the questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher, the collected data was processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for interpretation and analyses.

Table 1: Departmental response rate

Department name	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SONAM	30	25%
SBBS	30	25%
SAHS	30	25%
SPH	30	25%
	120	**100%**

SONAM, SAHS, SPH, and SBBS, were the core population of this study. The university comprises of eight schools with 254 faculty members. One-hundred-and-twenty (120) faculty members each were selected from each school using the simple random sampling technique. There was a 100% response rate. This might be due to the researcher's personal relationship with the sampled faculty members.

8. Format of needed information and frequency of library use

Table 2: Frequency of library use

Total responses (per school)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very frequently	42	35%
Frequently	51	42.5%
Less frequently	14	11.7%
Rarely	13	10.8%
	120	

In measuring the level of needed information and the frequency of library use, as well as the type of information needed, it was observed that 35% of the respondents use the library very frequently, whereas 42.5% use it frequently. This means that majority of respondents are library users. It is encouraging to know that the library is used by its target population.

Table 3: Level of needed information

Total responses (Departmental)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Basic	23	19.2%
Moderate	45	37.5%
Advance	52	43.3%
	120	

The majority of respondents visit the library to look for information they need for teaching and research purposes. Table 3 above shows that faculty views the library as the place where most of their information needs can be met. This is aligned with the previous finding of the majority of respondents frequently using the library. Hence the faculty has the advanced knowledge in using ILS in their research work and makes teaching and learning smooth.

Table 4: Format of needed information

Total responses (Departmental)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Print	68	56.7%
Online databases	52	43.3%
	120	

The majority of respondents (56.7%) use the library to access print materials.

Table 5: Perceptions of faculty members about their cataloguing skills using OPAC

Statement	Frequency out of 120	Percentage (%)
I can use search engines to locate required information.	90	75%
I can locate different websites to fulfill my information needs.	100	83.30%
I can use different databases to find out necessary information.	80	66.70%
I can apply advanced search option to limit my search	120	100%
I can find what I am looking for using UGcat – (UHAS OPAC)	70	58.3%
I can use the UHAS digital library	70	58.30%
I can use UGcat (UHAS OPAC) to locate library resources	90	75%
I can use keyword(s), titles, or authors in UGcat (UHAS OPAC) to locate materials.	100	83.30%

Respondents were asked about their capabilities in terms of using the Online Public Access Catalogue to find information. The data shows that majority of respondents are capable of using OPAC to find information and that all the respondents can search OPAC by using keyword(s), titles, or author names in UGcat (University of Ghana catalogue) to locate materials. While this is very encouraging, more needs to be done to assist faculty to be able to use different databases to find information.

Table 6: Perceptions of faculty members about their Information Literacy Skills (ILS)

Statement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I am able to know that I need information.	40	33.30%
I am able to determine the existence of needed information or not	100	83.30%
I am able to accurately identify and define the needed information.	70	58.30%
I am able to find the needed information.	50	41.70%
I am able to communicate and present the information.	110	91.70%
I am able to evaluate the reliability of information and information resources.	100	83.30%
I am able to utilize the information to resolve the problem.	108	90%
I am able to go for help to understand needed information.	120	100%
I am able to preserve, store, reuse, record and archive information.	110	91.70%
I am able to realize a need for information in an ethical manner (I cite my sources).	115	95.80%

Respondents were asked to select the information literacy skills that they use when searching for and retrieving information. Based on the data collected, majority of respondents have the necessary information literacy skills. They know when they need information, they can identify the sources to consult, and they are able to access the information. The data does however show that more than 80 out of 120 faculty members cannot evaluate information properly before use. Nevertheless, about 91.7% are capable of preserving, storing, reusing, recording and archiving information.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

To preserve and enhance knowledge, faculty members must be able to utilize e-databases and other tools to facilitate searching for current and relevant information for academic and research purposes, as well as the promotion of independent learning. This research shows the importance of the library to faculty at UHAS in their quest for information for teaching and research purposes.

It is recommended that faculty periodically attend refresher courses on navigation strategies to enable them to access e-resources without difficulty. At the same time, new faculty must be informed of which materials are available to them to facilitate teaching, and receive the necessary orientation on how to locate and evaluate information before passing it on to students for use. The managers of the institution should therefore provide the academic librarians with the necessary resources to deliver on their mandate, which will subsequently lead to faculty satisfying the needs of their students. Effective Internet facilities should be widely available to ensure that accessing information within the institution is not limited to the physical library environment.

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