USAGE AND AWARENESS OF EIRs BY THE ISLAMIC STUDIES AND ARABIC LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT SOUTH EASTERN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

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Abstract:

Low awareness of the Electronic Information Resources (EIRs) by the university library users were identified by number of Sri Lankan researchers. While there are ample numbers of studies on the e-resource usage by the university undergraduates, there is dearth of literature available on the undergraduates of Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Languages undergraduates (FIA) at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL). This research sets out to study the usage and awareness about the EIRs by the undergraduate students of FIA, at SEUSL. The study is based on a questionnaire survey. Printed structured questionnaires were administered among 164 randomly selected undergraduate students of the FIA, drawing 15% sample of the total students of the faculty. The study established that to the certain extent the students are aware of the availability of EIRs. In total, 46% of first year and second year students are of the opinion that EIRs are not significant to their studies. 21% Final year students had accessed EIRs to find information in order to write their project reports, dissertations and assignments. E-articles (From Google Scholar particularly), E-databases and EIRs from Institutional Repositories (IRs) were among the top three EIRs final year students frequently used. Web sites, friends, library staff and lecturing staff were the main sources of information on EIRs. Out of the 28% of final year student who have used EIRs for their academic work, 19% had indicated that access to EIRs was learned by themselves by trial and error method. The study leads to the conclusion that majority of the users were not aware of the EIRs offered by the library. Possible suggestions are to upgrade facilities to use EIRs, and to provide more publicity to improve the usage of EIRs at university wide. It is also recommended to university libraries of Sri Lanka, in general, to increase user training programmes. Advanced search strategies should be included in these further trainings. It is vital to identify non-EIRs users. Selective Dissemination of Information services and awareness programmes should be initiated targeting them. Both library staff as well as university lecturing staff has a responsibility in promoting EIRs among the undergraduate students. Introducing information literacy skills across the university undergraduate curriculum and assigning coursework to use library EIRs would be beneficial. Outcomes of the research would be particularly of use to the library administration in planning library orientation programmes and workshops and when designing and planning library infrastructure to promote EIRs.

Keywords: Electronic Information Resources, undergraduates, User Studies, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

University libraries are in the mission of meeting information needs of the users that are required for teaching, learning and research (Jayasuriya, 2008). While

drastic changes in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is taken place, collection development policies and practices of libraries are also undergone a colossal modification. Consequently, libraries inclined to use ICT in order to provide speedy as well as wider access to the materials that were burgeoning in the electronic format. In tandem with this technological boost, universities of Sri Lanka whilst expending thousands of dollars on Electronic Information Resources (EIRs), promote them among library users to reap the optimal benefit.

A large body of literatures examines the EIRs usage by the undergraduates both in local and international context. Dadzie (2005) points out that access to information irrespective of the geographic location or finances, currency of the resources and provision of wide-ranging links to other resources are the advantages of EIRs. Despite of its advantages, low usage of EIRs are reported in developing countries. As scholars state lack of ICT know-how, less bandwidth coupled with low speed, lack of printing facilities and less number of workstations, low EIRs subscriptions are the most occurring problems encountered in accessing EIRs in developing countries (Shukla and Mishra, 2011; Bhatt and Rana, 2011; Mulla, 2011). Insufficient training provided to users also leads to lesser access in EIRs (Muller and Chandrasekhar, 2006).

In assessing the usage of EIRs in Sri Lankan context, Karunaratne (2015) finds lack of computer and English language skills, insufficient work stations with fitting bandwidth as factors inhibit the usage. He also indicates majority of the students are unaware of utilizing EIRs for their academic activities. Gunasekara (2012) identifies lack of knowledge in English language and time allocated to access EIRs in the computer labs as the major hindrances to access to EIRs. Wijetunge, (2012) in her study on the agriculture undergraduates of University of Peradeniya, mentioned some of them have never used EIRs. In a study carried out between University of South Eastern university of Sri Lanka and University of Jaffna, Mashroofa (2013) states that e-books and e-journal usage of freshmen is as low as 6.4%. Low awareness of the EIRs by the university library users were identified by number of Sri Lankan researchers (Illeperuma & Mudannayake, 2008; Dehigama & Dharmaratne, 2015; Punchihewa, Kumara, & Kiriella, 2014; Vithana, 2016; Jazeel & Dehigama, 2016). While there are ample number of studies on the e-resource usage by the university undergraduates as revealed by the above brief literature review, there is dearth of literature available on the undergraduates of Islamic Studies and Arabic Languages undergraduates at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

Hence this research sets out to study the usage and awareness about the EIRs by the undergraduate students of Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language, at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study is based on a questionnaire survey. Printed structured questionnaires were administered among 164 randomly selected undergraduate students of the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, drawing 15% sample of the total students of the faculty. 128 usable questionnaires (78%) were selected for the study. In the study data was collected regarding following categories: Awareness of EIRs, type of EIRs accessed, preferred information formats, preferred information sources, reasons for using specific sources and problems encountered in using EIRs. The collected data through questionnaires were analyzed using MS office excel and frequencies and percentages were presented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study discovered 44% first year students, 39% second year students, 27% third year students and 69% final year students are aware of the availability of EIRs. 46% of first year and second year students are of the opinion that EIRs are not significant to their studies. 21% Final year students had accessed EIRs to find information in order to write their project reports, dissertations and assignments. E-articles (From Google Scholar particularly), E-databases and EIRs from Institutional Repositories were among the top three EIRs final year students are frequently used. Web sites, friends, library staff and lecturing staff were the main sources of information on EIRs. Out of the 28% of final year student who have used EIRs for their academic work, 19% had indicated that access to EIRs was learned by themselves by trial and error method. It is noteworthy 78% of the final year students preferred to read printed documents of the EIRS. FIA students as a whole have a preference to Wikipedia, search engines (Google is favored) over accessing EIRs. Reasons for preferring Wikipedia and search engines are attributed to ease of access, availability of accessing widely irrespective of the place, and having no passwords to remember. Slow speed in accessing, difficulty in remembering passwords, difficulty in finding relevant information, restrictions to access library databases outside the university, limited number of workstations, and lack of ICT know-how were attributed as the problems encountered in accessing EIRs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study leads to the conclusion that majority of the users were not aware of the EIRs offered by the library. Possible suggestions are to upgrade facilities to use EIRs, and to provide more publicity to improve the usage of EIRs at university wide. As pointed out above number of studies indicates usage of EIRs are low both in local and international context (Wijetunge, 2012; Illeperuma & Mudannyake; 2008; Dehigama & Dharmaratne, 2015; Jazeel & Dehigama, 2016; Shaheen & Ai Tee Tan, 2002; Perpetua & Dadzie, 2005). Despite of this discouraging phenomenon, it is recommended to university libraries of Sri Lanka to increase user training programmes. Advanced search strategies should be included in these further trainings. It is vital to identify non EIRs users. Selective Dissemination of

Information services and awareness programmes should be initiated targeting them. Both library staff as well as university lecturing staff has a responsibility in promoting EIRs among the undergraduate students. Introducing information literacy skills across the university undergraduate curriculum and assigning coursework to use library EIRs would be beneficial. Outcomes of the research would be particularly of use to the library administration in planning library orientation programmes and workshops and when designing and planning library infrastructure to promote EIRs.

Keywords: Electronic Information Resources, undergraduates, User Studies, Sri Lanka

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