

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

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### ABSTRACT

University of Peradeniya Library Network (UoPLN) was among the pioneers in application of Information Technology in the field of Library and Information Science. Digitization project was initiated in UoPLN 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. Under this background this research is taken up to examine attitudes towards access to ERs available at the two Faculty libraries of UoPLN. Accordingly the study was confined to the undergraduate students. 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.

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

### INTRODUCTION

Nature of the location of different faculties in the University of Peradeniya, had made it necessary for establishing a faculty oriented library system. Accordingly, a separate library was established in each faculty forming a Library Network, while the main library basically caters to the faculty of Arts and also functions as a Central Library for the entire user universe of the university community (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 (FAHS) in 2008, number of health libraries increased into four. Out of these four faculties both Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science (FVMAS) and (FAHS), 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. Digitization project was initiated in UoPLN 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 Electronic Information Resources (EIRs) through its web site. Accordingly, they are trained and instructed to access EIRs effectively through library orientation programmes, workshops and seminars. Hence, optimal use and access to available EIRs are expected.

## **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 context, users increasingly expect to access information in a single search, regardless of the source (Waibel & Erway, 2009). Digitization and electronic publishing appears to be providing a stable solution in responding to user requirements by providing access to EIRs. 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 are included in the category of EIRS.

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 they are not accessible. On global scale many studies have been carried out to examine user's attitude towards access to information. Some of the research findings show frequency of access to EIRs 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 Peiris and Peiris (2012) studied the use of EIR by Postgraduates, Dharmaratne (2008) investigated how undergraduates of Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya reap the benefits provided by EIRS in the light of Information Communication Technology. 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, Wijetunge (2014) finds users are motivated to use search engines and Wikipedia over scholarly digital information resources. 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. Above literature review shows that studies are focused on the information seeking behavior of the users, use and satisfaction level of users and preferences of using EIRs of different user communities of University of Peradeniya. 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 ERs available at the two Faculty libraries of UoPLN. Accordingly the study was confined to the undergraduate students of FVMAS and FAHS.

## **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 was analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as tables, charts, graphs, percentages and frequency distribution.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

887 questionnaires were administered among students of both faculties. 521 completed questionnaires were received from FAHS, while 281 were received from FVMAS, 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 incompleteness.

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, because 71% of the FAHS and 58% FVMAS first year students indicated as beginners in ICT skills.

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.

A growing trend of accessing EIR through library web site indicating 90% FAHS and 70% FVMAS could be identified among final year students of the both faculties. 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.

Students were asked whether they were aware of the available EIRS. It is striking to know that 81% of the both faculties are not aware of ER. 41% of total census was not aware of the EIRs. 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.

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.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The 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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