



Evidence Summary

Evidence from Students' Information Seeking Diaries Underscores the Importance of Including Librarians in Undergraduate Education

A Review of:

Lee, J. Y., Paik, W., & Joo, S. (2012). Information resource selection of undergraduate students in academic search tasks. *Information Research*, 17(1), paper511. Retrieved 8 Aug., 2012 from <http://informationr.net/ir/17-1/paper511.html>

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Abstract

Objective – To determine what information resources undergraduate students choose to complete assignments for their courses, why they choose those resources, the process of selecting those resources and the factors that contributed to selecting the resources, and their perceptions of those resources.

Design – Semi-structured information seeking diary.

Setting – Private university in Seoul, Korea.

Subjects – 233 undergraduate students from all majors and all years.

Methods – Students selected one assignment from their elective course and recorded the following in a diary: what the assignment was, the topic they needed to research to complete the assignment, resources used, the factors that contributed to choosing the resources, and perceptions of those resources.

Main Results – Data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The factors that affected the students' resource selection were analyzed qualitatively using an open coding method created by the researchers. The factors were not predetermined by the researchers, but were selected based on the factors identified by the students. Online resources (67.1%) were the most frequently selected resources by the students compared to human resources (11.5%), print materials

(11.5%), and mass media (3%). Students used an average of 5.28 resources to complete one assignment. Factors that affected the students' selection of resources were the type of information provided by the resource, the features of the resource, the search strategy used when searching in the resource, and the students' interaction with other people when selecting and using the resource. More than one factor typically contributed to the students' selection of the resource. The students' perceptions of the resources they selected were analyzed quantitatively: perceptions were analyzed in six content areas using a five point scale. Correlations and similarities across the six content areas were also analyzed. Perceptions of resources were broken down into six categories and the resources were rated on a five point scale. Librarians (4.50) were the most useful resource and lecture notes (5.0) were the most credible. Family (3.29) was the least useful, and social question and answer services, such as Yahoo! Answers, (2.62) were the least credible. Family was the most accessible and familiar resource (4.90 and 4.95 respectively). Experts (2.25) were least accessible and librarians (1.50) were the least familiar. Students were most satisfied with Google Scholar (4.33) and were most likely to use an online database (4.52) again. They were least satisfied with social question and answer services (3.05) and least likely to use a report sharing site (2.93) again. The usefulness and credibility of the resource contributed most to the undergraduates' satisfaction with the resource, while accessibility and usefulness were the major contributing factors to users intended continued use of a resource.

Conclusion – There are multiple reasons that support further information literacy education. Information literacy courses would encourage and teach students how to effectively use resources that they found credible and reliable, but considered inaccessible and unfamiliar. Information literacy education would also help educate students on how to best formulate their search strategies and how to select the best resource to use based on that strategy. Students also highlighted the importance of human interaction in resource selection and

utilization. This is an opportunity for librarians and professors to play a more active role in assisting students in selecting and using the best resources to complete course assignments. Due to the limitations of this study, further research is needed to investigate the factors affecting the exclusion of resources, not only the inclusion. Future study designs should address the characteristics of the study participants themselves, such as the age and gender. The impact of the research topic and subject on resource selection, as well as what resources are selected for non-academic information needs, should also be investigated.

Commentary

This study supports and complements the current body of literature regarding information resource selection of undergraduate students. The findings are similar to other studies in regard to student resource preferences; however, the study design is unique and examines student resource selection, usage, and perceptions in real time.

Critical appraisal of this study was completed using the Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Critical Appraisal Checklist (Glynn, 2006). The validity of the study was analyzed in four content areas: population, data collection, study design, and results. Validity of the data collection, study design, and results are strong, while validity for population selection is questionable.

Though the sample size and response rate are appropriate, and according to the authors is representative of the population being studied, the selection of study participants is problematic. Selection of the participants was not randomized, nor were inclusion and exclusion criteria clearly outlined. Gender, age, and confounding variables, such as year of study, were not taken into account. Data collection is clearly defined and the timing of data collection is appropriate; however, the study design was not validated and neither informed consent nor ethics approval is mentioned in the study.

Despite the concerns regarding population selection, this study has many strengths. All who volunteered for the study completed the study. The study design is simple and appropriate for the objectives. In regard to the collection of the data, the researchers validated their content analysis with inter-coder reliability to ensure the reliability of the coding method they used. Of most interest is the use of diaries and allowing participants to self-select their own topics. Unlike other studies that collect data after someone has done a search or relying on the participants to remember why and what they chose to search for, this study collected the data in real time. Also, the results of the study were clearly explained and could be applied at similar institutions.

This study provides evidence of the importance of involving librarians in undergraduate education and the necessity of information literacy instruction for undergraduates. Results from this study could help justify having librarians as members of the university's faculty and librarians being included in the development of undergraduate curriculum.

References

- Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, 24(3), 387-399. doi: 10.1108/07378830610692154