The Importance of Information Literacy Skills in e-Learning Environment

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Abstract:- The paper analyzed the relationship between academic libraries and e-learning in higher education in the context of information literacy. The traditional library services continue to be important in the enhancement of teaching and learning process but improving the traditional classroom activities with electronic elements will change the way faculty and students access, create and use information. It is a challenge for libraries to create and to disseminate new services which will highlight their expertise and abilities in order to take a leading role in the new e-learning environment. From our viewpoint library systems and e-learning systems need to interact in many ways from the simply incorporating collections of learning objects into the traditional library. The dynamic interactions means that teachers and learners will find new ways of developing learning activities, which in turn will influence the way they use learning activities and information content. Our analyze of the library service interactions with learning systems environments will take into account the potential transformation of learning activity. Universities must develop a digital campus that includes two important concepts of digital information management and e-learning management. Another aspect considered in our paper is that referring to information literacy related with university libraries which should provide remote access to its collections but also to information networks: training on information resources, retrieval strategies and how to use the information retrieved. We must recognize that library services have to change according to the new developments and they must to achieve a lot of conditions to become an integrative library. Integrating the library into the e learning process implies changes regarding new services and delivery systems.

Key words:- e-learning, information technology, information literacy, academic library, education, digital library

1 Introduction

E-learning has become an increasingly accepted option in the Romanian academic environment, so a great number of specialized domains provide the opportunity of following a distance course. In this context the academic library plays an important role as one that offers students information sources needed in the educational process. But to meet special requirements raised by distance learning the traditional library must turn into a virtual one.

When we talk about e-learning we talk not only about the courses that are taught on-line and over a distance, but also about traditional courses that have been enhanced with electronic elements. So, in fact the universities approach hybrid courses which have to make it work the relation between pedagogy, learning methodologies and technology.

The new generation software applications can manage now wide services that support and extend the entire curricula and related institutional services which make the e learning environment most practicable. In this context the libraries have to improve their service and extend their activities to the students which will find out that the educational software meet their information needs and tend to
use them as information portal. The enhancement of traditional classroom activities with electronic elements is changing the way faculty and students access, create and use information.

2 The role of the academic library in the context of e-learning environment

The academic libraries have to make available their traditional services via a web portal within a distance education scheme: on line catalogues, e-resources, databases, interlibrary loan etc.

Romanian universities try to use more efficient their institutional resources to transform the traditional library into an electronic one. E-learning integration offers academic libraries a good medium for reaching faculty and students directly as they engage in teaching, learning and research. In turn, this integration provides news services for the academic community and it offers a way to reach those faculty and students who have begun to ignore the library and go directly to the web for their information needs.[1]

Most Romanian academic libraries try to provide their users with various means or opportunities for enhancing their information searching. So, at Valahia University of Targoviste were designed tools to help users to locate and access the most appropriate resources.

The librarian plays a very important role in this electronic environment because it is a specialist in information science and librarianship and the only one who is capable to find answers to some questions related to e-learning:
- What traditional services can remain like that and what new services are required by the new e-learning environment?
- How can be defined the repositories and what role can libraries play in promoting this model?
- How can the academic library become a viable player in the community?
- What kind of strategies have to find the libraries for making their resources and services readily available?

In information society all information is somehow available and libraries deal with the concept of access to the world’s information. Librarians have to find tools that describe and provide well organized, uniform, integrated access because they make important scholarly and educational resources visible for researchers and students.

The crucial issues for academic libraries is how to organise it in such a way that its users can find what they need and when they need. Once it has been found, the next issue is to select and evaluate what can possibly be usefull for them.

Nobody can be sure to have accessed everything that might be important for their research. Also, the librarian needs pedagogical skills to teach information access and this is just one of many new subjects that need to be made available to reference librarians.

Education for information culture is a responsibility of all libraries. It is necessary a strategic approach of it and, also, a collaboration between the structures info-documentary experts and ones from the area of education, technology and other disciplines, to develop programs to promote information culture. It should be seen as an ongoing process that requires interaction of all involved parts.

3 Information literacy skills and the librarians

It is known that the success in terms of knowledge and use of library services depends on information literacy skills of its users regarding a number of specific elements of intellectual work. Most of the times library users don’t have adequate knowledge on library resources and how to use them effectively and efficiently. So they must have knowledge about not just the technology, but the domain of the application and the skills needed to determine what they need and how they use.

Electronic environmental impact on all sectors of social and economic life influenced the academic training too. Thus, it is required to introduce in training, indifferent of specialty disciplines, a course of information literacy to develop theoretical knowledge and practical skills concerning the construction, processing and communication of information.

The librarian must support teachers' roles by building up information skills and discovering how to integrate them into the course. In this role, librarians encourage faculty in the establishment of learning priorities which ensure that students develop the abilities that will allow them to be information independent in this digital world. The academic communities need to understand this, and in turn to support the librarians’ effort.[2] We must reconsider our role as academic librarians in the new information age and we need to build relationships with all educational factors, encouraging and supporting them to integrate an information literacy.
course into curricula.

Permanently librarians were concerned to offer students information literacy skills, to change the faculties’ attitudes toward the library and to demonstrate the importance of the library’s involvement in curriculum development. The question is what practical steps can academic librarians take to become more a part of the educational mission?:

- Knowing and understanding the academic organization;
- Identifying the academic councils, the Senate and working groups which are involved directly in academic program and make lobby for librarian membership in these committees;
- Taking a leadership role in providing information literacy courses for all specialties in the academic.

Educational processes may be traditional, electronic, in an online environment or through distance education. Analyzing the Romanian educational environment we notice that the faculties have a determined role in the degree to which a library contributes to the academic programs, specifically the curriculum, because the responsible factors, in most cases, consider that kind of courses not so important. They have to realize that students will obtain necessary library and information skills through a coursework determined by faculty. In addition, the librarians must involve in curriculum planning and cooperative teaching with faculty to help students develop information skills.

In many foreign countries academic librarians are equal partners with faculty in the instructional process, a model that not function very well in Romanian academic environment. There the library instruction is compulsory, being a required part of the general curriculum and the students have to pass a test to assess library skills before they graduate. From this point of view the librarians must become involved in curriculum planning. Therefore, there are some directions on which librarians must involve:

- intervention by the academic makers which must realize the importance of introducing such courses in academic curricula;
- library administrators must demonstrate need for such training;
- they had long-term commitments to integrate library instruction into the curriculum;
- expand their collaboration with faculty in building the curriculum;

- help students understand the role of the library in the Information Society;
- prepare a brochure explaining the concept of information literacy, goals and objectives for the information literacy program, and a basic checklist for evaluating information;
- begin to experiment with various faculty members to develop the most effective way to teach basic information skills
- developing criteria to measure information literacy outcomes

There are some criteria that provide librarians with a powerful rationale in their demand to become involved in the teaching/learning process to participate in the education of students for success in the Information Age:

- librarians must understand the curriculum and have good relationships with faculty leaders because this support is crucial;
- librarians must facilitate the integration of electronic information into the curriculum
- librarians must offer their expertise in teaching information skills to students
- librarians must help faculty become knowledgeable about electronic information formats
- librarians must be very well prepared for teaching, understand different learning styles, and engage students actively in the teaching process;
- librarians must be flexible to accommodate the range of the curriculum and disciplines, as well as a diversity of faculty and students;
- librarians must use effective marketing techniques to demonstrate the importance of information and technology literacy and their crucial role in it;
- librarians must stay somewhat ahead of the technology developments so they can be the first to teach new information formats and networks.

In Romania librarians hoped to be seen like partners in the educational and teaching process, a hope that was not fully realized in most universities. The higher Romanian education has not yet embraced the concept of integrating information literacy instruction into the curriculum. Reasons for this include such factors as the faculty’s control of the curriculum, individuality and autonomy of each institution regarding curriculum and educational outcomes, and the status of librarians within higher education.

Academic librarians and the members of the Romanian Librarians Association have worked to
integrate library and information skills into the curriculum, and in several institutions they have been successful (universities from Brasov, Pitesti, Timișoara, Bucharest, Targoviste). At this time there is an interest within the Romanian Librarians Association to bring information literacy into the universities curriculum, and this may be one way to ensure information skills as an important learning outcome of higher education.

It is urgent to teach information literacy to students especially because most of them usually work while studying, their work environment involving to know how to use the new technologies in information and communication. Through the information literacy program, students will be able to locate, evaluate, and use information more effectively to satisfy their information requirements. Librarians will work with all faculty members to include information literacy modules into appropriate courses, and to monitor students’ progress in becoming information literate. [3]

4. Study Case

We have made research study at Valahia University of Targoviste and University of Bucharest to measure users’ expectations and satisfaction regarding library services. Thus, the results of this research can become a reference tool for library and faculty administrators allowing them to make good decisions to raise the quality of the information literacy development programs.

The structured questions in the questionnaire mainly consisted of 28 questions in relation to the quality of the library services according with information literacy skills Each scale was scored using seven point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (total disagree) to 7 (total agreement). Data was collected from 300 individuals: 150 students, 100 master students, 50 Ph. D. students.

Among the data that the questionnaire attempt to obtain were:
- Accessibility of necessary information to achieve a specific task
- Relevance of information provided by the digital library
- Clarity and unity of the information provided by the digital library
- Completeness of information provided by the digital library
- Presentation of the digital library interface in terms of usability and performance
- Utility of services provided by the digital library
- The degree of contentment and satisfaction concerning the results obtained by using the digital library
- Intention to use such information resources in the future

The respondents from all three educational levels, have appreciated the relevance, usefulness, convenience, accessibility of online databases, intending in the future to use them in research or learning.

Conclusions

Information literacy is now one of the most essential skills in our universities. There is evidence in information behaviour research, as well as the authors’ own research, which can help understand the type of information within different disciplines. Making use of the research evidence may also be useful in opening up a dialogue with academics and stimulating them to reflect on their own practice.[4]

E-learning provide a unique opportunity for librarians to collaborate with university staff, especially with professors, to offer courses dedicated to all kind of users, and to provide professional tutoring in information literacy.

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