

USER PERCEPTIONS ON USER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY BASED ON THE FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

B.M.M.C.B. Hindagolla

Assistant Librarian, Dental Library, University of Peradeniya

Introduction

In the modern world information is subjected to constant change in terms of its volume, the technical aspects of its storage and retrieval as well as in the way it is communicated. The advancement of information communication technology has provided many facilities to people to access a wide variety of information within a fraction of time. Hence, access to information has been a driving force in modern knowledge based societies. In the field of university education, access to information is vital to the academic community to expand their knowledge and to engage in research. University Libraries have a vital role to play in attaining these objectives. Hence, the university library must ensure the proper use of its information resources and services and optimize information requirements of the user population. The users in turn have to be aware of the resources and services of the Library in order to make optimum use of them.

Accessing information effectively is a challenge in the present day due to the proliferation of information and its sources. Educating library users in information skills is one way to overcome this challenge. With this objective in mind, researchers in the Library and Information fields have developed different programs,

methods, and models to acquire information skills targeting different library user groups.

The state-sector universities in Sri Lanka have taken measures to conduct user education programmes to a certain extent but the Library network at University of Peradeniya does not offer properly designed user education programmes to enhance the information skills of students. The University of Peradeniya Library network lacks a mechanism to understand how a good user education programme will affect the information seeking patterns of users, how library users become information literate and the type of user education programmes to be offered. Although the University of Peradeniya has eight libraries and has an approximate user population of 8000, no scientific study has been conducted in relation to the library user education programmers. The Peradeniya Main Library is the mother library of the Peradeniya library network and it caters to the entire university population. However, it specifically caters to the Faculty of Arts. Therefore, the study focused on the Main Library and the undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts.

In this study, we attempt to elicit the perceptions of the users about library user education programmes. The users' views will be a good source of

information to identify lapses, strengths, shortcomings and weaknesses of the library programmes that are offered at present and to modify them in line with user needs in the future. The main objective of the study is to find out whether the present day user education programs are geared towards making users aware of all the information resources available in the Library, the services offered by the Library, the users' attitudes about user educational programmes and lastly to make recommendations based on user perceptions for an improved user focused education programme to make the students information literate and to maximize the usage of the resources in the main library.

Methodology

The study employed the survey design while study site was the Faculty of Arts. According to statistics, the Faculty of Arts holds the largest student population compared to the other faculties. As the largest user category of the Faculty of Arts, undergraduates were selected for the study population. To determine the definite sample size the Cochran (1977) sample frame was used and a random stratified sampling method applied. A sample of 339 was selected and the research instrument was a questionnaire. The data collected from the questionnaires were entered to the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists version 13). The analyzed data were presented in the forms of bar-charts, pie-charts, tables etc.

Results and Discussion

Out of the 339 questionnaires distributed, 263 were returned accounting for a percentage of 77.58.

According to the data, 100% of respondents had used the main library while 74.9 % users had visited the library daily which is very positive. Out of the total population surveyed, 84.4% users had participated in the library user education programme although only 27% had participated in all three programmes. About 60% of the respondents had indicated that they were made aware of the resources available in the Lending, Reference and Scheduled Reference Sections and the Ceylon Collection but about 70% respondents mentioned that they had not received any awareness regarding special library collections, electronic information resources and audio visual materials. The data further indicates that lack of awareness has been a main factor affecting the users' level of information resources and facilities usage. The chi-square test clearly indicated that there was a significant relationship ($P=0.019$) between awareness and the use of information resources and services. The survey further revealed that the students had participated in user education programmes when they were in the first year and 40% of respondents said that they had received information regarding the layout of the library, library rules and regulations, information on finding methods in the library, library resources and its facilities. The data revealed that only 34.6% were satisfied with the current user education programmes while the majority were not satisfied with the current user education programmes conducted at the Main Library. Twenty four percent (24%) of respondents did not say anything about the programmes. The study identified critical factors regarding

user dissatisfaction about the programmes. According to the user preference method, a video program to educate users ranked first with 68.82% respondents; introductory lecture ranked second with 68.44% respondents, and small group instruction with practical component ranked as third with 63.11% respondents. Above 60 % of the respondents desired to learn about all areas mentioned in the questionnaire and about 92% of respondents mentioned that the current user education programme needed to be modified with their comments for improvement on the lines such as contents of the programme , time and the structure of the programme.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the University of Peradeniya Main Library has not made any effort to get user views and feed back about the present day user education programs conducted by the Library and how the existing program should be modified according to current user requirements. The study showed that current library user education programmes do not provide proper awareness about some library resources and services of the Main Library while lack of awareness directly influenced usage of the library resources and services. Furthermore, the study explored user attitudes regarding the library user education programmes and identified user satisfaction and dissatisfaction towards library user education programmes. The information gathered in this study can be used to identify what areas need to be developed and to create a common framework for an improved

programme for the undergraduates of the Faculty of Arts.

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