



Information Literacy of LIS Students in Sulsit: Survey Results and Academic Reflections

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Abstract

This paper presents a sub-study that explores the transferability of information literacy (IL) competencies to the overall research and learning experience of Library and Information Science (LIS) students in the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (SULSIT). Also, it is focused on the application of IL competencies of LIS students in fulfilling course assignments in the educational process. The survey is a part of an international survey, implemented in eighteen countries in 2012-2013.

The analysis of the results determine three problem fields which need more attention from the academic staff in SULSIT and further improvements: 1st of them are the difficulties that students face in the starting phase of the studying process and in the initial part of the research; 2nd of them is the lack of experience with implementation of effective information search strategies; 3rd of them are the abilities of citing and other issues connected to the ethical use of works in the writing process.

The established differences and gaps in the IL of LIS students in SULSIT, compared with the findings of valid models and level of IL of LIS students from the multinational study - allow to outline the specific decisions, which are taken by the LIS departments at SULSIT, which might be useful in international context. The paper summarizes the measures, concerning the updating of curricula and learning content; the methodology of teaching and assessment; and for the effective interaction in the triangle: teaching - learning – practice

1. Introduction

1.1. Description of the International Survey

Library and Information Science (LIS) students have to be aware about the importance of Information Literacy (IL) concept and to understand its theoretical and practical implementations in the contemporary science and society.

This paper presents findings from sub-study that explores the transferability of IL competencies to the overall research and learning experience of LIS students in the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (SULSIT). Also, it is focused on the application of IL competencies of LIS students in fulfilling course assignments in the educational process. The survey is a part of an international survey, titled 'Information Behaviors and Information Literacy Skills of LIS Students', implemented in eighteen countries in 2012-2013 (Australia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Netherland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States), and a total of 1249 responses were received. The international collaboration is headed by Laura Sanders and Serap Kurbanoglu. As the data collection instrument was used the PIL survey (available at http://projectinfolit.org/images/pdfs/pil_fall2010_survey_fullreport1.pdf), designed in the frame of the Project Information Literacy, with some limitations and after permission from the authors.

1.2. The Aim

The purpose of the study is to investigate the IL skills and behaviors of LIS students across different countries, both to explore those skills and behaviors generally, and to examine the extent of differences in those skills and behaviors. In particular, this study examines the following questions:

- What strategies and sources do LIS students employ when gathering information for course-related information needs?
- Are there differences in the information seeking behaviors of LIS students in different countries?



The obtained results are summarized and analyzed: **at national level** - by scientists from the countries concerned, **and on the next stage** is a joint comparative analysis and scientific publication [1].

2. Survey implementation in SULTSIT

2.1. Background

Prior to this study, there had not been examination of research experience, information behavior and IL skills of LIS students in SULTSIT, but also in other universities in Bulgaria, training professionals in this field. In SULTSIT the survey covered students from Bachelor Programs – “Library and Information Management” and “Librarianship and Bibliography” and some PhD students and was held in December 2012 via web-based survey (LimeSurvey). From the target group of 170 students – 94 of the respondents answered to the all of the questions; 22 did not complete the whole survey.

2.2. Demographics

As regards the students' status, in the survey have participated the most actively bachelors in third (39.6%) and fourth year (21.6%) of training, followed by a second year students (21.6%), first year (10.3%) and PhD (5.2%); 1.7% of respondents skipped this question. The Grade Point Average of the respondents according to the grade scale using in Bulgaria is: Excellent (5.50-6.00) – 36.2%; Very Good (4.50-5.49) – 40.5%; Good (3.50-4.49) – 6.0%; Average (3.00-3.49) – 0.9%; 16.4% of respondents skipped this question. The distribution of the participants in the survey by gender is: female – 78.4%; male – 19.0%; 2.6% of respondents skipped this question. According to the age, more respondents are between 21-23 years (30.2%) and over 35 years (14.7%); followed by those aged 27-29 years (12.9%), 24-26 years (12.1%), 33-35 years (11.1%), 30-32 years of age (8.6%) and 18-20 years old (7.8%); 2.6% of respondents skipped this question.

2.3. Methodology

Survey questionnaire includes both closed and semi-opened (by applying a 5-point Likert scale) and one open question. Closed questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the study of frequencies and percentages, and open questions are encoded by content analysis. For the purposes of benchmarking, to the data from eighteen countries is applied *chi-square test* for correlations.

3. Results and academic reflections

The findings from the survey allow reaching reasoned conclusions and views on improving the quality of training offered by Library Management Department and Library Science Department in SULTSIT.

The results of the international study show that there are some patterns of IL levels and behavior common to LIS students in general, but that there are also some significant differences in the ways in which LIS students from different countries find and use information for course-related assignments.

What are the main problem fields in the information behavior of LIS students in SULTSIT that stand out and require corrective action? The analysis of the data outlined **three problem fields** which need more attention from the academic staff and further improvements, presented below. There are summarized the measures concerning the updating of curriculum and learning content; the methodology of teaching and assessment; and for the effective interaction in the triangle: **teaching - learning – practice**, implemented in SULTSIT.

3.1. First problems field - starting phase of studying and research

The 1st problem field is related to the difficulties of students identified at an early stage of implementation of academic tasks - the formulation of a specific topic; the choosing of search terms; the development of search strategy; the identification, selection and evaluation of the relevant information sources; the use of databases. It was found that LIS students at SULTSIT are generally more confident in the early stages of the implementation of academic tasks and experienced more serious difficulties at the stage of finding, selection and evaluation of relevant resources. This conclusion is valid for all students participating in the international study. For example, more than one-third of students in Turkey, Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Singapore, France, and Portugal express difficulty in evaluating of Web sources.

Our recommendation is to deepen the attention of faculty harnessing and application of knowledge related to academic writing and research methodology by students. Right decision in this direction was the introduction in 2012/2013 Academic Year (AY) of the compulsory discipline “Academic Writing” in



the first common semester for all first-year students in the Faculty of Library Science and Cultural Heritage (FLSCH). We offer it to bind with: incorporation as a mandatory component of the start of the learning process of students in their first year - familiarizing them in the university library with its information-retrieval systems, the organization of major collections and resources with educational literature. There are two possible approaches: library competence to integrate as the first, preparatory component in the course "Academic Writing" or to study in the form of extracurricular work, under the guidance of professor by the Department - involving, in both cases, a library specialist. Introduction to Library and familiarization with basic and specialized resources to the specialization is an established practice in universities around the world and also in our country.

3.2. Second problems field – the effective information search strategies

The 2nd problem field is established by the need of improvement of the students' preparation for implementation of effective and comprehensive information search strategies. The achievement of satisfactory results of quality information support of LIS students, we consider that can be achieved through the active use of information search systems (ISS) and databases through the whole process of education in degree "Bachelor" in various disciplines of the curriculum, integrated in the methodology of teaching and assessing the progress of students. The teaching staff, especially in the specialized disciplines can turn its attention to: putting the academic assignments related to the implementation of various effective techniques for information retrieval; discussion of approaches applied by the students; analysis and evaluation of the quality of presented bibliography.

The importance of this recommendation is underscored by another finding of the study of information behavior of LIS students at SULTSIT. In the process of information provision of the implementation of academic assignments, students very rarely use resources requiring complex strategies for information retrieval, most actively are consulted their notes from lectures and literature respectively recommended by the teacher. Considering the fact that the main and additional literature is important for the students in the respective discipline - it is concluded on the necessity within the learning process for students to be challenged ourselves to perform information search studied and discussed problems. Thus future librarians will gain the necessary skills, experience and intuitive and will build as competent information professionals.

The study found the fact that in addition to lecture notes, priority is the use of Wikipedia and Internet search engines and hardly ever scientific databases provided by the library as an information source for preparation of academic assignments from LIS students at SULTSIT. Moreover, respondents said they have difficulty to decide which academic databases to use, and are hampered by the very big amount of document's search in scientific databases. It is interesting to mention that covered by international survey respondents - students from the US, Australia and Singapore are characterized by the active use of scientific databases, but nearly a third or more students in France, Lithuania, Turkey, and Bulgaria indicated that deciding which database to use and finding articles in a database is difficult. All students report relying heavily on search engines, but students in France, Bulgaria, Turkey, Portugal, and Poland report much higher uses of Wikipedia. This finding troublesome because in the modern information society, all ICT literate people use independently and actively search engines and Wikipedia for its diverse information needs. If students, future professionals in the library and information field due to familiarity and comfort of these sources also use them priority - they could not add value, innovation and quality in information searches of their readers [1]. The usefulness of the library and information professionals as information managers and partners of the social development is threatened. LIS students must learn advanced and sophisticated search strategies in order to be more efficient and effective in their searches and bibliographic products than other populations.

3.3. Third problems field – citing and ethical use of works

The 3rd problem field is related to the need of the librarians and LIS students to understand what constitutes the plagiarism and the proper citation of sources. An issue of concern is the perceived level of difficulty that LIS students (not only at SULTSIT, and all covered by international study) meet with the citation of works and with the prevention of plagiarism in the writing process. LIS students have a professional obligation to know and observe the law related to the protection of intellectual property (IP), in particular copyright and related rights and the existing exceptions and limitations for libraries in support of education, research and personal development. Therefore, an important component of information competence of library professionals in the modern information environment is copyright literacy. Knowledge of IP today is a core integral component of the educational content of



LIS curriculum [2, 4]. In their future career the LIS students increasingly will have to be in the role of copyright advisors for the legal use of collections and resources, incl. in the digital environment; copyright literacy trainers and participants in the creation and implementation of institutional copyright policies [1, 3].

3.4. Academic Reflections and Recommendations

The established differences and gaps in the IL of LIS students at SULTSIT, compared with the findings of valid models and level of IL of LIS students from the multinational study - allow to outline the specific decisions, which are taken by the LIS departments at SULTSIT, which might be useful in the international context.

Priority is reviewing the curriculum content and teaching methodology of disciplines related to: cataloguing, classification and indexing of documents; information management; information retrieval; information provision; academic writing.

In response to these findings, prominent in the review of the first statistics of the survey, in the curriculum of Library and Information Management specialty in 2012/2013 AY was introduced two separate compulsory courses with building character – “Library and Information Services” and “Information Literacy - programs and models”. Also, there are the obligatory disciplines: “Information Management”, “Automated libraries”, “National Bibliography” and “Intellectual Property”. As electives academic courses there are suggested: “Quality Management of Library and Information Activities” and “Intellectual Property in Internet”. For implementation of the theory-practice interaction in the fifth semester students take 90 hours training practice in the real working environment of library institutions, and in the seventh semester have specialized practice with preparation of coursework. Some updates in the curriculum of Bachelor program Librarianship and Bibliography are also made. Mentioned educational plans are in force from AY 2012/2013, now in its fourth year. We offer in 2016/2017 AY again to be held the questionnaire survey - in order to register the achieving positive change in the behavior information, experiences and information literacy of LIS students at SULTSIT or more steps are necessary to rethink the teaching strategy, methodology and educational content.

4. Conclusion

Satisfactory results in regard the information competence of LIS students at SULTSIT could be achieved through the active use of information search systems and academic databases in the whole process of education in degree "Bachelor", integrated in the methodology of teaching and assessing at the various disciplines of the curriculum, and with the commitment and contribution of the entire teaching staff. It is necessary to achieve a new quality of cooperation with the university library and other partners from the library sector.

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