

Undergraduate perceptions of information use: the basis for creating user-centered student information literacy instruction

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Most higher education institutions are undertaking projects aimed at enhancing student information literacy. Unfortunately, the typical approach does not take into account undergraduate perception of information literacy. Designing information literacy instructions without incorporating the student perspective leads to what Webber and Johnson refer to as "inappropriate pedagogic strategy." To adequately address the needs of student learners, a user-centered approach must be adopted that reflect the complexities inherent in the current information environment.

This study was conducted with the objectives of investigating undergraduate perceptions of information use. It utilized a phenomenographical methodology to reveal the conception of information use held by undergraduate students.

Study was conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya, situated in the greater Colombo area whose undergraduate population is approximately 2500. The data for the study was gathered from a selected sample of 150 undergraduates from the faculty. While these findings about undergraduate conception of information literacy may not be generalizable, the results provide important clues about student perception that may apply to other academic institutions' undergraduate populations as well.

The research protocol intended to recruit participants representative of different majors, year levels and gender composition of academic community. Interviewing is the most commonly used method of data gathering in phenomenographical research. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Second-order questions are an integral part of the phenomenographical interview method.

The analysis of the data revealed three distinct conceptions reflecting the experience of information use held by undergraduate students:

- Category One : Sources - Information use is seen as finding information located in information sources.
- Category Two : Processes - Information use is seen as initiating a process.
- Category Three : Knowledge base - Information use is seen as building a personal knowledge base for various purposes.

Undergraduate information literacy training that focuses on a list of skills or attributes is inadequate and does not thoroughly address students' information literacy needs. A relational approach should be employed to embed information literacy values into course curriculum that focuses on students conceptualizing information use in increasingly complex ways. Knowing the three ways that undergraduates conceptualize information use will allow the creation of user-centered information literacy pedagogy designed specifically to strengthen student learning. This will result in students capable of using and understanding information deeply and comprehensively. Enhanced information literacy will give students an edge academically, in the workforce, and throughout their lives.

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