

Information literacy skills development of undergraduate students at the University of Kelaniya library: findings of the preliminary survey of the new student intake – 2006/2007

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Policy makers and administrators dealing with the higher education system of the country have now recognized the need to improve the quality and relevance of university graduates. In order to achieve this objective, it has become essential to develop the skills and attitudes required for the 21st century citizens in addition to the transfer of knowledge. One such set of skills required for the life-long education is information literacy skills. To-date, the university library system in the country has not addressed this issue with the requisite coverage and depth. Only exceptions are general library orientation programmes, a few attempts with a subject focus groups, and library publications prepared with the aim of educating users of the library resources, services etc. available in a given library.

In order to develop and implement a suitable programme at the University, considerable amount of background studies and preparation is necessary. As such a survey was carried out among the new batch of students admitted to the university for 2006/2007 academic year. A questionnaire was sent to all students registered for the Faculties of Commerce and Management Studies, Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences. Out of 1,976 questionnaires sent 95% responded and a random sample of 1,000 responses analyzed. This sample included 135,305 and 560 students from Commerce and Management Studies, Science and Humanities/Social Sciences (combined as Arts) faculties respectively having more than 50% sample size.

The data analysis revealed that 99.8% of students came from schools with a school library. The size of book collection according to their estimation was 2000 or more for 70.3% of students. 98.3% of students said that there was a school librarian, while 47.7% said they have followed some type of library instructional programme. In respect of the use of library resources and services, their responses were as follows:

Library visit at least once a week 43.4%, Use of encyclopedias 11.9%, Use of year books 13.5%, Use of computers 83.1%, Use of the Internet 31.6%, Use of Email 19.1%, Use of Google 13.4%, Use of Yahoo 19.9%

In a scale of 1 (lowest priority) to 6 (highest priority), students have identified the use of library for gaining subject knowledge (with an average of 5.32) followed by for completion of assignments (4.01), to obtain books otherwise not available (3.87).

In order to identify whether there is any similarity or significant difference in respect of important areas according to their study streams, these data was again sorted and analyzed according to the three basic streams encountered, i.e., Arts (Humanities / Social Sciences), Commerce and Science.

Study shows that there is a significant improvement in science based students against the other two streams in respect of use of encyclopedias, English proficiency and the use of Internet and its services.

Key words: Information literacy skills, Library and information science, Undergraduates, Library use, Higher education

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