Patterns of Information Seeking and Use among High School Students Writing Final Papers

Michal Bibi

Abstract

The fast development of information and communication technologies during the recent decades have posed us with the challenge of providing our students with better information skills, in order to prepare them for a society in which computer use is an integral part of everyday life.

It has been widely recognized that educational institutions aiming to prepare their students for life in the 21st century, must provide those students with information skills, along with the basic, more traditional skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. In order to develop and apply information skills, students have to be familiarized with the school library and the search tools it offers.

The Current study examined patterns of information seeking and use of both printed and electronic information resources among high-school students who wrote final research papers, as part of the requirements towards the matriculation diploma, equivalent to 4-5 matriculation units. The questionnaire, devised especially for this study, was filled out by 200 students in various Israeli schools from all around the country. All students had written their papers on topics from the humanities, the social sciences or the sciences.

Main Findings: The use of computerized information sources was not found to be common among high- school students writing final matriculation papers. Only half of the sample population used a computerized catalog or the Internet, and only 31 students (15.5%) used computerized bibliographic databases. Most students were not aware of the advantages inherent in computerized information resources – the ability to formulate complex search strategies and to utilize various sophisticated functions. Most students showed little or no interest in the various details of bibliographic records.

Another distressing finding concerns the instruction offered to students regarding library tools and resources. Most students received little or no instruction. In those cases when the tutor was a school teacher, he was found to be little involved in providing guidance concerning the library and its resources.

Several variables were found to be correlated. Gender was correlated with the following variables: the extent of computer and Internet use, the scope of Internet searches, the topic for the final paper, and the publication format. In addition, patterns of use of computerized information databases were found to be correlated with the topic of the final paper.

A correlation was also found between the computerized information resources used in the search for bibliographic material, and the number of references cited in the paper. A positive correlation was found between the pre-planning of search strategy and variables like the number of matriculation units awarded for the paper, the use of analytic search strategies or internet browsing, and the use of a computerized database.

Searching the Internet was correlated to the following variables: past computer training, Internet connectedness at home, and the extent of computer and Internet use at home. The above findings confirm former ones, according to which prior computer experience enables the user to adopt a mental model of search processes, which facilitates computerized searching. A correlation was also found between the extent of library use and several other variables, such as past computer training and computerized catalog searching.

The findings of the current study seems to indicate a disparity between the prevailing notion that information skills are as important as other basic skills and should be taught as such, and the relatively limited application of such skills among high-school students. The mere fact that vast amounts of information have become accessible to us, does not guarantee optimal utilization of the available search tools.

Our main conclusion in light of these findings is that in order to allow students to maximize the scope and efficacy of their interaction with computerized resources, information skills should be taught formally in schools. In addition, the teacher's role in developing and assimilating "computer-culture" among students should be reexamined.

System No.
481269

Library of Information Science הספריה ללימודי מידע
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel 52900 אוניברסיטת בר-אילן, רמת גן, ישראל
Website www.is.biu.ac.il/library Email: Ruthi.Tshop@mail.biu.ac.il Tel. 972-3-5318163 .טל