Information Sources Used in Master Theses in Nursing during 1986-2002: a Citation Analysis/

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Abstract

The goal of any library is to answer to the information needs of its users. However, the difficult question many libraries face is how to determine these needs. One accepted method is to survey the information sources used by library patrons in writing research papers and articles. The purpose of this study was to determine the information sources used by students of nursing in Tel Aviv University in their MA theses, thus allowing the collection building librarians to check if the current collection building policy is consistent with the needs of the students. The study can also serve as a basis for comparison for other directors of academic medical libraries regarding their libraries, as well as for researchers who wish to compare citation patterns of students in other disciplines.

The main research tool was citation analysis of bibliographic lists, appended to the theses. The sample included 209 MA theses and MA project papers, randomly selected from theses and projects submitted during 1984-2002 and listed in the catalog of Tel Aviv University Library of Life Sciences and Medicine. Fifty theses were selected of each decade (the 80's, the 90's and 2000). Forty projects were selected from each of the following decades - the 90's and the 2000 (there were no projects in the 80's). A maximum of 65 references were sampled from each bibliographic list, summing-up to 12,380- references.

The parameters examined regarding each thesis or project were decade and year of submission, author's gender, main topic, language, total number of references, number of references in English, Hebrew, and other languages, length of the thesis and length of the literature review chapter. Parameters examined regarding the characteristics of each cited reference were: type of publication, main field of publication, year and language of publication, age of the cited reference, and number of its authors. In addition to these parameters, names of authors, titles, and publishers as well as places of publication were also recorded. Statistical analysis was done by SPSS 11.0 and Excel 97.

Main findings regarding the citing sources are: the majority of authors are women. The main topics of the projects deal with professional aspects of nursing: Education, Nursing, Quality Assurance, Health Care, and Nurse Patient Relations. On the other hand, the theses deal with topics pertaining to the social sciences: Patient-Psychology, Patient-Education, and Family Psychology. Projects tend to be shorter than theses. Length of these sand projects has been decreasing over the years, but with different rates: theses decrease 4 pages per year while projects decrease 1.5 pages only. The typical length of the literature review in both theses and projects is 10-19 pages. The total number of references tends to be higher in theses than projects. On the other hand, the number of references in Hebrew is lower in theses than in projects. Nevertheless, in both theses and projects, the language most cited is English, with little use of sources in other languages.

The main findings of this study regarding the characteristics of the references are: the main formats of publications used in both theses and projects are journal articles, books and article collections. The citation rate of theses and dissertations does not exceed 3% in either theses or projects. Thus the assumption of the cataloging department in the Tel Aviv University Library of Life Sciences and Medicine, which states that there is extensive use of theses and dissertations as a main source, was not confirmed. The majority of references in theses are from the fields of sociology and psychology, while the majority of references in projects are published within one decade prior to the year of citation, and no citation older than 29 years was found. The "Half Life" of references in theses is 8 years, while in projects it is only 6 years. The vast majority of references were written by one or two authors, and there is a general trend of declining use of books and increasing use of journal articles as far as can be judged from the bibliographic lists of the theses and projects checked.

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