# Evaluating the effectiveness of bibliographic instruction for term paper / Rachel Livne

**Abstract**:

Bibliographic instruction today constitutes one of the main functions of the library, with the emphasis on the imparting of skills of locating, accessing and retrieving various types of bibliographic material using bibliographic tools and aids, computer software, and data bases. In the era of the information revolution, it is very important to provide skills for using focused access and retrieval methods, based on the creation of search strategies designed to suit the defined objectives of the information consumer.

The recognition of the importance of bibliographic instruction has led to the creation of a broad range of instruction programs for schools and academic institution, particularly in the USA and Europe.

The literature contains descriptions of instruction methods and technologies adapted to the requirements of the institutions where the instruction is conducted. The methods vary with the technological developments which provide new means for location information, and with the objectives faced by the information consumers – the pupils and students.

While instruction programs and systems are extensively described, little effort has been made to examine and evaluate their effectiveness. The programs evaluated are mainly local instruction programs within academic institutions; however, no research has been done to obtain more generalized findings or to create standards for effective examination of such program.

The present study has a practical orientation, setting out to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of an "intervention program" such as the giving of bibliographic instruction to secondary school pupils writing a final project paper.

This study was conducted at the Vardimon Library at the Sha'ar Hanegev school complex in the Western Negev. 54 tenth-grade pupils at the Sha'ar Hanegev Joint school, participated in the study. The study set out to determine to what extant pupils adopt

systematic, structured and graduated strategies in the search for and retrieval of bibliographic information using existing bibliographic tools and aids.

The study investigated the ways pupils searched using a wide range of bibliographic materials – computerized cataloging systems, data bases, indexes, and manual and computerized thesauruses.

The study also set out to determine the extent of the independence or dependency exhibited by pupils during their search for bibliographic material to prepare a final project paper.

The main hypothesis of the study was that a group of pupils that had received formal bibliographic instruction, and had engaged in developing search strategies, would exhibit a greater level of proficiency in preparing bibliographic material for a particular research work than a group of pupils who had not received such formal instruction. The study looked at the extent to which bibliographic material was used, systematic search and retrieval skills employed, and extent of independence versus assistance seeking behavior exhibited.

The intervention program – the instruction – was given to an experimental group of 28 pupils. Another 26 pupils formed the control group.

The program contained two stages:

The first stage consisted of a 3 month instruction program made up of 8 lessons based on four didactic components:

a. Familiarization with and search of consultative references – encyclopedias, lexicons and atlases
b. Ways of searching for and finding interdisciplinary materials.
c. Ways of searching reference books – monographs and compilations with the aid of bibliographic tools.
d. Locating of articles using indexes and thesauruses.

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The instruction lessons were accompanied by exercises, and included presentation of material relevant to the project paper on the subject of "The Second Temple Period in Annals of Jewish History".

The second stage consisted of evaluation of the instruction program. This was done by means of a principal questionnaire administered to the pupil and a bibliographic control questionnaire completed by the study coordinator. The two questionnaires were submitted to the coordinator when pupils submitted their final project paper.

The results of the study indicated distinct differences between the two study groups with regard to the main elements of the study hypothesis:

- The use of different types of bibliographic sources such as books, articles, and encyclopedias was far more extensive in the experimental group than in the control group. This was evidenced by the overall number and variety of bibliographic items employed, with particular emphasis on searches of articles.
- In the use of systematic search and retrieval skills, it was found that a graduated search approach was adopted from the general to the specific, from delineation of the subject boundaries using encyclopedias, lexicons and atlases, to the focus on research articles on the subject being studied. It was also found that searching of interdisciplinary material in the library had been undertaken, enabling the subject matter to be approached from different angles, and avoiding a one-dimension perspective, liable to hinder understanding of the subject.

No distinctive differences were found in the form of the searches – use of the computer (Aleph system), principal bibliographic materials (encyclopedias, books and articles) and any other types of search.

There was also no significant difference in the extent of independent working evidenced by the participants in the preparation of their final project papers.

The conclusion drawn from the study findings  are that the running of a formal bibliographic instruction program is highly effective; it is likely to result in the better

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assembly of a relevant bibliography, both in terms of quantity and in terms of the variety of bibliographic items employed; and it may well lead to the formulation of a systematic search strategy that is structured, proceeding from the general to the specific, employing broad-based, comprehensive and interdisciplinary searching, based on an interdisciplinary orientation to the research.

Instruction in the systematic accessing and retrieving of information will lead to the use of sophisticated and innovative bibliographic tools and aids – computerized information systems, data bases, computerized catalogs, and effective use of indexes, thesauruses and other search tools.

Bibliographic instruction does not entirely eliminate the need for the assistance and support of librarians and information specialists. Rather, such instruction must be reinforced in order to strengthen the researcher's independence and confidence, and enable him to search for and locate the information he needs both in the short term and in the future.

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