ABSTRACT

This study attempt to discover the information literacy competencies of the final year undergraduates at the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology, University of Malaya, their information seeking behaviour and problems encountered during the process of writing their final year project proposal. The context of the study is the information literacy behaviour and abilities indicated within an Information Literacy Framework developed based on the Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education by the Association of College and Research Libraries and the Information Literacy Standards by the Council of University Librarians, Australia. The study participants comprise of Computer Science (CS) and Information Technology (IT) final year undergraduates who are required to undertake a Final Year Project. The proposal writing stage of the final year project requires the students to choose a project title, conduct an extensive literature review, as well as identify similar systems in the domain they are developing and write these in the first three chapters of their report. They are expected to be computer and Internet literate by virtue of being adequately exposed to the CS and IT programmes for at least 2 years; and they are expected to be information skilled as they have taken a 1-credit “Information Skills” course offered by the University Library in their first year. The design of the study is divided into two phases of data gathering. The first phase was a survey. In total 439 (93%) questionnaires were returned, out of which 360 (76.5%) were usable and form the basis of the analysis. The demographic variables, programme of study, gender, indigenous status, grade point average and geographical background were cross tabulated to ascertain relationships. The second phase of the study was the diary entries and subsequent in-depth interviews with 14 participants who volunteered. Findings revealed that the undergraduate were aware of their need for information, from the moment they have to choose the topic for their Final Year Project. Overall 92.5% reported that they used the Internet to understand the possible scope of their project. Other sources include past year project reports (81.9%), guidelines from lecturers (70.6%), books (69.4%), friends (62.5%) and other reports (50.3%). About 57.5% of the respondents conducted surveys and interviews to gather information from their respective sources. When searching through search engines or databases, 98.1% used keyword search and 90.8% used subject search. The respondents knew the criteria to be used to measure reliability, validity,
accuracy, authority, up to date ness and biasness of the information gathered. Respondents from both the survey and interviews were aware of ethical issues concerning the use of information. However, they consciously accept the use of pirated software as well as cutting and pasting information obtained. Generally over 80% of respondents needed help in searching from electronic databases (73.6%), digitised information (67.9%) and the Internet (59.7%). Respondents kept abreast by reading materials, which they have listed. The results have provided an insight and understanding of information seeking behaviour and information literacy competencies of Computer Science and Information Technology undergraduates in general and provided a behavioural model, which librarians and educators could consider when planning, implementing, assessing or reshaping information literacy programmes.
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