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E-Libraries: Managing E-resources and E-Services in Academic Libraries in the Caribbean

Abstract

The landscape in which we live and operate has been influenced by many changes which have impacted tremendously on our various activities , whether it is in our homes, schools, universities, communities, businesses, or the various institutions through which we are all interconnected. Within this knowledge-based society information and communication technologies have influenced and contributed a great deal to these ever increasing changes.

Universities and other tertiary institutions have over the past decades restructured and reengineered their operations and processes so as to be more efficient, effective and relevant to meet the diverse demands of the various stakeholders. Libraries are critical to the effective operations of these universities and therefore have to adapt to these changes so as to meet the needs of students and faculty. Many libraries have experienced the emergence of new services especially in the areas of information access and delivery to patrons. Students and other information seekers welcome this new mode of access but there is also cause for concern especially as this relates to quality and use of the information. The paper will identify and discuss some of the related issues and will analyse the findings of a survey administered to students at the UWI School of Education on the use of the various databases and other web resources.

Introduction

The twenty first century has brought many changes, challenges and opportunities to all institutions but certainly the impact on our educational institutions has been phenomenal. These changes have occurred at such rapid pace that it is almost difficult to comprehend much less to keep abreast in any systematic or coherent way. There can be no doubt that the advent of the internet and the global technological infrastructure have brought not only competitive advantage to companies but also empowerment to employees (Van Brakel, 1997). Hernes (2006) in describing the changes caused by globalization describes them ‘as the increasing flow across borders and boundaries-national, economic, cultural, technological- of people, goods services, ideas, information, images and values”(p.41). Secker quoting Martin also describes this era as having “a Society in which the quality of life, as well as prospects for

social change and economic development depend increasingly upon information and exploitation, (Martin,1995,3).

Over the last two decades there has been more sophistication in the technological structure resulting in increase in the speed of data processing and the increased capacity of computers, as well as the ease and availability of data transmitted instantly. La Velle(2000, 99) describes this as “living in a global capsule with the world at our fingertips, no more than a few clicks of the mouse away.” The growth of e-resources over the years have been phenomenal, with the growth in these various e-resources seen as significant and critical opportunity for the changes taking place in education as well as the shift towards student independence in learning (McDowell, 2002). With this wide range of information available ,it is however important that students and other users develop the necessary capability to deal with all this information. According to McDowell , students do not only require the basic generic information skills but a knowledge of the discipline and capability to handle the complex information(P.255). The research indicates that information use among students is multifaceted which means that students do not only require the basic information skills but a knowledge and capability to handle the complex information.

The global realities have shown that electronic resources play a critical part in everyone’s lives and that the impact of e-resources on institutions especially libraries has been one of constant change. Younger (2002) describes the first CD-ROMS as almost book-like (p. 20).Many librarians like myself can associate with them as we kept these CD-ROMS as reference, and they were indexed to make sure that the readers knew what were available, and then there were certain restrictions placed on their use , because of the fear that they may be damaged or lost. This almost restricted access to the material has changed drastically as access to information through the world wide web is opened and available to everyone. There is no doubt that the shift has taken e-resources over that year and has affected the way our client’s access to information and use it.

Libraries and the Electronic Environment

The technological changes have also impacted on the skills that librarians have and also on the services which are offered y the different libraries. Libraries in order to offer these new services and also respond to the needs of their clients must work with other professional groups such as the technologist and web designers to accomplish the various tasks. These libraries, especially academic libraries have to spend a large part of their budget investing in these resources. Within the new electronic environment the library user or researcher can access the information that he needs from the desktop and at home, work or where he/her chooses. The web-based information is no doubt extremely important and has given users the facility to access information. As Mayo(2004) points out there can be no doubt that the worldwide web is so powerful and accessible in that it gives the readers 24/7 access and is available from the comfort of the place of one’s choice. These resources are available in many formats and services, such as: electronic databases, electronic journals, online catalogues, online books , tutorials and reference services.

Access to information

With the increasing technological skills and changes, the expectations and demands from the various stakeholders of the libraries have changed. We find that individuals have been using the online facilities in their everyday lives, the online banking which includes the paying of bill from just one point, which could be from the comfort of one's living room. This of course saves a lot of time and dare one say energy as there are no long lines or wait in traffic to reach one's destination. Persons who need legal or even medical advice tend to go on the internet to find the relevant information, and nowadays when persons are diagnosed with a particular illness, the tendency is to go to the internet and check some of the popular medical websites to get some more detailed information and opinions on this particular illness. There are persons who do a chat room to discuss this further. This ease of accessing information in one's daily life and in carrying daily tasks can also be translated into the ways that students now want to use the library. Students, faculty and other stakeholders do not necessarily want to go to a library to find out whether a particular book is available, but if the information can be accessed from homes, workplace or office then there is great satisfaction for the clientele. The information age therefore is characterized by this electronic resources, most of this can be described as uncontrollable as a result of the "internet facilitating information creation, distribution and access" (Mayo 221). In this environment anyone can put what he or she likes in whatever format the User can access any of this information that is freely available. The web with its 24/7 access allows the reader to search anytime and from anywhere. This has also created the expectation especially among students that everything that is needed should be available online and some readers even become agitated if searching for the information does not produce the expected results. The students therefore in doing research use the search engines especially google to get the required information, the "googlization of information" is therefore very popular among students. As we said earlier anyone can write and upload the information on the web so users have to be quite when retrieving information to carefully assess the information retrieved.

Libraries and information resources

The technology has contributed to the storage and transmission of large volumes of information in different electronic formats. Library collections have been going through various stages of transformation, one may recall that the printed books were the main sources of the library's collections. Patrons had to go to the library to use this information, this was the same way with the printed catalogue, in order to ascertain whether a particular item is in the catalogue, the client had to physically visit the library to see what is there. With the access to electronic resources (Mayo) this has changed dramatically, the collection development policy in most libraries has moved from one of ownership to Access to information. There is the advent of new "hands on" and easily available technology which facilitates the needs of the users, and respond to the changes as they become more competent in facilitating access to the various formats and content. With this new thrust, many libraries have been subscribing to the electronic databases that are provided by various vendors; these are not exactly cheap and so some libraries find themselves forming consortia so as to mitigate the costs.

The library users consist of various forms and formats, they can be local or from a distance, traditional or non-traditional, part-time, full-time, online programmes or even students who are from overseas who are doing a particular course or training through the web.

Access to information . It must be emphasized that the services offered in most libraries include the printed books as well as the electronic formats. These include printed catalogues in tandem with the traditional card catalogues, the electronic journals and sometimes tutorials. There is the advent of new “hands on “ and easily available technology which facilitates the needs of the users, and respond to the changes as they become more competent in facilitating access to the various formats and content. With this new thrust, many libraries have been subscribing to the electronic databases that are provided by various vendors; these are not exactly cheap and so some libraries find themselves forming consortia so as to mitigate the costs.

These new services offered by the vendors differ from those of the traditional libraries. There is the electronic access to the information as well as access to the databases, rather than ownership of them as was the cases of print. This access to the subscription is very expensive and developing countries experience much difficulty especially with a foreign exchange crisis as is evident in Jamaica. There is also the licensing agreements which demands certain skills in negotiating, and the archiving of back issues (Mayo).The use of technology has allowed libraries to improve in the offerings of the quality of services offered to its patrons, this can be multi- access in that many users can search and access the databases at the same time, there is the full text access which means that the patrons have access to the full article online. This can bring some compromise as this relates to the quality of articles especially among those who are called the “Google generation”. There is the availability of course reserves which are also available on the web through special programmes; 24/hour electronic access important to students who tend to do multitasking from home or other comfortable environs. The paper will now use examples from the UWI Libraries to show the use of some e- resources by students of the School of Education, special emphasis will be on the databases .

University of the West Indies Library and the UWI School of Education, Documentation Centre

The University of the West Indies was established in 1948 to serve the needs of the university community and other researchers within the region. According to its web page The University now operates from 4 campuses with the advent of the open campus and “delivers high-quality education, research and services to all the 15 contributing territories as well as Turks and Caicos Islands. Each campus has a library attached to it which was established to serve the needs of the stakeholders. At the Mona campus, the- Main library was built in 1952 and houses the Arts and Humanities, Education, law Social Sciences as well as General Reference (Library’s web page). There are also two branch libraries, the Medical Branch Library and the Science Branch library which both fall under the main library administration. There are also other departmental libraries which are funded for the most parts from the departmental budgets.

The School of Education Documentation Centre was established in 1967 to “support the Education thrust and to provide access to a comprehensive and relevant up to date information especially as this related to the Caribbean.” The Centre operates in collaboration with the main library to provide the information for faculty and students, and as part of the rationalization plan avoids duplication of materials. In fact the Main library has the responsibility for purchasing all books and other required material for faculty and students so that there can be no duplication of materials.

Use of E-Resources

The University of the West Indies in its strategic plans 2002/2007 and 2007-2012 provide definitive information for the student. One of the strategic aims of the University 's plan is "to prepare a distinctive graduate for the 21st century ""with the following attributes a critical and creative thinker.....knowledgeable and informed; IT skilled and literate... and a lifelong , self motivated learner, (2007, 15). The University in its strategic plan emphasized the need to modernize the teaching and research infrastructure so as to compete for the best students and to enhance its relevance and competitiveness (13). The plans articulate a student-centered institution, facilitation of lifelong learning, expanded opportunities for continuing professional education, the use of information and communication technology and the upgrading of the library facilities including 24/7 access.

The library's web page is regarded as a very important marketing tool as it provides the gateway to access the relevant information. The library's web page at the UWI Mona library provides the avenue where all the patrons can access the information electronically. There is the Online Public Access catalogue (OPAC) which provides a listing of all the materials in the library. Accompanying this is the tutorial which guides the reader as to the " how " to use the catalogue. There is the electronic reserves which can be accessed online and the many databases which include the international databases of scholarly peer reviewed articles. The library also provides training for students and other patrons on the searching strategies to these databases so as to maximize the information that is accessed. Other electronic areas are the electronic reserves, electronic journals and subject portals and then there is question point (Virtual Reference Point) and Net library.

A questionnaire was administered to some Masters and PhD students and a smaller amount given to some undergraduate students registered in the School of Education to ascertain their use of the internet facilities including the subscription databases. It was also trying to ascertain whether the students were familiar with the various databases that were available through the Main library's web page.

In response to the question on the use of the various search engines, some 98 per cent of all the students said that they used google engine to assist in their research. The University library subscribes to some twenty one (21) databases, some of which can be accessed from home and some of them also have full text peer reviewed articles.

OurVLE is a common learning space for students and instructors to interact, synchronously and asynchronously to collaborate during the learning process and to have access to the course resources through a variety of media. It is used to post news items, assign and collect assignments maintain blog and post electronic journals and resources.

In response to question on the use of OurVLE, some 68 per cent of the students said that they use this facility. This is not surprising as is an online teaching learning system which operates as a management course system and most lecturers do post their assignment and course work there.

The databases as was said earlier provide scholarly research and some of the articles are peer reviewed and full text. The following databases were among the well used ones, Academic Search Premier Article First, ERIC, and JSTOR. The results on the use of the databases from the graduate students show over ninety per cent all the students use the databases while the undergraduates students show that some 76 per cent have been using the databases.

In response to the question on the use of the international databases, the students were asked to those that apply. The following databases were the most used ones.

Databases	Per Cent
Academic Search Premier	14
Article First	6
First Search	18
ERIC	26
Wilson Select Plus	10
PROQUEST	24
JSTOR	26

Some of the reasons given for the use of these databases are that they were able to provide the students with full text articles and that the material found was relevant. I will describe the content of a few of these data bases . Academic Search Complete is one of the databases hosted by EBSCO and is the world's largest academic multi-disciplinary database' It provides full text for more than 400 scholarly. publications including full text for nearly 3100 peer reviewed journals. It also offers indexing and abstracts for than 11000 journals and monographs, and conference proceedings. The students however prefer to select the full text articles.

OCLC First Search database has some 15 databases . Article First index articles from the content pages of journals with some full text articles ERIC specializes in education and has both abstracts and full texts of reports and journals pertaining to education. Wilson Select Plus has full text articles in science , humanities and education.

JSTOR provides both multidisciplinary and discipline specific collections in the Arts and Sciences, Language and Literature collections .PROQUEST another database provides coverage of a wide range of subjects including education, humanities and psychology.

Copyright and Plagiarism

These two areas are very relevant to the quality of research and information accessed. Copyright covers the areas relating “literary, artistic, musical dramatic, architectural designs, maps, technical drawings, photographs, computer programmes etc..” It is the means by which creators benefit from their intellectual property, that is the work which they have created. Copying of all or part of a work without the permission of the copyright holder or without a licence will be regarded as an infringement of copyright.

In Jamaica the Jamaican Copyright Licensing Agency (JAMCOPY established in 1998) is Jamaica’s licensing body established under the copyright act to manage the reprographic reproduction rights of **various creators and publishers. These creators include writers, illustrators, musicians, journalists, poets,** visual artists, photographers.etc

Plagiarism is becoming more and more of a concern especially as this relates to information on the internet and other electronic formats. The word plagiarism comes from the Greek root for “kidnap”. Plagiarism is the unauthorized and/or unacknowledged use of another person’s intellectual efforts and creations however recorded, including whether formally published or in manuscript or in typescript or other printed or electronically presented form and includes taking passages and ideas or structures and so on.

It has been recognized that access to the online information and the reproduction of another’s work without the proper attribution has now been made easier (Mundava & Chaudhuri, 2007). At the University of the West Indies there is the promotion of the ethical use of information and some Faculties and Departments devised their own policy for students. The University itself is presently working on an overall policy. The Libraries also teach students through the information literacy programmes the strategies for searching and citing references based on the manual used. A software tool used to manage the bibliographies such as Endnote is used. There is also the software programme used to identify plagiarism when used in any course work or research.

E- Learning and Information literacy

Librarians have always been engaged in many forms of user education, such as teaching library skills, library orientation programmes or bibliographic instruction. These programmes have been combined or superseded into this relatively new concept information literacy. The American Library Association (ALA) defines an information literate person as an individual who has “the ability to locate, evaluate,

and use the information effectively from a variety of services to meet the required information needs(ALA, 1989). With so much information being generated, the user, if not being able to utilize the material effectively will not be able to produce the level of quality work. The ability to determine the information and to access this effectively and efficiently are very important characteristics of an information literate person. The evaluation and the sources of the information are critical aspects for the person seeking the information. The information literate person should understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information. It can be said that an information literate person is one who is an independent learner and strives for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation. There is the growing recognition to train users in information literacy skills and this can be one in several ways. The University of the West Indies Library has a unit called the Mona Information Literacy Unit (MILU). This Unit has the responsibility for training both students and staff in the use of the materials, There is also the online tutorial which allows the person to be self taught. The Documentation Centre also teaches the students the information skills and the search strategies. These workshops are done to help the students with their research skills and to do the proper citing of articles and so avoid plagiarism . However not all students attend these classes and not all the students understand the search strategies.

Conclusion

The University of the West Indies Mona Campus has been responding to the many challenges by the restructuring of many of its operations and by upgrading the technological infrastructures. The use of technology in the teaching and learning has also created a new learning environment. The upgrading of the library facilities especially the technological aspects also provided to faculty and students new resources and services. From the responses of some students who answered the questionnaires it is obvious that they were frustrated in searching the databases ,some complain that they were unable to find anything. Another complaint was that there were too many responses to select showing again the lack of proper search strategy which is usually taught but can also be self taught. It was also very clear that students rely a lot on google search engine to satisfy their information needs, although subscription databases that were available. The quest for full text articles was also shown from the responses. The libraries will have to apply more marketing strategies so as to have more effective use of its services.

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