Chapter 10
Access and Accessibility of Academic Libraries' Electronic Resources and Services:
Identifying Themes in the Literature From 2000 to the Present

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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the literature on access and accessibility in academic libraries identified five themes including: evaluating electronic resources and services for disabled users, examining the digital divide and electronic access in countries with limited resources, analyzing access to library collections and services, increasing access to electronic resources and services, and utilizing tools to promote access to resources. The review highlighted the importance of assessment, user studies, collaboration, skills instruction, and technologies in fostering access and accessibility in academic libraries. Assessing all users' access to library resources remains essential in identifying issues with the delivery of services and materials through the web. User studies foster improved access to resources by revealing individuals' resource and instructional needs as well their physical impairments. Collaboration among various entities supports funding, resource acquisition, and service development, especially in countries with limited resources. Instruction, like collaboration, enhances users' access through the improvement of their information and digital literacy skills. Lastly, access and accessibility of library resources centers on the use of technology to support all users' abilities to utilize libraries materials and services. Students' access to library resources and services is critical for their completion of course work as well as their development of 21st Century skills.

INTRODUCTION

A primary responsibility of academic libraries includes supporting users' access to resources and services. In the digital era users' access to the Internet, and especially the web, facilitates their use of library materials and services. However, nearly two decades following the identification of the digital divide, differences remain for information and communication technologies (ICT) ownership and access among individuals in rural areas and developing countries, within various race, ethnic, economic and social groups, as well as for persons with disabilities. In addition, library users are challenged by the proliferation of web resources that can produce information overload. Still, academic librarians strive to enhance users' access to resources and services through the adoption of web accessibility guidelines, the purchase of electronic subscription content, the digitalization of content, the use of metadata harvesting tools, as well as the acquisition and development of tools to support the organization and discovery of these materials. In this chapter the authors examine the literature on access and accessibility in academic libraries to identify the major themes relating to this topic. Ultimately this research offers librarians strategies to promote and manage users' online access to library materials and services. The future of accessibility in academic institutions must include students' access to library resources and services for their completion of course work as well as their development of 21st Century skills.

BACKGROUND

The literature highlights the importance of information accessibility to foster its use. However, as Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) remind, us the availability of information does not assure its accessibility (as cited in Ugah, 2008). Ugah (2008) pointed to five obstacles to information accessibility such as "conceptual, linguistic, critical, bibliographic and physical" (p. 3). The author also maintained the more accessible information sources are, the more likely they are to be used. Likewise, studies that illustrate the popularity of electronic journals over their print counterparts and Google rather than subscription databases, underscore users' need for convenience in accessing library materials.

In the pre-digital era accessibility of library resources included access to the building, the staff, the card catalog, and the catalog records. A variety of factors influenced users' access to materials in this period including: the library's operating hours, the knowledgeability of its staff, the circulation period for an item, the call number, the shelving layout, as well as the librarians' usage of cataloging standards and rules. The latter remained particularly important and centered on librarians' adherence to classic texts in cataloging items (Knowlton, 2008). These tools enhanced the findability of library records in the last four decades and included the *Anglo American Cataloging Rules*, the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, the *Library of Congress Classification* schedules and the *U.S. Machine Readable Cataloging* to (Briscoe & Selden, 2000, pp. 181-182).

The advent of the Internet extended information accessibility in academic libraries with the inclusion of virtual access to resources and services. Foremost, the availability of electronic resources coupled with the popularity of the web fostered its use for delivering content from subscription databases, online journals, virtual collections, the Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) as well as library services (Ewing, 2005; Jasper & Sheble, 2005; Kaur &Verma, 2009a, 2009b; McHale, 2008; Northrup & Ashmore, 2006). Libraries created webpages to provide access to their resources and also adapted services such as reference, reserves and document delivery to support users online (Buckstead, 2001; Burk, 2006; Li

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