

Chapter 47

Importance of Information Literacy

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ABSTRACT

It is said that we live in an information society. In this scenario, information becomes a key aspect in everybody's professional and personal lives. Thus, a new concept appears: information literacy. Even though information literacy is not always considered a core competency, many organizations require information literacy skills on their job offers. Therefore, every university student should acquire and develop information literacy skills during their undergraduate studies. Taking this into consideration, as a first step, students should be aware of the relevance of information literacy skills. Once they are aware of its importance, they are able to improve and develop it. Thus, the aim of this study is to analyze whether university students are aware of the importance of information literacy. Additionally, the authors analyze whether students' awareness varies after attending an information training course. In order to fulfil this objective, the IL-HUMASS survey is used.

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade an educational change has taken place in many European countries. The European Union has promoted several reforms in the university education system in order to create a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The changes introduced aimed to adopt a comparable degree system (Sanchez-Ruiz, Pérez-Pérez, Blanco-Rojo, & Serrano-Bedia, 2013), being one of their main objectives the adoption of a competency-based education system.

Among the wide range of competences that students may acquire, the relevance of information literacy has increased during the last decade as we are said to live in an information society.

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But, what does information society mean? As Webster (2006) said this concept has been extensively studied from different perspectives (technological, economic, occupational, spatial and cultural). Whatever the perspective, *they all share the conviction that quantitative changes in information are bringing into being a qualitatively new sort of social system, the information society* (Webster, 2006).

In this new scenario, information becomes a key aspect in everybody's professional and personal lives. Thus, a new concept appears: information literacy. *It entails the learning of the skills, competences, knowledge and value to access, use and communicate information in any of its forms, in order to produce competent professionals trained in the routines of identifying, evaluating and recording information sources appropriately and with the knowledge to process and produce their own information* (Pinto, Doucet, & Fernández-Ramos, 2007).

Despite information literacy is not always considered a core competence, many organisations require information literacy skills on their job offers (Klusek & Bornstein, 2008). Therefore, every university student should acquire and develop information literacy skills during their undergraduate studies. For instance, among the whole range of information literacy skills, students should: be aware of the goals for which they are going to use information, know how to use available technologies to organise and store information, be able to assimilate the key information of documents or know how to synthesise and represent essential information properly (Pinto et al., 2007).

Taking this into consideration, as a first step, students should be aware of the relevance of information literacy skills. Once they are aware of its importance, they are able to improve and develop them. Thus, the aim of this study is to analyse whether university students are aware of the importance of information literacy. Additionally, we will analyse whether their awareness varies or not after attending and information training course.

Once the objectives of this study have been stated, the structure of the rest of the paper will be as follows. First, in the next section (Background) the basic concepts of this study (European Higher Education Area, Information literacy and the IL-HUMASS survey) are explained. After this, the following section includes information about the methodology used and, after that, the results obtained in this study are presented. Next, some recommendations based in the results are made. Finally, future research suggestions are presented together with the conclusion of this research.

BACKGROUND

The European Higher Education Area

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is aimed to adopt a comparable degree system from a common system of credits (ECTS) based on two main levels –undergraduate and postgraduate– harmonizing its duration and combining the balance between basic education, cross-cutting skills, specific knowledge and discipline skills, and professional competence (Sanchez-Ruiz, Pérez-Pérez, Blanco-Rojo, & Serrano-Bedia, 2013).

Although the intention of convergence had already been expressed in the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), it was due to the Bologna Declaration that the process was accelerated. Specifically, the main objectives of the Bologna Declaration were (ANECA 2005, pp.27-28):

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