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The Effects of Information Literacy Instruction on Business Students

Abstract: Results from a survey concerning the effects of information literacy instruction (ILI) on business students are presented. The effects of ILI on student learning outcomes, and the influence of ILI on the adoption and use of online library resources and the mediating effects of self-efficacy and anxiety are examined.

Résumé : Sont présentés ici les résultats d'une étude sur les effets de la maîtrise de l'information sur l'enseignement aux étudiants de gestion des affaires. L'étude s'intéresse également à ces effets sur les objectifs d'apprentissage, à leur influence sur l'adoption et l'utilisation de ressources bibliothécaires en ligne, ainsi qu'aux effets médiateurs de l'auto-efficacité et de l'anxiété.

This presentation reports quantitative findings from a recently administered survey concerning the effects of information literacy instruction (ILI) on business students. As this presentation pertains to information literacy instruction and how a particular human population reacts to how this instruction is given and received, this presentation highly aligns with the Human-Information Interaction theme described in the CAIS 2010 Call for Papers that explicitly lists information literacy as a sub-component.

Information literacy, according to the Association of College and Research Libraries or ACRL (2006), is the set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.” These skills are vital for success in today’s business world where “information has become the leading business asset” (Kanter, 2003, p. 23). This view is substantiated by writings in the business librarianship literature that describe the critical importance of teaching information literacy skills to business students and the dire need for more instruction (Cooney & Hiris, 2003; Hawes, 1994). For example, Cooney (2005), in her survey of nearly 400 libraries of colleges and universities accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), identifies such instruction as still “evolving,” where collaboration between librarians and business faculty is described as “overwhelmingly moderate” and only a third of respondents report incorporating the ACRL’s Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education into their instruction efforts with business students.

The purpose of the survey was two-fold. The first was to determine the effects of ILI on business student learning outcomes (i.e., behavioural, psychological, and benefit outcomes). Behavioural outcomes are changes in action (e.g., improved and increased use of online library resources; improved and increased use of librarians; improved and

increased use of the physical library itself). Psychological outcomes are changes in attitudes or values (e.g., both decreased anxiety and increased self-efficacy in using online library resources; improved perceptions of librarians, online library resources, and the physical library). Benefit outcomes are positive outcomes of receiving ILI (e.g., time savings; effort reduction; higher grades; and being better prepared for the workforce upon graduation).

The second was to examine the influence of ILI on the adoption and use of online library resources by business students, and to discover how self-efficacy and anxiety mediate this effect. Self-efficacy refers to the “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, pg. 3). Self-efficacy beliefs have been found to influence the courses of action that people pursue, the level of effort they exhibit, and the extent of their perseverance in the face of obstacles and failure and their affective states (Bandura, 1997). Thus, self-efficacy is a useful construct for predicting and explaining a student’s use and acceptance of online library resources. Anxiety refers to the fear or apprehension felt by an individual, and in the case of online library resources, anxiety refers to the “fear or apprehension felt by an individual when using online library resources or when considering the use of online library resources” (Booker, 2009, pg. 18).

The survey was recently conducted at a medium-sized Canadian university. The target population was all full-time undergraduate Commerce students. To encourage recruitment, survey respondents were eligible to participate in a draw for 100 \$50 gift certificates at the local campus bookstore. In total, 409 students completed the survey (a 20% participation rate). Of these, 37 incomplete or invalid responses were removed (deduced from responses to negatively worded survey items), leaving 372 valid responses for analysis.

Note that the survey is part of a larger national study investigating student learning outcomes from information literacy instruction at three Canadian business schools. At last year’s CAIS conference, results from the qualitative analysis portion of this larger national study were presented (Julien et al., 2009). That analysis yielded the generation of a new theoretical model, based on information literacy and educational assessment theories (Boyer & Ewell, 1988; Lindauer, 2004; Sims, 1992) that explains how certain key factors of the learning environment, information literacy program components, and student demographics affect ILI student learning outcomes.

The quantitative analysis of the survey data, to be presented at this year’s CAIS conference, validates and tests an abridged version of this theoretical model. In addition, the Web survey results offer new insights on an extended version of the Technology Acceptance Model – the most widely-used model for explaining the adoption and use of an information technology (Davis, 1989; Davis et al., 1989).

Results from the survey promise to deliver theoretical contributions to the information literacy, educational assessment, and information systems literatures, as well as provide recommendations to business school librarians on how to deliver improved information literacy instruction.

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