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Resistance to Information Literacy: potential causes among undergraduate university students

Abstract: The author investigates the potential cognitive factors responsible for university students' resistance to information literacy (IL). Previous research explored different possible cognitive factors but so far no causal relationship has been established. The author, by asking students' personal opinions, is hoping to discover a relationship in order to improve the design of IL learning interventions.
Résumé : L'auteure se penche sur les possibles facteurs cognitifs responsables de la résistance des étudiants universitaires à la maîtrise de l'information. Des études ont déjà exploré différents facteurs cognitifs possibles, mais aucune relation causale n'a encore été établie. En demandant l'opinion personnelle des étudiants, l'auteure espère découvrir un lien afin d'améliorer le design des séances d'intervention en maîtrise de l'information.

1. Purpose

The purpose of the study is to identify the cognitive factors responsible for students' resistance to information literacy in order to find appropriate solution to counter act them.

2. Problem

Information literacy (IL) is most often described as the ability to recognize when information is needed and the skill to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information (CAUL). IL is a lifelong learning skill and a good example of interaction between people and information since it is a process that link people to the information they need. Previous research demonstrates that IL is important and that university students' research skills improve when taught information literacy (Chevillotte, 2010). Therefore, it might come as a surprise when students resist IL (Ivanitskaya, 2008; Badke, 2010). So, to motivate them, librarians and teachers create new techniques to teach IL. What we should really be doing is asking: 1) what are the cognitive factors responsible for students' resistance to information literacy? 2) Are these cognitive factors the same across demographic factors, like students' age, gender and university status?

The cognitivist paradigm states that human actions are a consequence of thinking, i.e., when we do something we know why we are doing it. Knowing why students find information literacy "needless" will provide useful information.

3. Background

Previously, it was assumed that because students grew up with a computer they were technologically savvy and good at research. Further investigations have demonstrated that students do perceive themselves as experts in research, but performance wise they barely rate as beginners (Mittermeyer, 2005). Mittermeyer (2005) tested 3000 university students, from 15 Quebec universities, on their IL perceptions and performance. On average 75% of first Year University students failed their IL performance assessment. Although the study provides insight on undergraduate students IL skills and validates librarians' observations of a lack of students' IL skills it does not explicitly establish a link between students' perceived excellence in research and resistance to IL instruction.

Few others scholars have suggested reasons for students' resistance to IL. Badke (2010), based on Kruger & Dunning's (1999) research on competencies, implies that students, once they reach a "knowledge plateau", oppose further teaching. Gross & Latham (2009) suggest that students' barriers to IL could come from being unaware of the exact meaning of information literacy. Although these might all be valid cognitive factors responsible for students' resistance to IL, research has not yet established this link; i.e., all three reasons remain assumptions.
A few outreach programs created to motivate student in learning IL are working, usually on a small scale or on a specific population; on the other hand several outreach programs have failed making this "hit and miss" approach haphazard to say the least (Ismail 2010). Foster & Gibbons (2007) warn that if more outreach program were to be carried out we need to know more about "today's undergraduate students – their habits, the academic work they are required to do, and their library-related needs" (v). In other words many outreach programs fail because they do not consider what students want and need.

4. Methodology

Therefore it is important to ask students why they resist IL in order to built program that will successfully motivate them. I plan to do this by:

1) Performing a literature review
2) Conducting semi-structure interviews with librarians, IL teachers and students to answer question 1) what are the cognitive factors responsible for students' resistance to information literacy?
3) Establishing a list of possible cognitive factors and comparing it with the literature to create a questionnaire
4) Sending online survey to McGill undergraduate population to answer question 2) are these cognitive factors the same across demographical context, like students age, gender and university status?
5) Analysing data and writing thesis.

5. Anticipated Outcomes

Once we recognize the cognitive factors responsible for students' resistance to IL we will be equipped with the knowledge to find appropriate solution to prevent them. We will improve the design of our learning interventions which will amount to an increase in students' participation and motivation in IL instruction. The research outcome will have an impact on students,

professors and IL programs. In the long run the results will influence the educational system in Universities and society at large by increasing the number of students who will enter the workforce equipped with the lifelong learning skills of information literacy.

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