

Title : Distance students' readiness for an online information literacy programme: Unisa School of Accountancy as a case study

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MIS THE STUDY

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What is covered in the discussion

- **Brief background of the study**
- **Problem statement**
- **Research questions**
- **Sub-questions**
- **Clarification of key concepts**
- **Brief review of the literature**
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What is covered in the discussion...

- **Means of data collection**
- **Participants Selected findings and discussion**
- **Presentation of the study solutions**
- **Recommendations for theory**
- **Recommendations for practice**
- **Conclusion**

Background of the study

- Case study conducted on information seeking behaviour of first year students in the School of Accountancy at University of South Africa (UNISA)

What is Unisa? Who is Unisa?

- The distance education institution of higher learning in South Africa with a large scale open learning.
- Distance institution with more than **336 286** students. (See the statistics below).
- It caters for distance students who are scattered all over the globe.

Statistics of students registration per country

Nationality Grouping	Headcount	% Headcount
America	263	0.08%
Asian	434	0.13%
Australian	34	0.01%
Europe	870	0.26%
No Info	85	0.03%
Other Africa Countries	3978	1.18%
South Africa	2000000	60.0000%

The aim and objectives of the study

- This study aimed to determine undergraduate students' self-reported level of readiness to use the library's online information resources and an online learning management system.

Objectives

- **The objectives of the study were to determine: Unisa undergraduate first year distance students' in the School Accountancy...**
- self-rated perceptions of their information literacy (IL) skills.
- preferences in using online information resources
- level of access to the internet and Unisa library website and readiness in using the electronic learning management system (i.e. myUnisa).

The importance of information literacy skills

- The study alluded about the importance and implications of information literacy to distance students.
- Mentioned that distance students should be trained on information literacy skills similar to on-campus students to develop **their retrieval and searching skills** (Ritterbush 2014:26; Sreeve & Chelin

The importance of information literacy skills...

With relevant retrieval skills students will enable to:

Search the library online catalogue at a distance.

Search the spectrum of e-resources such as electronic databases, e-reserves, see prescribed and recommended reading lists, dissertations and theses, etc. at distance

Search the e-journal finder for available

Problem statement

- The main problem to be addressed by this study is that the Unisa library does not offer an online IL programme for distance students.
- A first step in the design and development of such a programme would be to determine students' needs and their readiness for using online information resources available through the library.

Problem statement

The main research question thus was: ***What are the information seeking behaviour and the readiness of Unisa distance students in using and accessing the library online resources?***

Research questions

To answer the research question and sub-problems, several sub-questions were set: (only the empirical component questions will be discussed here).

- What has been reported on IL and IL programmes for distance students, with special reference to online programmes?
- What has been reported on virtual learning environments with specific reference to distance education?

Research questions

- What are the students' self-rated perceptions of their IL skills?
- What are the students' information seeking behaviour and preferences in using online information resources?
- What are the students' readiness in using an online learning management system in a virtual learning environment?

Clarification of key concepts used in the study

Information seeking behaviour of distance students

The concept is described in this study as an individual's way and manner of gathering and sourcing information for personal use, knowledge updating and development (Fairer-Wessels 1990:361, Bansode & Nargide 2014:27).

Information literacy

IL is a "set of abilities requiring individuals to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information" (ACRL, 2000).

Distance student

Distance student is someone who is engaged in learning that is physically separated from the institution of learning (classroom, lecturers and classmates) (Mothata 2000:165).

Clarification of concepts continues...

Distance education

Distance education is the various forms of study that are not under the continual immediate supervision of tutors (and presumably also lecturers) present in lecture rooms (Holmberg 2005).

Virtual learning environment

It refers to web-based toolkits that facilitate learning through the provision and integration of online teaching and learning materials and virtual communication tools.

Digital divide

Some of the distance students face more difficulty than others in accessing a library and library services due to the digital divide which is defined in this study as the gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not. Many distance students face poor or no access to computers, the internet, printers and the required software. (Block 2010:5; Van Biljon & Renaud 2009:90).

Review of literature used in the study

- The information behaviour of students is one of the most studied topics in the field of information behaviour research but few studies report on the information-seeking behaviour of distance students.

Overall authors who reported on distance education

Holmberg (2005:47-53) Harper, Kuanchin & Yen (2004:588)

A brief history of how distance education was conducted in earlier years

It was conducted through postal correspondence. Instructors and students exchanged information such as assignments, notes and tests; timely mail delivery sometimes presented a problem.

Nickel & Mulvihill (2010:88)

In present times distance education has been moving very fast from correspondence education to online education or web-based delivery of education.

Overall authors who reported on library services to distance students their information seeking behaviours

Owusu-Ansah & Bubuama (2015:2), Kadli & Kumbar (2013:26)

Tury, Robinson & Bawden (2015), Oladokum (2014), De Groote, Schultz & Blecic (2014), Byrne & Bates (2009), Tompson (2007) Siong (2013), Thompson (2007)

In order to provide quality library and information services for distance education, distance education institutions must recognise the provision of quality library services to their students as their primary responsibility

Authors report on information seeking behaviour of distance students from various perspectives, such as issues affecting them e.g. geographical distance. They also reported on the use of the library at a distance

Continued

Authors emphasise that web-based IL instruction has many advantages, especially at distance education institutions where such programmes can enable students to learn by themselves. Such programmes can encourage self-directed learning, self-reflection and a learner-centred approach for learners anywhere, any time and at any pace.

Step taken in conducting this study

- **This study essentially involved the following steps:**
- Analysing selected literature to gain better understanding of the subject and to learn about gaps in the subject knowledge
- Identifying research objectives
- Preparing a preliminary list of research questions
- Selecting a suitable research method for the purpose of the study
- Developing a questionnaire as research instrument

Step taken in conducting the study

- Selecting the sample from the university (case study) used for the study;
- Pre-testing the questionnaire and revising it;
- Distributing the questionnaire to the potential respondents;
- Checking the data for reliability and usability;
- Analysing the data by coding the responses,

Research Methodology or research approach

- This study adopted a descriptive quantitative research approach supplemented by limited qualitative data.

Research method

- **Research method: case study survey** - Yin (2013) defines a case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context.

- **Means of data collection**

Because of the large number of participants (first-year students in the School of Accountancy, Unisa), and in order to reach students in their diversity of geographic locations, **an online questionnaire was used to collect data.**

Sampling / participants

The total number of students registered for first-year modules in the School of Accountancy was 29 685 at the time of data collection (Unisa Statistics for 2015 registrations). The statistics can be classified per department as follows:

- Department of Auditing: **2 767**
- Department of Financial Accounting: **21 372**
- Department of Management Accounting: **2 992**
- Department of Tax and Taxation: **587**
- Others students registered for accounting modules in other schools: **1 967**

(Unisa: DISA Information Service, 2016).

Sampling / participants...

- Therefore, a census approach was followed for the study, inviting all undergraduate students registered for first-year modules in 2015 in the School of Accountancy to take part. This was done to ensure that all students had the opportunity to participate.

Empirical findings

- The empirical study focused on self-rated perceptions of skills, use of e-resources, use of the Unisa library website catalogue, etc. and readiness to use an electronic learning management system in a virtual learning environment.
- It was found that a high percentage of students (91.38%) did have access to computers and 77.05% to the internet. The study, however, reported various problems in accessing and using the Unisa library website and information resources.

Findings from literature on information seeking behaviour and preferences in using online information sources

- Students reported on their information-seeking behaviour and preferences in using online information sources, such as the library catalogue: for the purpose of searching for a specific author or book title,
- searching according to selected keywords,
- conducting online requests,
- viewing their library record and renewing books.

Findings literature on information seeking behaviour

- The students were also asked if they had ever accessed the Unisa library website, and if they did, how often they used it. More than half of the students (53.22%) had never used the Unisa library,
- while 51.30% had neither visited the library through the website or as walk-in clients (physically) (70.34%).

Findings literature on information seeking behaviour

physically visiting the library and/or seeking information when in the library.

Furthermore, the majority of students (83.44%) had never received training on how to access and use the library resources to find information via the library website and the internet.

It was also found that students preferred to use different methods when requesting assignment-related information from the library.

Findings literature on information seeking behaviour

74.01% never used the Ask-the-Librarian platform to request assignment information,

41.69% never made an online request and

69.70% never sent an e-mail to a librarian to request assignment information

Findings on self-rated skills in using an online learning management system

- A minority of students (29.03%) could not access various electronic library resources when using the myUnisa platform.
- More specifically, 22.06% of students could not use the myUnisa platform to access previous examination papers,
- while 20.73% could not access recommended reading material from the myUnisa virtual learning environment.

Findings on self-rated skills in using an online learning management system

- A further 34.14% reported that they could not use the learning management system to access e-reserves, and
- 15.98% could not submit assignments using the myUnisa platform,
- while 36.38% could not interact with the lecturers.

Findings on self-rated skills in using an online learning management system

- There seems to be a need for training in using an online learning management system.
- Awareness of the library website and how it can be accessed and used remotely should be addressed first.
- Readiness to use an online learning management system should also be addressed.

Empirical findings...

- The study found that from the students 53.22% could not use the Unisa library website
- 50.39% lacked skills on how to access the library catalogue
- 56.27% indicated that they lacked skills to access bibliographic and full-text databases
- 53.40% lacked skills to access electronic newspapers
- 52.94% lacked skills to access electronic newspapers
- Apart from lacking IL skills, participants highlighted other barriers such as lack of training on IL programmes.

Empirical findings on students' self-rated perceptions of their information literacy skills

- Information literacy skills are crucial to both distance and on-campus students. These include skills in accessing and using the library catalogue to search for books and articles, and electronic databases to access articles, e-books, e-reference sources and e-newspapers.

Presentation of solution

- A distance academic library such as Unisa can use the findings to design a suitable IL training programme for distance students.
- The findings provide an indication of the types of problems to address in terms of the IL skills students lack and the skills that need to be addressed in terms of their readiness to complete an online IL programme presented through an

Presentation of solution

- The findings can be supplemented through extended surveys among wider groups of students before on the instructional design of an online IL programme. In a similar way other distance teaching libraries can benefit from the findings of this study, with specific reference to the need to conduct such a study as part of the situation analysis in designing a programme.

Recommendations for theory

- **The following recommendations for theory are suggested:**
- Aligning findings on information-seeking behaviour to decisions taken in the design of an online IL programme; and
- Exploring how theories of distance teaching, such as Holmberg's guided conversation (Holmberg 1983), Keegan's theory of distance education (Keegan, 1996), Moore's theory of transactional distance (Moore 1997) and Knowles's theory of adult learning (andragogy) (Knowles 1950), should be considered for the development of an online IL programme.

Recommendations for practice

The recommendations are specific to the Unisa library, which served as the case study, but can also be considered by other distance libraries.

Recommendations include:

- Extending the study to all students on all levels (undergraduate and postgraduate) to determine how many students do not have access to computers and internet connections;

Recommendation for practice

- Implementing an IL programme based on the ACRL standards and addressing the concerns noted as problematic to students in this study; an extended survey covering a wider selection of disciplines and study levels should be conducted first;

Recommendations for practice

- Launching a marketing campaign that will ensure that students are aware that they can access and use the library resources and services without visiting the campus or physical building;
- Exploring mobile or tablet access to the library website, e-resources and services;
- Ensuring enhanced access and internet connection, e.g. through mobile library services, and signed memorandums of understanding between the library and public libraries; and
- Negotiating with faculty to include an online IL programme in course curricula.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, this study's findings cannot be generalised to all first-year students at Unisa; the study was limited to the School of Accountancy. Findings might be different on other levels of study, and according to discipline or field of study. The value of the study, however, lies in taking note of students' access to ICT and the internet.

Conclusion...

- Their lack of awareness of the library and library resources, as well as of methods to access resources from a distance, for example e-books, articles, databases, reference sources, newspapers and reference management software.
- In order to help students to meet academic requirements and develop into critical thinkers, librarians need to explore the design of an appropriate online IL programme that specifically satisfies the requirements of distance students

Thank **you**

Define tomorrow.

UNISA

