DEFICIENCIES IN LIBRARY ORIENTATION PROGRAMS AT MALAYSIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A NEEDS ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS

NURFAEZAH MAMAT
Faculty of Information Management
University Technology MARA, Kelantan
18500, Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia
2011210642@isiswa.uitm.edu.my

MOHD NASIR ISMAIL
Faculty of Information Management
University Technology MARA, Kelantan
18500, Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia
nasir733@kelantan.uitm.edu.my

ADNAN JAMALUDIN
Faculty of Information Management,
UiTM Puncak Perdana
adnanj@salam.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present the results of a needs assessment study conducted to determine the deficiencies in WebOPAC training during library orientation programs at the Malaysian academic libraries. This paper analyzes and discusses the finding collected from the interviews with five expert librarians from the five difference public universities in Malaysia. The result shows that, there are four main factors identified in this study which are: (i) lack of logical thinking skill among students, (ii) ineffective strategy used to conduct WebOPAC training, (iii) lack of content coverage during WebOPAC training, and (iv)no standard instrument to measure information literacy competency level among students during WebOPAC training. Based on the above findings, we propose relevant suggestions as references for the development of a WebOPAC self training tool and assessment for information literacy skill development among first year students in Malaysian academic libraries.

Keywords: Needs Assessment, Library Orientation Program, WebOPAC Training, Academic Library, Information Literacy Skill.

INTRODUCTION

Today, Malaysian's academic libraries are shifting their role from collection-centered to learning-centered due to continuous changing on the academic agenda and user needs. To date, Malaysia have twenty public universities which are funded by government and governed as self manage institutions. These academic libraries serve two complementary purposes: to support the universities' curriculum, and to support the research of the academic faculty and students. According to Maitaouthong, Tuamsuk, and Tachamanee (2012) academic libraries have 4 major roles which are, (a) preparation of resources and learning sources, (b) supporting the teaching of information literacy of educators and librarians (c)

organizing learning and teaching activities to develop student's information literacy and (d) organizing activities to develop educator's information literacy. The essential objective of these libraries is to disseminate information and to make effective use of its resources to the library users. Therefore, these academic libraries have to perform its fundamental responsibility by providing effective library orientation program to users.

In Malaysia, most of the academic libraries conduct their academic orientation for their users especially for undergraduate and post graduate students. These library orientation programs are compulsory for every new student and are conducted usually at the beginning of every academic year or semester. Throughout the year, the libraries will organize program with the aim of familiarizing the students with the various tools within the libraries. This program is a way to help new students familiarize themselves with the layout, regulations, types of services and facilities offered by the particular academic library. Varying in types, most of these programs try to achieve the common goal of reducing library anxiety (Gregory & Broussard, 2011). Library orientation is both a marketing, welcoming activity and often forms part of the academic's orientation program for the first year students. Furthermore, these program help in the survival of the first year students throughout their studies at tertiary level.

According to Madhusudhan and Singh (2010) a library orientation program plays a vital role in the communication process between the library and its user by achieving its two main purposes. First is to train users to tap library resources and services and second, to instill awareness among its users about the significance of principles and practices of information skills. They also define that library orientation has to make (1) provision of guidance for understanding the features of specific information system or information in relation to user's needs, (2) provision of guidance on the specific information sources accessible through a specific system, (3) provision of guidance in the use of specific tools (e.g. online public access catalogue (OPAC) used in specific information system; and (4) developing familiarity with the outputs obtainable through a specific system. To summarize, these library orientation programs are important because it is the first step to introduce and develop the information literacy skills among new undergraduate students in these academic libraries.

Library orientation program need serious continuously improvement by academic library to develop information literacy skill among undergraduates which will allow them to function in an information society as envisioned in Malaysian Vision 2020 (Edzan, 2008). Thus, students need to be information literate as to cope with the challenges in their future studies and profession.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In most of academic libraries in Malaysia, library orientation activities are consist of library tours, hands on library system (WebOPAC), library briefings, information skills classes using online databases, lectures and multimedia presentations (Faiz & Halim, 2011; Ali, Abu-hassan, Daud & Jusoff, 2010; Edzan, 2008). Ironically, even though library orientation program in Malaysian academic libraries were carried out every semester to new students, Ismail, Dorner and Oliver (2011) discovered that information literacy education in Malaysia is still at infancy since year 2002. The most common problem faced by academic libraries in Malaysia that was reported in previous studies is basically due to conventional ways of conducting library orientation programs. The problems identified were regards to information overload, student's time constraint, varying levels of information skill among trainers, limitation of classroom and with burden to the library staffs (Faiz & Halim, 2011; Ismail,

Dorner, & Oliver, 2011; Ranaweera, 2010; Edzan & Mohd Saad, 2005; Norma, 2003). This issues was supported by Madhusudhan and Singh (2010), explained that students had a majority problems in use and searching library OPAC and internet services during attended library orientation programs. Syamalamba (2011) showed that no student use the OPAC services in the library to gather the information. It is because students do not understand and unaware the function of OPAC as a library services.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) provided a standard which is Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education as a guideline that will assist student in learning how to use the information, describe, locate, satisfies, evaluate and use the information need effectively (ACRL, 2011). Recent studies found that few problems facing during practicing information literacy training which relate to the ineffective way and strategy of conducting library tours, introductory information skills classes, and in teaching advanced information skills. The studies conclude that the academic agencies do not aware the importance and development of information literacy among students. Supporting facilities such as class spaces, funding and training coordination provided on information literacy development was not seriously manage. As the result, the information literacy training during the orientation sessions does not comply with ACRL's standards (Magnuson, 2013; Baro & Keboh, 2012; Firoozi, 2012; Husaini, Aziz, Karim, Jamin & Saad, 2011; Syamalamba, 2011; Gullikson, 2006). The major finding and supported by Rice and Gregor (2013); Gregory and Broussard (2011) concluded that the ineffective way and strategy of conducting these orientations programs contribute to the deficiencies of information literacy skill among university students.

OBJECTIVE

The main aim of this study is to determine the deficiencies in WebOPAC training during library orientation programs at the Malaysian academic libraries. A needs assessment was conducted to identify deficiencies relating to WebOPAC training and finding possible solutions to these matters. The paper will present the result and discussion on the needs assessment analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methodological issues such as the study's participants and the interview protocol and other pertinent issues relating to the study.

Participants

The needs assessment was done by collecting data from interviews with five expert librarians at the five Malaysian's academic libraries. An interview protocol to elicit information on the problem under discussion was created and used as a guideline during the interview sessions. The participation was voluntary in nature and each interview session was around an hour to two hours.

Five experienced librarians participated in the study. The selection of the participants is based on years of experience in conducting orientation programs and WebOPAC trainings. All the expert participants were degree holders in library management and have more than eight

years experiences in conducting orientation programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Two of them were awarded as an excellent librarian in their academic university.

Interview Protocol

An interview protocol was developed to elicit information concerning the librarians' perception on the importance of students' understanding in using library's services, problems and causes of problems in understanding the usage of those services. In addition to identifying the problems faced by librarians and students during the orientation program, the participants were also asked to discuss about solutions, methods and strategies they used in properly handling the orientation program and in overcoming some of the problems identified earlier.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings from the needs assessment are discussed. Based on the needs assessment from the interview conducted, all the expert participants conclude that students still had critical problems in using the WebOPAC after orientation program conducted. The researchers found that the orientation programs which were done at the five academic libraries in Malaysia generally did not follow the library orientation learning outcomes which are consistent with the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. This is because the library management is not familiar with ACRL Information Literacy Standards.

Basically, there is one major problem and four factors which contribute to the problem related to orientation programs that been identified by the expert participants and supported by the literatures. A summary of the problems is shown in Table 1 and the following discussion will be based on these one main problems, solutions to the factors contribute to the problems identified by the experts and recommendations by authors on some research possibilities as the solutions for some of these problems.

Table 1: List of factors which contribute to the problem related to orientation programs at the Malaysian academic libraries

Problem Type
Deficiencies of information literacy skill
Factors contribute to above problem
1.   **Lack of thinking skill among students**
2.   **Ineffective strategy used during WebOPAC training among librarians**
3.   **Lack of content coverage during WebOPAC training among librarians**
4.   **No standard instrument to measure information literacy competency level for WebOPAC training**

To ensure that issue, regarding to the interview conducted, the researcher considered that the library orientation program which was done at the academic libraries in five public universities in Malaysia, generally they did not follow the standards designed by ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. This is because the library management is not familiar with the ACRL Information Literacy Standards. Therefore, they believed that the library staff conducted WebOPAC training by given the

short slide presentation which is about 20-30 minutes. As the effect, after the WebOPAC training students always tend to get help from the librarian to use the WebOPAC. Hence, it shows that the student lack of logical thinking skills especially in using WebOPAC. Past reseacrh by Ralph Catts (2010); Špiranec and Pejova (2010); King (2007) conclude that student lack of logical thinking skills to evaluate information literacy, to identify the most efficient search strategy, to use scholarly information resources, and to use information ethically. This issues supported by Fabunmi and Asubiojo, (2013); Sankari et al., (2013), believed that the lack of basic skills such as logical thinking skills of information literacy will become the main problems among undergraduate students in using WebOPAC in any academic library. Regarding to the ALA 2000, reported that institutions need to recognize that different levels of thinking skills are associated with various learning outcomes. Therefore different instruments or methods are essential to assess the outcomes.

Furthermore, each participant agreed that information literacy training was conducted in a surface content due time constraints, lack of the space and places to conduct classes or session with the large group of students. This problem happens due to lack of effective strategy to the students in using WebOPAC with regards to the instruction given by the librarian. This problem supported by Rice and Gregor (2013); Baro and Keboh (2012); Yusuf (2012); Gregory and Broussard (2011); Xiao (2010) which were criticized that librarian lack of adequate instructions, inadequate information and lack of confidence in the effectiveness of IL training. Nilsen (2012) agree that lack of coordination of IL instruction at the proper scores also gives the high impact to increase information literacy scores among students.

Another problem was defined in this study which is lack of proper content coverage among librarian on conducting WebOPAC training. All the participants agree that there is no standardize or formal content and instruction given by the librarian to the students during library orientation program. Actually, participants convinced that they provided WebOPAC training based on the syllabus which are not updated date to date. Participants also said students are given a simple template that summarized of the library services information including WebOPAC usage. Additionally, Nilsen (2012) thought that the lack of librarian awareness provide the IL service and duplicate of content are the major problem of conducting information literacy courses. This issues also supported by Baro and Keboh (2012); Diep and Nahl, (2011); Ranaweera, (2010) which were identified several problems of IL content due to the lack of resources, trained staff, facilities, progress, IL policy and proper guidance.

According to the needs assessment, expert participants conclude that there is no specific instrument to measure information literacy competency level during WebOPAC training. The participants argue that the students usually are given a simple questionnaire which is measure the user satisfaction of the library orientation program. So, from the result of the questionnaire given to the students, the librarian does not know how to measure the student's information literacy skill. Additionally, they only give the questionnaire based on user satisfaction of the library orientation program. The librarian also had a problem to measure the level of information and knowledge in library skills and expectation of the service quality among students. It is because the librarians actually are not familiar with the information literacy competency standard which is ACRL IL standard. Supported to this problem, a previous study by Karshmer and Bryan (2011), agreed that there was no standardize instrument on the library program to the first year students in higher education. Actually, each librarian focusing on the different skills, covering different information and requiring different levels of interaction and participation development process (Martin, 2013).

Pertaining to the needs assessment done, the researcher found that students are very distressed when attending WebOPAC training during library orientation program conducted. It has been proved by the needs assessment done and supported by the literature review. The main problems define in this study was deficiencies of information literacy skill which are relate to the four factors ; 1) lack of problem solving skills among students; 2) lack of effective strategy of using WebOPAC; 3) lack of proper content to conduct training of WebOPAC; and 4) there is no standard measurement on WebOPAC to measure the scores of Information literacy. Actually, the four factor gives a very accurate affect to the lack of information literacy skills among students. So, there is need improvement and idea to conduct a study to overcome the problems which are to increase information literacy skill among students and academic staff in university. In other words, the ability of academic libraries to develop the library orientation programs be more effectively and achieve their goals in the development of information literacy skill especially in use WebOPAC.

CONCLUSION

Analyses of the data from the needs assessment revealed some similarities between problems identified by the expert participants and their experience in conducting similar trainings. There are gaps or deficiencies in students' information literacy skill. Four main problems were identified, including (i) the lack of problem solving skill, (ii) ineffective strategy used during WebOPAC training, (iii) lack of content coverage during WebOPAC training, and (iv) no specific instrument to measure information literacy competency level during WebOPAC training. Regarding to the four problems identified in this study, conclude that all the problem are reflected to the main problem of the library orientation program on WebOPAC training which is the deficiencies of information literacy skill among university students. So that, the library orientation program need improvement and enhancements suitable with the evolution of information technology is growing rapidly. Therefore, the need improvement and idea to conduct a study to overcome the problems which are to increase information literacy skill among university students. In other words, the ability of academic libraries to develop the library orientation program be more effectively and achieve their goals in the development of information literacy skill among university students.

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