

Information literacy in Portugal: A perspective from European Higher Education Area

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of this paper

This paper takes as general reference the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), whose creation endeavoured an educative approach of all European Union countries. A new educational model needs new skills. The informational skills constitute one of the most important requirements needed by university students in the information society context and they were effectively prioritized in the conception of the new educational models, consequently they should have an impact in the teaching-learning process.

So, it is important to know and understand how these university students are prepared in terms of competences and skills, regarding the access, (re)production, use, and diffusion of the information gathered and applied in different contexts. It is also necessary to establish a connection between apprenticeship and the acquisition of informational skills prior to the university, during the university frequency period and at the end of the university degree.

This configures a comprehensive approach that will consider the educational context, the student's informational behaviour and his personal and social contexts and demands.

In fact, those concerns and positioning are in the core of the ongoing research project that supports the present paper. It focuses on the issue of informational literacy in the actual Portuguese and European learning models and the determination of the competences contextually acquired and the intrinsic abilities to search and use (reference, assimilate and transform) any type of information. The informational behavior study in focus has two important aspects to consider: the education reforms introduced in the Portuguese pre-university schools; and the transformations introduced by the Bologna Process in the EHEA.

This project also intends to contribute to the definition of a strategy that will support the effort of Portuguese universities on getting a good performance in the promotion of information competences. The theoretical-practical model that must be reached shows the importance of the information literacy theory which is clearly emphasized in this paper.

Background

As we have mentioned, it's impossible to dissociate this subject from the Information Society environment and the impact of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Despite the global use of technologies and the massive presence of the networked environments, we can't forget its complexity and the fact that if we consider the problem of "digital divide" it is directly related with the "information divide", involving not only technology, but also the access and use of the available resources based on some abilities and skills with an interdependency of the socioeconomic (rich/poor), generational (young/old) and geographical (urban/rural) contexts, among others.

We should also consider the new educational environment - the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) – focused on a different teaching-learning process based on: the active student's participation in constructing their own knowledge; the promotion of continuous training and lifelong learning; the emphasis on the full integration of information and communication technologies in education systems, thus enabling a system of interactive learning to take root; the creation of the ECTS (European Credits Transfer System) as a new measure that recognizes the student's academic knowledge and brings major changes in the transmission and acquisition of knowledge when valuing the hours the student devotes to acquiring specific knowledge, rather than a definition based on the number of hours the lecturer teaches; the promotion of integrated education for the student, embracing the acquisition of generic, transversal and specific competences (knowledge, capacities and skills), in which access to and use of information is prioritized.

Based on these two main environments - Information Society and the EHEA – and the consequent emerging issues related with the informational literacy problematic, it will be impossible to approach this one without establishing manifest connections with the knowledge gathered and produced in the educational area and other scientific areas close to it.

Epistemologically and theoretically founded in the scientific area of Information Science, our approach assumes the existence of an emergent paradigm (post-custodial, informational and scientific) which tends to substitute or dominate the still dominant

paradigm (the custodial, historical, patrimonial and technical paradigm) and performs an inter and transdisciplinary relation mainly with Education and Cognitive Sciences.

According to the assumed conceptual premises there are some inevitable inferences implicated in the theoretical *corpus* in which this research is based and from which its results will be interpreted and that assumption allows us to develop how the approach to the informational literacy builds itself in two complementary moments or periods: (1) internal period or inherent to the Information Science; and (2) a period external to the Information Science or interactive with other approaches.

Methods used for the study

The starting point of our theoretical-practical model is the macro level of Tom Wilson's model, which must be developed, considering the research area "information behaviour", in the scope of which informational literacy belongs, and performing the inter and transdisciplinary referred above.

The research is based on the following basis:

- a) It is necessary to develop a specific study in the country in order to determine the existence or not of several information literacy standards
- b) In order to determine the aptitude and attitude of the university students the higher education information literacy level must be assessed
- c) The information culture is potentially different in distinct geographic areas of Portugal.
- d) The information behaviour is connected to expectative, needs and lifestyle.
- e) The creation of information literacy strategic program would be a warrant to an optimal way to adapt Portugal to the EHEA and to the knowledge society.

The study is being done national wide (9 districts) in order to compare regions with different developments levels. The sample includes students from the last year of high school education (12th grade) as well as university students (of the 2nd year). The idea is to compare the skills in three different moments prior to the university, during the university period and at the end of university studies. The methodology that has been applied is divided in two areas, qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative research permitted to obtain precious indications about the information behaviour, expectative, needs and the use of information in the students that are preparing to enter university education and those that are already there. The indicators obtained in qualitative research were used to design questionnaires, which are being applied in the 18 High Schools and 15 Universities throughout the country. The total sample will be constituted by approximately 2000 students.

Through the data obtained it is believed to be possible to identify the interaction between information needs and information use; the ability of acquiring competences and informational skills when comparing the before and after entering university, and inside this topic analyse the improvement level of these competences and skills obtained

according to the different courses and more important according to the different scientific area. And so, it is possible to define a map of informational behaviour at the university level.

Findings

All the results will be used to determine the weak and strong aspect in information skills in Portugal. It will be designed an informational behaviour map, at the university level, and developed a model concerning the promotion of information competences in Portuguese university students Strategic actions will be defined.

The results obtained in the first district will be presented in this paper. This first sample includes 677 students, (64,1% girls and 35,9% boys) with an average of 17,82 years (they are between 17 and 20 years old) studying 58,8% of them in the Sciences and Technologies area and 40,2% in the Social and Human Sciences.

Importance and interest of the study

The main contribution of this project is to create, in long time, a Portuguese university student and a Portuguese graduated adapted to the demands of the global society and European Higher Education Area. This investigation is unique in Portugal since it is the first time that the information culture in Portugal Universities will be analyzed at such large levels. The application of the developed model in other countries will be considered in future work.

Value of paper

A new educational model needs new competences. Portugal lives at the present a transitional period. This research considers this situation and will offer possible solutions.

The major purpose of this research is: a) to investigate the information competences levels in Portuguese universities; b) establish a link between High School and university; and c) to define an information skill strategic plan to adapt the Portuguese university to EHEA and information society.

This is completely new to the Portuguese education area and it will permit to develop comparative studies thru out Europe.

Short biographical note

Viviana Fernández Marcial, she is lecturer in Library and Information Science since 1997 and PhD in Information Science (2001) by University Carlos III de Madrid (Spain). She was teacher in this university from 2000-2002 and between 1997- 2006 she works at University San Pablo-CEU in Madrid. She is now full time teacher at University of Coruña (Spain) and associated teacher in Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain). She also collaborated, as lecturer, in other universities, Universidad Autónoma

Metropolitana (México) and Universidad de Tepic (México). She has taken part in Erasmus teacher mobility program (Teaching Staff) in Universitat degli Studi di Génova (Italy), Universidade Portugalense (Portugal) and Universidade de Porto (Portugal).

Her main research topics are Information Literacy and Library marketing. She has some papers about these subjects. Some of her articles have been published in *Revista Española de Documentación Científica* (Spain), *Scientometrics*, *Biblios* (Peru), etc. She has participated as research in several projects granted by Ministerio de Educación and Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación. Now she is research consultant of the project, coordinated by PhD Armando Malheiro senior lecturer of University of Porto, *Information literacy in European Higher Education Space context: case study of Portugal information skills*, funding by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (Portugal).

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Maria Manuela Azevedo Pinto, is a full time teacher (lecturer) in the undergraduate course in Information Science at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto (FLUP), since 2004. Her research main interests are: information management, information behaviour, digital preservation and information services management.

She obtained the graduation in History at the FLUP, in 1985. In the same year initiated is Master in Modern History, which academic component was successfully concluded in 1987. In 1996, began the Post-graduation Course of Documental Sciences (Archive), at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Coimbra (FLUC), concluded in 1998. In 2006 initiated her PhD - Doctorate – in Information Science and, in January of 2008, she concluded the "Provas de Aptidão Pedagógica e Capacidade Científica" in Information Science (equivalent to Master), both at FLUP. Superior staff member in several private companies (1985-1996), developed her activity in the Computing and Information Systems area, after conclusion of specialised and technical formation. In 1998 initiated the activity of information manager at Vila do Conde's Municipality (1998-2004) with the Project "Integrated Management of the Municipality Information System", and also cooperated as a teacher in the Post-graduation Course of Documental Sciences (Archive), at FLUC (2000-2005). In her curriculum there are papers presented in Congresses, Seminars, Workshops and other events, and also several published studies and papers.

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Letícia Silva. Student of the Master in Information Science of the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Porto (FEUP) and graduated in Information Science, in 2005, by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto (FLUP). Worked in projects related to Information Management in FLUP and in the Rectory of the University of Porto and participated as a trainer of the module Information Society in the course for Library and Documentation Technicians, of the Instituto de Emprego e Formação

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Technical equipment: Portable computer and Data show