3rd ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON THE TEACHING OF COMPUTING - DEVELOPING INDEPENDENT LEARNING SKILLS VIA THE WEB

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ABSTRACT

This poster presentation examines the impact of the web-based resources produced to develop information literacy and research skills required to complete the dissertation module for a BSc in Information Management. This module was selected because of its emphasis on independent learning, and web resources were designed to provide a support framework that would enable students to operate as effective independent learners. Preliminary findings have shown that students at the advanced level of the degree are not equipped with independent learning skills and are particularly poor at the types of competences promoted by the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL)'s Information Skills model. We will assess the effectiveness of the web-based resources to develop these skills by examining student and peer-based feedback.

Keywords

independent learning, information literacy, research skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

The poster focuses on the outcomes of a research funded by LTSN-ICS and undertaken during the semester B of the academic year 2002/3. The project was embedded in the dissertation module in Information Management delivered at the Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University. A number of themes promoted by the conference are explored. Students' progression and support are addressed through the overall evaluation of students' profiles, while assessing the effectiveness of ICT is viewed within the context of open, distance and life-long learning. Here ICT is seen as a tool to develop more complex skills of reflection and critical thinking that underpin independent and life-long learning.

The poster presentation examines students' learning profiles generated by the research through an analysis of the qualitative data recorded during supervision sessions and group-based activities and from students' feedback on the level and the quality of interaction with the web-based resources. This, together with peer-based evaluation of ilit.org, should offer a comprehensive picture of the quality and the extent of provision.

2. PREMISES UNDERPINNING THE RESEARCH

Information Literacy (IL) is defined as the foundation stone of the independent learner (ALA, 2001). IL provision in this research is based on the SCONUL's model of Information Literacy which identifies seven information-handling competences (see diagram below) and which promotes the idea of integrating Information Literacy skills throughout the curriculum to foster a culture of independent learning.
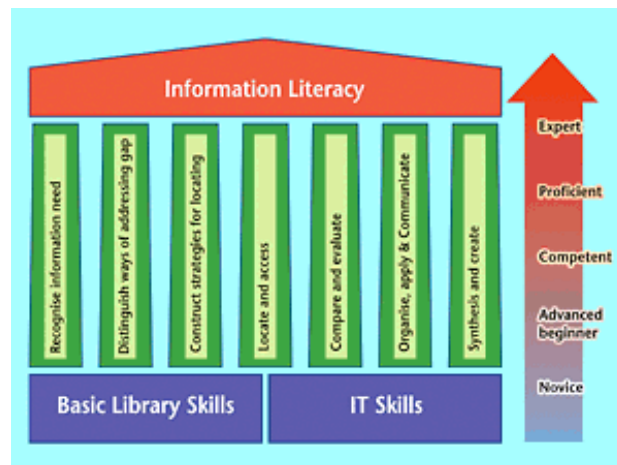

Figure 1: SCONUL Information Skills model.

2.1 Development & Delivery practices

In accordance with the SCONUL's perspective the ilit.org site was developed using a "plug and play" approach (McFarlan et al, 2002: 1) offering a flexible structure that ensures the integration of IL skills within any discipline and level of provision. In this project IL played a complementary role to the development of research skills in Information Management. The site was therefore structured according to three stages of investigation, namely: planning the project, implementing the research and

presenting the outcomes of the research. The assumption underpinning the ilit.org structure was based on the homogeneity of the sample of students participating in the project, as they displayed similar characteristics in terms of their academic profile generated by a compulsory program of study, and in terms of their needs to undertake successfully an independent piece of research. This is in contrast with the structure used for IL provision at Certificate level (the first year of the undergraduate degree) where the website operates according to three levels of competences to address the heterogeneous nature of the cohort's skills (SA, 2002). In this case access to the learning resources is determined by the level of competence of the learner categorised as novice, intermediate and advanced for the three areas of the syllabus which consists of: ICT, Searching and Evaluating, and Information Ethics (see. http://learning.unl.ac.uk/uw100/intro/introess/index1.htm)

Learning resources used to support students' dissertation work covered a range of strategies. These included task-based documentation on the process of research, which was divided into the three research stages listed earlier to break down the research process into more manageable tasks. Web-based tutorials were used to encourage the effective use and evaluation of information sources in support of the literature review. Face-to-face supervision sessions complemented these strategies by exploring the problems encountered by the students while undertaking the investigation.

3. PROJECT OUTCOMES

The main aim of this project was to provide a web-based gateway to the learning resources that would foster independent learning skills required to complete the dissertation module. The extent to which this has been achieved will be examined at the conference when the profiles of the students have been fully analysed.

4. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Frames were used to develop the ilit.org site, however a no-frame option is planned to make the site accessible to disabled users/learners, particularly those who are partially sighted.

Although this project was designed to support undergraduate students completing their dissertation, provision was extended to postgraduate level to address the needs of students who were supervised by the researcher to complete the dissertation module for the MA in Information Services Management. This illustrates an overlap between postgraduate and undergraduate students in terms of their learning needs, as both groups showed low independent learning skills. As a result of this the ilit.org website will be developed further to support the delivery of the Applied Information Research module for the MA in Information Services Management. This provision will begin in Semester A of the academic year 2003/4.

5. REFERENCES

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