The University Teachers' Attitude Towards Grey Literature: A Survey Led at the University Constantine 2

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THE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS GREY LITERATURE:

A SURVEY LED AT THE UNIVERSITY CONSTANTINE 2

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Abstract

Scientific research requires the collection of a variety of information gathered from diverse resources. Grey literature is one of the information resources that may enrich researchers' scientific works, but, in some situations, some users may not have a positive attitude towards grey literature for various reasons. We led a qualitative study at the University Constantine 2 where we arranged an interview with a representative sample of university teachers. The descriptive approach was adopted. Significant results will be presented to the audience of the conference.

Keywords

Scientific research, university teachers' attitude, grey literature, institutional digital repository, qualitative study, survey, University Constantine 2

Introduction

Researchers endeavour to identify their information needs. After exploiting the information, they collect with tremendous efforts, they seek to publish their intellectual output. Whenever they succeed in this task, they give more visibility to their research. Thus, they benefit scientifically. This process underlines the importance of gathering a variety of information from different resources. Grey literature is among the information resources researchers require to produce quality scientific works. However, in some situations and for various reasons, researchers do not have the opportunity to benefit from these fruitful resources.

Methodology

In this chapter, we state the problem and explain how we arranged the survey.

Stating the problem

We live in an era of information explosion. The output of literature is undergoing extraordinary expansion thanks to the development of the publishing process and technology. University teachers are astonished by the multiplicity of modern and evolving research tools now available. For scientific reasons, university teachers and academic institutions endeavour to produce published and unpublished works. Scientific published literature is visible and available in libraries, bookshops, academic sites, databases and so on, whereas unpublished literature seems hidden and unavailable. University teachers in Constantine had a negative attitude towards grey literature. This factor created a difficult situation for teachers who needed information in general, and grey literature in particular.

The survey

This stated problem encouraged us to run a qualitative survey to identify the basic reasons for such attitudes towards these useful resources. We adopted a descriptive approach that helped us, on the one hand, describe the phenomenon and, on the other hand, analyse the

data collected from the interview which we used to gather elements to provide explanations and predicted answers to our questions. The interview process lasted ten (10) days from 15 June to 25 June 2018. It was arranged at the Central University Library. Fifty (50) teachers from University Constantine 2 constituted our sample. Twenty-five (25) university teachers were females, while the other twenty-five (25) were males. All the selected university teachers worked in the social and human sciences. We did not experience any difficulty getting in touch with our respondents because they were colleagues, we often meet at university pedagogical meetings, scientific conferences, and when frequenting the Central University Library. Through our study, we sought to achieve he following objectives: a) to determine how frequently university teachers use this literature; b) to check whether these teachers encountered obstacles when they needed to use these specific collections; c) to evaluate the university teachers' attitudes towards grey literature; and d) to highlight the fundamental role of universities in promoting the use of grey literature.

Scientific research

Scientific research is the means used when seeking the truth concerning objects and phenomena and when identifying the relationships and links that exist between these matters. This enables us to find answers to queries and solutions to problematic situations. Scientific research is an activity carried out at universities and research laboratories and centres. It can assist society to develop and renew itself. It can also assist society in overcoming a variety of obstacles. Scientific research is an efficient instrument that enriches faculty members' knowledge, and develops their scientific experience. Students benefit when their teachers transmit this knowledge.

Nobody can deny that scientific research is fed by information and knowledge. Quality research output requires information collected from a variety of scientific documents. A great many scientific, academic and technical studies and reports are produced yet, often remain unpublished - these are useful and valuable scientific documents that can be added value for the researchers' scientific output.

Information search and the knowledge culture

Information is transmitted in many formats; it can be printed, electronic, digitized and/or audio-visual. "Information resources are understood as the totality of information gained and accumulated during the scientific and practical activities of people for use in production, management and everyday life" (Odintsov, 2012). Information search means a set of actions, methods and procedures that attempt to extract desired information from a set of documents (Dinet, Rouet and Passerault, 1998). Individuals need to be skilled enough to be able to access information rapidly and efficiently. Consequently, they should be familiar and competent with information search techniques. Nowadays, technological development plays key role in storing, processing and retrieving information available in a variety of forms and in multiple modern formats. Information users should, therefore, be competent in electronic information searches. This skill has now become fundamental, so that information users can establish search strategies and use information in a rational manner (Candallot, 2005). Nowadays, searching information in data-bases, on the internet or in a document has become a common activity accessible to all: it is no longer only undertaken by information specialists (Maury, 2011). Information professionals should, however, "Know that even

though search engines may be important tools, it is also important to help users develop a critical approach to assessing the information resources that are readily available" (Dinet, Rouet and Passerault, 1998). Competency with information search techniques permits the progressive acquisition of knowledge and culture. Furthermore, it is no longer sufficient to merely know how to use information; it is also important to produce the knowledge that is a prerequisite for any progress and for any success. For this reason, society should valorise knowledge, encourage citizens to keep learning throughout their lives, and oblige its institutions to dispense and diffuse knowledge. M. F. Blanquet (1999) was right when she said: "The future belongs to those who handle knowledge".

Grey literature

Grey literature is a broad concept that is in constant evolution. The best global experts, such as Joachim Schöpfel (2010), have mentioned the difficulty in giving a precise definition to grey literature, adding: "The definition of grey literature is intimately conditioned by the fact that it is an object of collection and acquisition. A document becomes grey not only because it is a work of the mind and not sold by a vendor but insofar as someone – an institution, a library, an information service, and a professional – shows interest in acquiring it." The fourth international conference on grey literature defined it as: "That which is produced at all levels of government, by academics, business and industry, in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers (Fourth International Conference on Grey Literature, 1998). Other writers state that grey literature represents "a reservoir of rich information which is however not well structured (Expernova, 2015). Marzi cited IGLWG (Interagency Gray Literature Working Group) which defined GL in 1995 as "Open source material that is usually available through specialized channels and may not enter normal channels or systems of publication, distribution, bibliographical control, or acquisition by booksellers or subscription agents (Marzi, Pardelli and Sassi, 2010).

Data collection and analysis

When asking the respondents to give examples of grey literature documents, 90 % mentioned: manuscripts, theses and technical reports. 10 % of our sample only cited: theses. These examples expressed the teachers' interests and needs in terms of information resources. To highlight the distinction between grey literature and other documents, 50 % of our sample explained that it was a matter of published and unpublished documents, while the other teachers were not able to identify any distinction. This statement proved that for many teachers, their conception of these specific resources was still ambiguous. Regarding the location of grey literature documents, 70 % spoke only of university libraries, 20 % mentioned university libraries and digital university repositories, while 10% spoke about university libraries, digital university repositories, information centres in the industrial sector, and the Internet. Though the respondents were not perfectly informed about the multiple locations of grey literature, 30 % of them mentioned digital university depositories, an instrument which might encourage them to archive their scientific output, and gain a clear idea about the concepts of grey literature and open access. An institutional repository can be viewed as "...a set of services that a university offers to members of its community for the management and dissemination of digital materials created by the institution and its community members" (Institutional repository, 2018). A question related to possible difficulties when attempting to gain access to grey literature, and when using it, showed that

60 % of the respondents faced technical difficulties. This problem was definitely related to the age of the university teachers and the related difficulty to gain competency in today's technological culture. We should also mention that 80 % of our sample consisted of university teachers aged between 50 and 60. Concerning electronic information searches, 65 % of the respondents underlined its complexity. This proved that they had not mastered this discipline. 80 % of our sample spoke about administrative obstacles, explaining that academic institutions rigidly conserved and protected unpublished documents using the permanent slogan of "copyright regulations". Regarding the frequency of use of these documents, 80 % of respondents mentioned that they "rarely" used grey literature in their information searches because of the tremendous obstacles they faced when attempting to use these resources. Just 15 % of them affirmed that they "never" used grey literature documents in their research because of the harsh and complex environment surrounding these specific resources. When asked about assistance provided by their university in the use of these documents, 90 % of respondents attested that the contribution of their university in this matter was very modest. "As proof", they explained, "our university launched a project in 2016 to establish a digital university depository that would be useful and helpful for teachers on the scientific side, but we are still eagerly looking forward to its birth". **The following list shows the digital university repositories available in the country:**

- **Tlemcen University**
  http://dspace.univ-tlemcen.dz/
  Copyright
- **Biskra University**
  http://dspace.univ-biskra.dz:8080/jspui/
  Copyright
- **Ouargla University**
  https://dspace.univ-ouargla.dz/jspui/
  Copyright
- **Chlef University**
  http://dspace.univ-chlef.dz:8080/jspui/
  Copyright
- **Bouira University**
  http://dspace.univ-bouira.dz:8080/jspui/
  Copyright

We asked them another question to see whether they could benefit from other digital university depositories available in the country. 75 % did not know anything about these repositories in Algeria. 25 % of respondents who were informed about these informational tools attested that the online university repositories were under copyright protection, and that no repository was licensed under Creative Commons. The survey showed that male university teachers who were informed about grey literature were more numerous than female university teachers (5 %), which could be explained by women's double responsibility as housewives and as university teachers. They cannot spend enough time at the university to frequent university libraries and communicate with librarians about library collections in general, and grey literature in particular. The respondents added that full-text access was not possible, and that some of these online repositories provided access to bibliographical data, whereas others also provided abstracts of theses and articles, and in addition they affirmed that the Internet connection was weak, making access to these repositories quite impossible. Universities should work hard in this field to develop modern depositories. With the new

digital university repositories, "advanced users are also given the opportunity to perform advanced queries" (Caffaro and Kaplun, 2010).

Main survey results, comments and suggestions

The global attitude of Constantine 2 University teachers, (respondents to our interview), was negative for various reasons: a) A lot of them find it difficult to define the concept of grey literature or to identify the various types of these specific documents; b) They confront multiple obstacles (administrative, technical, technological and personal) when attempting to access grey literature documents; c) A lot of them think that the geographical space where grey literature resources are located is very narrow, whereas it is actually wide for those who are well informed about these documents; d) The majority of university teachers are not competent in electronic information searches.

University teachers should know that grey literature can significantly contribute to the promotion of scientific research. Unpublished resources that seem invisible to teachers for various reasons have the potential to make teachers' scientific output more valuable, fruitful, pertinent and of higher quality. University teachers have just begun to be aware about the importance of the digital university depository: this is positive, yet the number of teachers, who understand the usefulness of this instrument, use it, feed it with their scientific output, and benefit from it should be expanded. "Now-a-days, libraries cannot meet the needs of their users solely through their own collections. To meet the various needs of users and interdisciplinary approaches, libraries need to use information sources (…) in a network environment." (Chowdappa and Ramasesh, 2010)

The role of academic institutions in improving university teachers' sensitivity to the importance of grey literature is predominant. Arranging meetings and organizing conferences and, programming workshops… are some of the activities that can improve teachers' awareness of grey literature, as well as their interest in accessing it to use it. Each institution should establish training programs to enhance teachers' understanding of grey literature and the importance of archiving their scientific output in their institutional repository when the latter is available. Training is the dynamo for academic progress. Using modern tools that promote intensive communication, will help them develop the open access spirit and increase their willingness to share, transmit and exchange information. They will discover a great amount of grey literature resources in their digital university repository and be able to exploit it. "Grey literature has significantly contributed to the open access movement and, as such, has bolstered the public's trust in science" (Farace, 2010). This will make teachers' scientific output richer and more visible. The impact of research at the university will be improved and, consequently, the university will also be more visible, and will demonstrate its performance through international academic rankings.

Conclusion

Progress generates unprecedented upheavals in all fields. The acquisition of information and knowledge by citizens is giving new dimensions to learning and development (Bouderbane, 2013). Information resources are available in a variety of shapes and formats. People who know how to use and exploit these resources will feel strong, useful and productive in this complex society. It would be a pity to conserve information resources that cannot be used

and exploited by users. University teachers – people with sensitive roles in educating generations – should possess the faculty of adaptation that they need to easily integrate this changing society. Grey literature is among the resources that university teachers need, above all in their scientific research. Information specialists should participate in sensitizing users to the importance of grey literature. They can train them in electronic information search competency. Grey literature is a treasure that should be opened to users' eyes, especially to those who have the mission of educating generations. These specific resources should not be buried; they are alive, and, furthermore, they can represent added-value to scientific research and output.

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Appendix

Interview grid

1. Could you give examples of documents that are specified as grey literature?
2. What is the main distinction between grey literature and other resources?
3. Are you able to determine the location of grey literature?
4. Do you encounter difficulties when you need to use grey literature? If so, what are the main difficulties?
5. How often do you use grey literature?
6. Does your university help you gain access to grey literature? If so, how?
7. What do you know about your digital university repository?
8. As a university teacher, are you able to use grey literature via the digital university repositories available in your country?
9. How would you generally evaluate your use of grey literature?
10. How can your university promote teachers' use of grey literature?