

INFORMATION SEARCHING SKILLS BY DISTANCE NURSING STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA SCHOOL OF NURSING SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT: *The importance of access to adequate library services for the attainment of higher academic skills in nursing education, regardless of where students, faculty, and programmes are located cannot be overemphasised. This is in view of attaining vision 2030, of ensuring a healthy population in which the incidence of major diseases and conditions such as tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS is reduced and brought under control. Supportive structures and services, like the provision of quality information to distance nursing students by librarians are required. The aim of this paper was to investigate information searching skills that distance nursing students use to access information from the University of Zambia Medical Library during and after residential school. A survey method with a simple random sample of 42 students was adopted. Thirty seven students responded to the questionnaire which was sent via email. Data was analysed using SPSS version 23. 32 (86.5%) felt it was very important to supplement provided course material with information from the library. However, 35 (94.6%) indicated that they do not get help from the Medical Library when not in residential school. The majority, 35 (94.6%) of the respondents said that they had never attended any training on how to access library materials, hence did not know how to search databases that the university subscribes to. 91.1% respondents said they used Google for research, study using phones, personal computers and laptops. In conclusion, the medical library needs to facilitate access to information for distance nursing students through training and find ways to support them remotely.*

KEYWORDS: *distance nurse education, nurse students, information support, information, library services.*

INTRODUCTION

The nursing profession is challenged to meet continuing community health care needs, while maintaining the standards and integrity of the profession. This challenge can only be attained through lifelong learning provided by Universities and Colleges, as well as access to timely and relevant information provided by medical libraries and other health information providers to support learning and research. Deprived of this sustenance, this goal may be difficult to attain. Limited resources in health care and nursing education; especially inadequate staffing in hospitals and clinics has compelled the nursing profession to embrace distance education as a way of upgrading the much needed qualifications and skills of large numbers of nurses without disrupting service delivery in the hospitals and clinics. In order to achieve the much-needed higher skills and additional educational qualifications for nurses already in-service, alternative learning methods apart from full-time and class-room based learning has to be considered. As the School of Nursing Sciences at the University of Zambia (UNZA) increases the enrolments of nursing students, space limitations at the institution has dictated that the increase be done through distance education. This is with a view to meeting the needs of the nurses, the hospitals and clinics where they work as well as the needs of the School of Nursing Sciences at the

University, which does not have adequate learning facilities for all the nurses that would require enrolment at the institution. The onset of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has made the need for digital access to information for academic learning more prominent as more and more universities are expanding access to learning through e-learning. Firstly, this means that information delivery by libraries are going to increasingly be offered electronically. Secondly, libraries will need to respond to the delivery of information in a safer and healthy environment, entailing the use of digital tools to offer information services to students

LITERATURE REVIEW

Distance education has led to the development of specialised information services that can be termed distance librarianship, catering specifically to the information needs of distance learning students. In this context, it has been argued that health professionals studying on distance basis are entitled to library services and resources equivalent to those provided for students and faculty in regular campus settings especially when distance learning is one of the fastest growing modes of education Holly (2009). A number of countries the world over are embracing distance education as a means of upgrading the skills and qualifications of nurses in a timely manner without disrupting their jobs and service delivery Oosthuizen and Van Rensburg (2012). It has been argued time and again, that removing nurses from the clinical field, as well as potential nurse leaders and nurse educators from an already limited labour force for the purpose of further education is almost impossible and perhaps immoral Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on the Health Professions Education Summit (2003). This is due to the influence it has in disrupting health care delivery and therefore impact on patient care. The provision of distance education has significant implications for library services, and academic libraries that are used to only service students who are on campus must adapt their services to accommodate distance learners Joseph and Huber (2015). Furthermore, irrespective of the physical distances involved, every user "is entitled to the library services and resources of that institution regardless of where enrolled or where located in affiliation with the institution" Almquist (2011). This assertion fits very well with the *Five Laws of Librarianship* as proposed by S. R. Ranganathan in 1931 that:

*"Books are for use.
Every person his or her book.
Every book its reader.
Save the time of the reader.
Library is a growing organism"*
(Koehler et al. 2000; Ranganathan 1931)

These five laws of librarianship as proposed by S. R. Ranganathan in 1931 are as relevant today as they were years ago. In this regard, various versions of the rules have been proposed to fit the requirements of the modern library and information user Simpson (2008); Noruzi (2004). However, at the core of these variations is Ranganathan major theme that the library or rather information must be accessible to a user in the most easy, comfortable and efficient manner. In this context, some of the roles that librarians and libraries play in serving with distance education students may include: helping with searching and locating resources for assignments; teaching them learn how to use these resources; learning digital skills and supporting their educational needs Gandhi (2003); Latham, Gross, and Witte (2013). A few disadvantages related to distance learning in relation to information needs are noted: "lack of time; limited access to crucial support networks such as peers, tutors and librarians; delayed feedback; and technology which can fail, is often expensive to implement and often requires specialised skills to be used effectively" Tury, Robinson, and Bawden (2015, 4). Naturally, it was assumed that librarians were trained professionals who find and assess information, and the libraries where they work often hold valuable resources, and therefore nurse educators and librarians can work together to educate nurses, no matter their location, on finding credible health information Hallyburton and John (2010). This belief has been supported with a view that the most common library services offered to distance learners included: "remote access to online library catalogue; electronic databases; electronic books and journals; online information literacy tutorials; electronic research guides on academic and special

interest topics; electronic general library guides; Ask-A-Librarian (chat, e-mail, or telephone); interlibrary loan; electronic reserves; and document delivery services" Raraigh-Hopper (2009). Additionally, it has been argued that to bridge the gaps that disadvantage distance learning in relation to information literacy and lifelong learning, nurse educators, their students, and their librarians must work together and use as many communication formats as needed to accomplish their goals Hallyburton (2010).

According to Dew (2001) as cited by Ritterbush (2013) in his assessment of Academic Library Services to Distance Learners literature review, he highlights that in most of the preceding University of Iowa surveys which were designed to monitor and assess both the appropriateness of students use of services and resources and the degree to which needs are met, it was discovered that 65% of the distance students had used library resources for class projects and online reference ranked top, access to full-text databases, and home delivery of books and articles were the most important services in that order. On the other hand, Moyo and Cahoy (2003) in their survey of Penn State University distance students to learn whether they knew about and utilised various library services, and if these services were satisfactory they reported that 76% were using the library catalog and 64% used full-text databases. Most distance students (65%) felt that the library offered adequate help and support. Furthermore, it was concluded by Moyo and Cahoy (2006, 339) that academic libraries needed "to be proactive in engaging and serving the e-learning community, including active promotion and marketing of services". In most of the literature surveyed, the outstanding point that comes out is that distance students were not utilising library resources to the optimum hence, Liu and Yang (2004) sought to better understand how students made decisions in selecting and using information resources at Texas A & M University and they discovered that Internet was the primary source of information for distance students coursework and academic activities, while only 28.8% used university libraries. Online databases and e-journals were reported as the most frequently used resources, but 49% of respondents reported rarely or never using the libraries. A study by Monde et al. (2020) found that (36, 97.3%) of the surveyed distance learning students in the School of Nursing at the University of Zambia used the library and 32 (86.5%) felt it was important to supplement prescribed course texts with materials from the library. They further noted that they used the library for different purposes as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Purpose of using the library

Purpose of using the library	Responses		Percentage of cases
	No.	%	
To access prescribed/recommended materials	21	36.2	36.2
To use computers	4	6.9	12.9
To read	21	36.2	67.7
To photocopy	3	5.2	9.7
To print	1	1.7	3.2
To access research materials	8	13	25.8
Total	58	100	187

Monde et al. (2020, 27)

Generally, nursing students tend to face barriers to information searching and seeking, identified as lack of equipment, inability to access equipment, lack of time, and inability to utilise technology as some of the key challenges; more so for those on student learning via the distance mode Bertulis (2008); Catherine (2015). Additionally, lack of competency in searching, inadequate computer technology skills and lack of interest are individual challenges. Lack of time, combined with lack of library access and database or computer access, are also a great obstacle to distance nursing students Bertulis (2008). A lack of access to appropriate and recommended materials were one of the challenges highlighted in a study done at the University of Zambia Nursing School Monde et al. (2020). As a result of these challenges, the Association of College and Research Libraries stipulates that librarians/distance librarians must ensure that students enrolled in distance education

programmes are “provided effective and appropriate library services and resources, which may differ from, but must be equivalent to those provided for students and faculty in traditional campus settings” American Library Association (2008, 563).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper was to investigate information searching skills of distance nursing students at the University Of Zambia School Of Nursing Sciences.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a survey method. A mailing list was sought from the School of Nursing Sciences at the University of Zambia and a questionnaire was built and administered via email. First year students were excluded from the random sampling, as the researchers felt they would not give enough information due to lack of experience and knowledge of the institution. A total of 37 (88.1%) of students responded to the emailed questionnaire out of a sample of 42. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 20 while closed ended questions were analysed by content analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Background characteristics of the respondents

Out of the 37 respondents, 28 (76%) were female, while 9 (24%) were male indicating that most of the respondents were female. Most of the respondents, 13 (35%) were aged 30 – 40 years while the majority 16 (43%) of the respondents were in fourth year of their study. The data further shows that most student nurses 14 (39%) were from Lusaka province, while each of the remaining provinces were represented as shown in Figure 1.

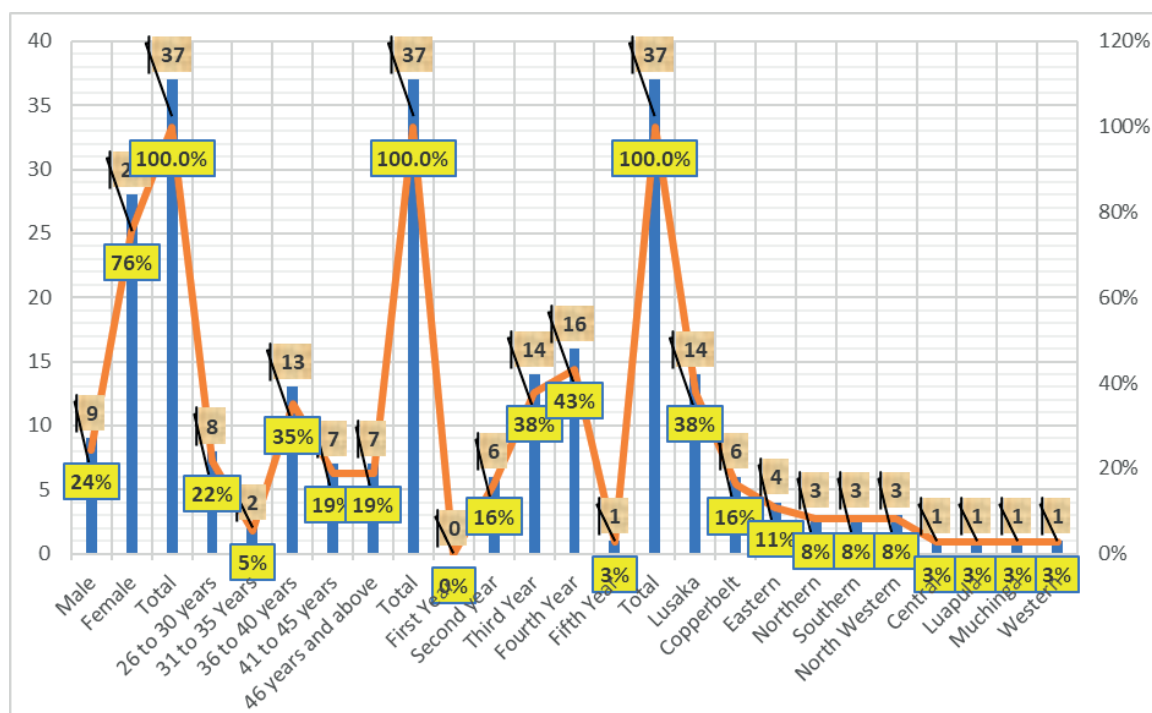


Figure 1: Demographic information

Importance of using the library

When asked if it was important for distance nursing students to make use of the library, 36 (97.3%) of the respondents indicated that it was necessary while 32 (86.5%) felt it was very important to supplement the

provided course material with reading materials from the library this is in line with the belief that, irrespective of the physical distances involved, every user should have access to library services offered by the institution Almquist (2011); Ritterbush (2013); Cordell (2013). It also reaffirms the importance of access to information resources endorsed by the student nurses at the University of Zambia. With regard to why student nurses visited the library, the majority indicated that they visited the library to access prescribed/recommended materials, 21 (36.2%) and to study, 21 (36.2%) Monde et al.(2020, 27) and in another study at UNZA library it was established that 41.7% used the library to access course materials Makondo, Kanyengo, and Kakana (2018). These findings are in contrast to the findings of Liu and Yang (2004) whose findings indicated that the Internet was the primary source of information for distance student's coursework and academic activities at Texas A & M.

Training on how to access information

The distance nursing students were asked if they had attended any training on how to access information in the library, the majority 35 (94.6%) of the respondents indicated that they have never attended any training. These results demand for immediate action by the University of Zambia Medical Library to train the distance nursing students on how to access library materials. Because of this, the authors noted a need to quickly raise awareness of library services among all distance students at the University of Zambia. These responsive action can only be achieved by librarians whose roles include helping and teaching students the skills to search and locate and or access resources for study and assignments Cassner and Adams (2012); Schulte and Sherwill-Navarro (2009); Makondo, Kanyengo, and Kakana (2018).

Special arrangement of Library usage

The respondents were asked if they had access to any library in their locality. Only 8 (21.6%) respondents indicated that they had made special arrangements for library services while 35 (94.6%) indicated that they did not get help from the Medical Library or any other library when not in residential school. Similarly Tury, Robinson and Bawden (2015) highlighted the disadvantages relating to distance learning in relation to information needs that included lack of time; limited access to crucial support tutors and librarians. Since Librarians are trained professionals with special skills in locating and assessing information, nurse educators and librarians can work together to educate nurse students, no matter their location, on finding credible health information resources Hallyburton and John (2010). In this regard, the authors suggest a strong working relationship between health science librarians and nurse educators to further the cause of distance learning nurses access the relevant and required information for their studies.

Knowledge of searching for information on UNZA website

Respondents were further asked if they knew how to search for information available through the University of Zambia (UNZA) website. Results show that 35 (94.6) did not know how to search for information on the UNZA website as presented in Figure 2 below. The results are contrary to other researchers who have concluded that 90% of distance students at the Pepperdine libraries in the United States of America used research databases of the library to find material for their literature reviews. Furthermore, most of these students usually started their search from the Library Brahme (2010). In most studies, findings show that students prefer to use Google, yahoo and other search engines because they believe these are easier and better than the databases that are paid for by the Institution; and Google is most often ranked the first Dee and Stanley (2005); Makondo, Kanyengo, and Kakana (2018). However Liu and Yang (2004) also report unique results indicating that only 28.8% used university libraries and found out that online databases and e-journals were reported as the most frequently used resources.

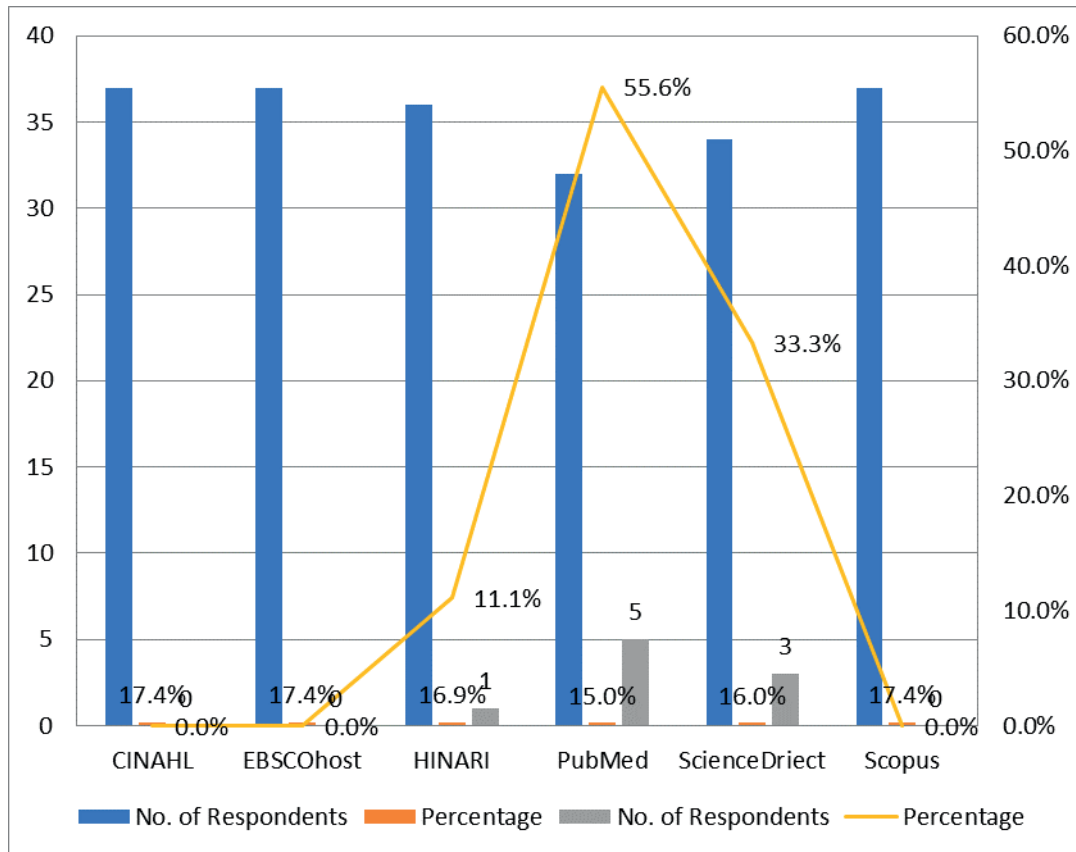


Fig. 2. Databases Used

Use of Google for research and study

This study revealed that the majority (91.1%) used Google for research and studying. These findings are similar to Dee and Stanley (2005); Brahme (2010); Makondo, Kanyengo, and Kakana (2018) who confirmed that students feel much more comfortable when searching Google than library catalogues or academic databases. In a study at the University, it was found that 64.6% of the surveyed students preferred to use google as opposed to library database Makondo, Kanyengo, and Kakana (2018). This could be due to the fact that Google offers access to information resources without requiring one to log in with a password and additionally it's easy to search especially using a free search approach. This worries librarians, however, who feel that a large search may have a low precision return rate and may frustrate the user as opposed to a more structured search. And that is why medical librarians are there to offer training to these users on how they can have focused searches even when they are using google search engine or other internet based search engines.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides the University of Zambia Medical Library with great feedback that can be used to improve library services to distance nursing students as well as other distance students at the University of Zambia who may be facing similar challenges of accessing information for their studies. What clearly came out of the survey was the lack of knowledge on the library services that are available as well as the lack of the information skills necessary to efficiently access the resources. The students need digital skills to enable them navigate the digital world that enable them survive and meet their study requirements. However, in order to achieve this, the library must organise itself to be ready to provide information in various formats with a diversity of delivery methods, both traditional and digitally. Additionally, they should endeavour to identify ways in which to assist distance students according to their information needs; programme, time, and learning environment. This is an era that offers tremendous opportunities for librarians and libraries

to change roles and/or add on the existing roles. This study recommends that, The University of Zambia management must work on modalities to incorporate information literacy courses in the curriculum which amongst others will equip students with ideal skills for identifying accurate, reliable and credible information from different sources.

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