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Learning Resources Centers and Their Effectiveness on Students' Learning Outcomes: A Case-Study of an Omani Higher Education Institute

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating the use and effectiveness of a learning resources center, which is generally known as a library. In doing so, eight elements were investigated through an author-designed questionnaire. Each of these elements tended to delve into certain aspects of the aforementioned center. These elements included a) students' visits frequency, b) availability of books related to modules, c) center facilities, d) use of discussion rooms, e) use of online resources, f) staff cooperation, g) impact on knowledge enhancement, and, h) recommendation to peers. Eighty undergraduate students participated in the study. Participants were then asked to read the statements carefully and choose one of the five responses provided, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Data were analyzed based on 5-point Likert Scale. Findings of the study revealed that participants were mostly in agreement with all eight statements provided in the questionnaire, which were interpreted as positive feedbacks from the students. Then, the frequencies of responses by the participants were reported. Finally, the results were compared and contrasted and related discussions on the effectiveness of libraries and learning resources centers on students' learning performances and outcomes were made.

Keywords: *Center for Learning Resources, Library, Omani Undergraduate Students, Online Resources, Learning Outcomes*

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1. Introduction

During the past decades, several researchers have put their foci on how the use of library would enhance the knowledge of students in academic contexts (Chan, 2008; Lonsdale, 2003; Soria, Fransen, & Nackerud, 2013, to mention but a few). These studies have mostly come up with conclusions related to the user's opinions and preferences about the libraries (Bowles-Terry, 2012), as well as the way they contribute to the knowledge of students (Chan, 2008).

With the high range of improvements and developments in the area of technology, students mostly prefer to use online resources such as E-libraries, as compared to the traditional libraries available in their campuses. To support this argument, Griffiths and Brophy (2005) reported the findings of two studies on the behaviors of users with online information searching intentions. Findings revealed that the online searching engines have dominated the students' information-

seeking strategies. Based on the results derived from the study conducted by Griffiths and Brophy (2005), 45% of students preferred to use Google as their primary source of information search, while the campus library catalogues were accessed by only 10% of the sample. In addition, some findings related to the students' perceptions of ease of use, as well as the issue of saving time in their searches were addressed.

One of the most significant attempts on collecting data about the use of E-libraries and their contribution to users was the report for the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) by Tenopir (2003). This report tended to come up with the summary and analyses of more than two-hundred recent research publications with the main focus on the usage on E-libraries and other electronic resources published between 1995 and 2003. According to the findings, studies in question used different types of research methodologies such as observations,



surveys, interviews, etc. Tenopir (2003) argued that while some of the surveys and interviews would tend to investigate the preference of the users (i.e., how they would feel about the library), some would aim at providing information on their behaviors. Tenopir (2003) also pointed out that the diversity of conclusions derived from the studies covered by CLIR could provide the audience of this report with a comprehensive image of “what library users actually do, why they do it, what they would prefer, and what they are likely to do in the future” (p. iv).

Another attempt in measuring different aspects related to the libraries was made by Martensen and Gronholdt (2003). In this regard, the researchers conceptualized a structural equation model allowing the concerned librarians to assess library users’ perceived quality, satisfaction, and loyalty in a quantitative manner. In addition, the level of specific elements of the library’s services and environment which would in turn contribute to those perceptions was accounted for. In doing so, Martensen and Gronholdt (2003) reported the findings of a survey among the users of five libraries in Denmark, with Copenhagen Business School Library being the main focus of the study. Finally, it was argued that the modeling approach in question should form the basic foundation of library performance measurement system.

Library users have seen to be more effective in the areas of teaching and learning. In a study conducted by Popoola and Haliso (2009), the probable relationship among the library use and teaching effectiveness in thirteen Nigerian universities was investigated. Data were gathered from 650 academic social scientists. Findings revealed that implementation of information provided by the libraries would significantly correlate with the teaching effectiveness of the respondents. Results also pointed out that the use of library information resources as well as library services contributed 49.8% and 38.5% to the prediction of teaching effectiveness of the participants, respectively.

A brief search into the literature supports the idea that libraries have changed dramatically as compared to the past. Limits in funding the libraries, as well as the customer demands have presented new types of service models, allowing the users to have different ways of access to

resources (Casey & Savastinuk, 2006). However, there are still some people who prefer to use the traditional campus-based libraries for various reasons. The present study was an attempt to understand the preferences and ideas of campus-based library users, trying to delve into different issues related to the use of such libraries.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Eighty undergraduate students (both males and females) participated in the present study. These students were selected from those dealing with their International Foundation Program (IFP) at Gulf College, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. The participants were selected based on accidental sampling. At the time of research conduction (i.e., second semester of Academic Year 2015-2016), there were four educational levels offered by the college for the IFP students which were all handled by the Faculty of Foundation Studies (FFS). These levels included a) Pre-IFP, b) Block 1, c), Block 2, and, d) Pre-Sessional Plus Program (PSPP). Although the educational levels of students were different, they were studied as a whole, since they were all under the same faculty.

2.2. Materials

An author-designed questionnaire formed the material of the study (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was designed based on 5-point Likert Scale and consisted of 8 statements. Each of these statements focused on a specific aspect of the CLR. The frequencies of students’ visits to the CLR, availability of teaching and learning materials, and satisfaction on the types of different facilities provided such as books, discussion rooms, and online resources were the main foci of the questionnaire. In addition, CLR staff behavior and engagement with students were investigated. Likewise, the impressions of the participants on both utilization and recommendation of CLR were targeted by the researchers through the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated through Cronbach’s alpha formula. The coefficient was 0.789, which shows a rather high level of reliability.

2.3. Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed among the participants. Some instructions on how to deal with the materials of the study were provided in advance. The participants were asked to read the statements carefully and choose one the five

responses provided, ranging from strongly agree being the first item, to strongly disagree, being the last one. Participants were supposed to do this task with the time limit of fifteen minutes.

3. Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier (c.f. materials section), the questionnaire was designed based on 5-point Likert Scale. Having collected the data, first, the frequencies of each item were recorded carefully. On the quantitative side of the research, the data were analyzed based on the 5-point Likert Scale and the frequencies of the responses to each statement were reported and compared. In addition, a chart was provided in order to present a better descriptive-comparative overview on the findings.

4. Findings and Discussion

Having collected the data from the participants, the total number of valid responses (N=626) to the eight statements mentioned in the questionnaire was recorded to be compared and contrasted. Followings are the frequencies of responds ranging from strongly agree (item 1) to strongly disagree (item 5), which were derived from the information.

4.1 Students' Visit to CLR during Weekdays

The first item in the questionnaire was related to how often the students would pay a visit to the CLR during weekdays. As findings of the study revealed, 12 participants strongly agreed to this point. Similarly, 41 agreed. The frequency of neutral answers was found to be 15. In addition, 5 and 6 students disagreed and strongly disagreed with this point, respectively.

Findings of the study revealed that the students would mostly pay visits to the CLR on a regular basis. In fact, a search into the literature reveals that information has always been an essential part of an academic context. According to Kumah (2015), the effectiveness of any academic system is related to the concept of information and both teachers and students need to use information on a daily basis. One of the most common ways of information collection is through libraries. Likewise, Alemna (2000) argued that for centuries, libraries have served as repositories of information and knowledge. This could possibly highlight the reasons behind frequent visits of the participants to the CLR provided to them.

4.2 Availability of Books Related to Modules

10 and 33 students strongly agreed and agreed respectively on the availability

of books which were related to their modules being taught to them. In addition, 20 students had neutral opinions, whereas 5 and 10 students disagreed and strongly disagreed with the point in question, respectively.

Students were mostly in agreement (N=43) with the issue of module-related books availability. However, findings revealed some negative responses (N=15) from those who claimed they could not find the books related to their modules at the CLR. In fact, as Griffiths and Brophy (2005) pointed out, students' attitudes towards searching for books in libraries have changed and nowadays, their use of library mostly relies on searching engines. Most of the libraries throughout the world have their own software, with all the information related to books encoded in them. The main advantage of this software is facilitating the knowledge seekers (i.e., both faculties and students) with their searches. In addition, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) mostly provide their students with online access to supplementary materials related to their modules, which usually could not be found in the traditional libraries.

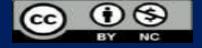
4.3 The CLR Facilities

According to Adele and Milheim (1995), enquiry services, bibliographic assistance, library instruction, interlibrary loans, photocopying, and computer facilities are some of the services provided by the libraries. Findings revealed that 16 students were in strong agreement with this statement. Similarly, 29 students were in agreement with the quality of CLR facilities. 19 students neither agreed, nor disagreed with the quality of facilities at CLR. The number of participants who disagreed and strongly disagreed with the quality of CLR facilities was 6 for each item. All in all, findings revealed that the students were mostly satisfied with the quality of the CLR provided to them.

4.4 Use of Discussion Rooms

12 and 23 students strongly agreed and agreed on this point, respectively. In addition, 16 students neither agreed, nor disagreed. Likewise, 11 and 18 were the frequencies of those students who disagreed and strongly disagreed with the use of discussion rooms in the CLR, respectively.

Discussion rooms are provided as additional facilities for both students and faculties, including librarians to hold their official meetings in. According to Lonsdale (2003), a collaborative relationship among teachers and librarians might have a



significant effect on learning, with special reference to the planning of instructional units, resource collection development, and the provision of professional development for teachers. One of the most important parts of discussions which could be made among the students and librarians would be related to the notion of resource collection development, through which, the students would get the chance to discuss which resources need improvement and which collections need to be added.

4.5 Use of Online Resources

The frequency of students who strongly agreed, agreed and those with neutral opinions in relation to the use of online resources were observed to be 11, 27, and 22, respectively. While 10 students disagreed with this point, the number of those participants who were in strong disagreement was observed to be 7.

We live in the information age with immediate access to online resources provided through the Internet. Nowadays, this access has even gained more popularity throughout the world. The literature shows that as time passes by, there is an increase in the number of students using online resources as their primary search tool. This was in agreement with the findings of the present study. For example, Ole Pors (2006) found out that students would not bypass the physical libraries and it was also evident that the use of physical libraries and digital resources would complement each other. On the other hand, Kumah (2015) argued that although students would use both libraries and the Internet in order to obtain information, the Internet usage was more than the library usage. Findings were also in agreement with Bao (2002), who claimed that the Internet continues to be an important component of library services in today and tomorrow's libraries.

4.6 CLR Staff Cooperation

Based on the findings, the frequencies of students who strongly agreed and agreed that CLR staffs were helpful in finding the required books and materials were observed to be 14 and 32, respectively. 14 students had neutral opinions. In addition, 15 students disagreed, while 4 strongly disagreed with this point.

Evaluation of 21st century libraries must put the changing environment of higher education into consideration, as the concept of learning has shifted from the teacher's knowledge to the student's understanding and capabilities (Smith, 2001). This possibly means that the students

should take the lead in order to search for the required information. Therefore, clear instructions by the library faculties seem to be essential.

3.7 Impact of CLR on Knowledge Enhancement

12 students were in strong agreement, while 33 were in agreement that the use of CLR could be helpful in enhancing their knowledge, performance and learning outcomes. 18 students neither agreed, nor disagreed to this point. Frequency of disagree and strongly disagree answers were observed to be 9 and 6, respectively.

Data analyses revealed that students were mostly (N=45) in agreement with this point. Findings supported the qualitative study carried out by Small, Snyder and Parker (2007) in the United States, in which, the significant role of library use on knowledge enhancement of students were highlighted. Findings were also in agreement with Williams and Wavell (2001), who selected a qualitative approach towards the usage of libraries to investigate their effect on knowledge enhancement in Scotland, concluding that the school library could potentially positively impact upon a wide range of learning experiences.

Another scope of improvement via libraries is the concept of critical thinking. According to Ory and Braskamp (1988), participation in academic activities including the experience in libraries and learning resources centers is in moderated correlation with the achievements of students in the realm of critical thinking skills. Likewise, Whitmire (1998) argued that significant impacts on critical thinking skills of students were reported by those engaged in more focused library activities.

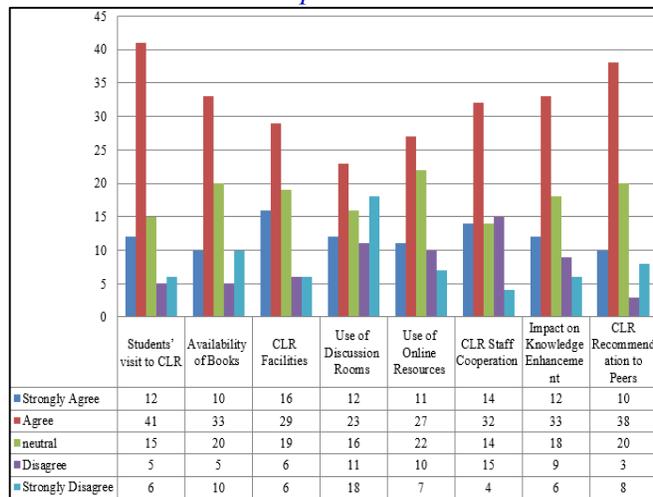
3.8 CLR Recommendation to Peers

The final statement mentioned in the questionnaire was related to the students' intentions as of recommending the CLR to their peers (i.e., other students). 10 and 38 students were in strong agreement, as well as in agreement with this statement, respectively. 20 students neither agreed, nor disagreed to this point. In addition, 3 students disagreed to this statement. Finally, 8 students were observed to be in strong disagreement.

Findings revealed a high frequency (N=48) of positive responses among the participants as per CLR recommendations to peers. Chan (2008) earlier found out that not only the students, but also the teachers and administrators are mostly unaware of

the potential and significance of libraries on the learning outcome of students. Accordingly, conceptualizing and establishing a systematic use of libraries and learning resources centers often require a wide range of research and self-evaluation (Chan, 2008).

Finally, Figure 1 tends to provide a descriptive-comparative overview on the data obtained from the participants of study: *Figure 1: A Descriptive-Comparative Overview on the Students' Responses*



5. Conclusion

As Lonsdale (2003) pointed out, several gaps in the research related to libraries and learning resources centers exist. To date, several researchers (e.g., Smith, 2001; Small et al., 2008; Kumah, 2015, Kumar & Amsaveni, 2016, Jordan, 2017, etc.) have tended to investigate different aspects related to libraries and learning resources centers in the field of education. In addition, inter-disciplinary research has also been carried out in order to highlight the significant role of libraries (e.g., Rafferty, 2013). Despite all the research conducted, a lot more needs to be done in terms of libraries and their probable impacts on the achievements of students.

Libraries and learning resources centers not only contribute to the educational achievements of the students (Chan, 2008), but also can make positive differences in students' self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility in regard to their own learning (Lonsdale, 2003). This, in turn, highlights the importance of research related to libraries and related centers.

The trend in searching academic sources has significantly changed and students tend to utilize searching engines such as Google, Yahoo, and other similar online services instead of the traditional, physical libraries (Griffiths & Brophy, 2005). Therefore, it would be of great importance to encourage the systematic use

of libraries and learning resource centers among the students and the faculties.

Finally, despite the studies conducted in search for the probable relationship among the utilization of learning resources centers and students' academic performance, some limitations due to different reasons such as participants' ages or sample sizes have been reported (Soria et al., 2013). In addition, there are many libraries which do not tend to collect the data in relation to students' use of services because of users' privacy policies and other similar reasons (Nicholson, 2003). This lack of data collection would in turn lead into a shortage of studies tending to investigate the association among library use and students' learning performances, outcomes, and achievements.

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Appendix: The Questionnaire

Dear Participant!

The present questionnaire is part of a research program which aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Centre for Learning Resources (CLR) at Gulf College, Muscat, Oman, which is located on the second and third floors of Phase 1. You are kindly requested to read each statement and tick (✓) the answer which describes your feelings the best. Please note that for each statement, only one answer could be selected. Rest assured that all your personal information provided in this questionnaire will remain confidential and are for research purposes only. Thanks for your cooperation!

Name (optional):					Age:				
Level:	Pre-IFP	<input type="checkbox"/>	Block 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Block 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	PSPP	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Gender:	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>					
#	Statements	S	A	N	D	S	D		
1	I visit CLR during the weekdays.								
2	I can find most of the books related to my modules at CLR.								
3	I like the facilities at CLR.								
4	I use discussion rooms in CLR.								
5	I use the online resources of CLR.								
6	I find CLR staff very helpful in helping me out to find the books and other materials.								
7	CLR can be helpful in enhancing my knowledge in the future.								
8	I recommend my classmates to use the CLR.								

- SA: Strongly Agree
- A: Agree
- N: Neutral
- D: Disagree
- SD: Strongly Disagree