

Title: The Information Seeking Behaviour of Distance Students
A Study of Twenty Swedish Library and Information Science Students

ISBN 91-89416-11-2 ISSN 1103-6990

Language: English

Information seeking is an object of learning and therefore an essential part of the educational content, rather than simply a means to an end. The objective of the thesis is to gain a thorough understanding of the information seeking behaviour of distance learners in library and information science. The theoretical foundation is interdisciplinary and the approach is based on theories on information seeking behaviour in library and information science and theories on distance education and learning.

The study discusses possible influencing factors and barriers that students may encounter in their studies while accessing, seeking and to some extent using information. Factors that influence access to information, such as place of residence and place of work, are focused upon. The distance students' experience and use of various information paths and sources are studied as well as how their personal circumstances, their information literacy, previous experiences and ambitions influence the way in which they seek information for their studies. Pedagogical aspects, such as the construction of assigned tasks that may affect the students' choice of information channels and resources and in what way the students' approach to learning tasks influence their information seeking, are dealt with.

The empirical data consist of forty-two in-depth interviews with twenty LIS distance students, two members of staff at the host university and diary notes written by nine of the students. Purposeful sampling method was applied and the informants were of various ages and living in different areas throughout Sweden. The interviews and diaries are used to capture the students' personal experiences, which form the basis of this analysis.

The findings revealed that the distance students had a positive experience of distance studies. Geographical distance did influence literature acquisition and information seeking and use. Although the sample consisted of LIS students they often experienced problems with locating information and mastering the techniques of seeking information. The findings indicate that more library and technical support is needed to eliminate the effect of geographical distance. The students preferred to seek information locally and were reluctant to use remote access and make use of interlibrary lending services. It also emerges that the interaction of convenience, local availability and information literacy to a certain extent determined what information sources were used, rather than the questions formulated in the study assignment. The students' approach to the learning task was conditioned by their information literacy conception, their background, aims and ambitions regarding the studies.

Keywords: Information Seeking Behaviour, Information Seeking Process, Libraries, Distance Education, Distance Studies, Distance Students, Library and Information Science, Information Literacy, Information and Communication Technologies, Geographical Distance.