UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF ONLINE LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY AT UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA, SHAH ALAM, MALAYSIA

ROZIANA ABDUL RAHMAN

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the information seeking behaviour of the online learners who studied at one of the local universities in Malaysia. It also examined their information sources, library and the Internet usage as well as barriers to their information seeking. The respondents were selected based on non-probability sampling due to their nature and availability while the survey was being conducted. The survey was conducted in two phases on two different batches of online learners who joined the Master Programme in Information Management at Universiti Technologi MARA in the academic year 2003/2004 and 2007/2008. A questionnaire was designed as the instrument for data collection and distributed to 120 students. Responses came from 85 students, 51 from the academic year 2003/04, and 34 from the 2007/08 academic year. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 11.5. The results show that most students used journals and books for assignments and final year projects, and preferred materials of not more than 3 years old. Most of them consulted friends and instructors, and a small number consulted library staff. All students, except one used the Internet to seek information. The majority accessed it from home between 9 pm to midnight daily. Most of them used Google, e-mail, e-journals and online databases to seek information. The majority of them faced problems namely: the slow speed of access, files could not be opened, searching took too much time, information could not be downloaded and print-outs unobtainable. Besides information seeking online, the majority of students also used the university library to obtain information. However more than half of them faced the problem of lacking library skills and needed items were not obtainable.

Keywords: Information Seeking Behaviour, Malaysian Online Students,
             Malaysian Students, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Library Use,
             Internet Use.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with the online learners' information seeking behaviour which was conducted at one of the local universities in Malaysia. The first chapter of this report describes the background situation of this study which includes the area of online learning and information seeking behaviour. It gives an overview of some aspects related to the evolution and development of the online learning, the online learning scenario in Malaysia, the online learners' information needs and information seeking behaviour. The problem statement, research questions, objectives, scopes and the significances of the study are also included here. It ends by defining some terms used in the context of this study and a brief description of the structure of this thesis.

1.1 The Evolution and Development of Online Learning

1.1.1 Defining Online Learning

Online education or online learning is an option for those who prefer to have their own learning environment and learn over the Internet. It is defined by Muirhead (2000) as the processes entailed in distance education where network technologies such as the Internet and other medium are used to make connections among students, teachers, and educational materials. It is closely related to the concept of "distance education" which was defined by Volery and Lord (2000) as a learning process where the instructors and the students are physically in separate locations, and usually implies a higher learning level. It is also defined as any approach to the educational delivery that replaces the same-place, face-to-face environment of a traditional classroom. Previously, Perraton (1983) had described distance education as a type of teaching process where it is conducted by someone who is far away from the learner.