

## Academic Libraries. Electronic Resources

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### *The role of the university library for an efficient use of the electronic resources*

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#### **Abstract**

By means of the topic approached in the present paper we would like to highlight the crucial role of the university library for a better access to the electronic resources, from the perspective of the new information and communication technologies. In this context, we shall try to identify the factors leading to the need to use electronic resources, we shall analyze the role played by the university library in increasing the efficiency of the access to this type of resources (implicitly, instructing the users), we shall suggest ways of collaboration between academics and librarians etc. From a managerial perspective, we shall analyze a few important aspects that one needs to consider when making the decision of buying or not an electronic resource: selection, type of acquisition, legality, monitoring the usefulness etc.

**Keywords:** electronic resources, information management, information literacy, university library

## **Introduction**

By the topic of the present paper we aim to highlight the crucial role of the university library for a better access to the electronic resources, from the perspective of the new information and communication technologies.

The value of a library, regardless of its type, consists not just in the richness and diversity of its collections, but also in the professional use of their informational potential, as the mission of any library is to permit the users' rapid and efficient access to information on any kind of support. In the knowledge society, the informative function of the library has become one of the most important, information becoming the main development factor in all the knowledge domains. (1)

In the present context, when increasingly important changes are taking place, on the level of education, in general, and especially of higher education, and the need to master information is becoming a more and more stringent demand, an essential role in its evaluation going to the university libraries, which, transforming the traditional services and processes through the adoption of the new information and communication technologies, have turned their main function, of repository of knowledge, into one of transmitter of knowledge via the new means.

## **Factors influencing the use of the electronic resources in the library**

Electronic resources represent the logistic support needed to provide electronic services, which are offered via the communicational technologies. The advantages coming from the provision of these services are intrinsically related to the rapid access to information, by the elimination of the barriers related to space and time. The electronic services that can be provided by a university library are: access to online catalogues, access to online databases, e-mail reference services, Internet access, etc.

The role played by the university library in an increased efficiency of the access to this type of resources is a very important one. Yet, we also need to have in view the influence of certain factors that lead to the efficient use of the electronic resources: technology, costs, management, training, content, and information support.

As far as the technology is concerned, the Internet connection needs to be a very good one, as the electronic resources require easy accessing

(rented line, satellite connection, Wireless connection, sufficient digital bandwidth). This can only be achieved through investments in the infrastructure and technology. Often, these aspects mentioned above are ignored and, in this situation, the people responsible need to be informed of the need of such investments. The hardware equipments (computers, printers, scanners, etc.) need to be updated, the recommendation being 1 computer for every 10 students. So, the costs involve infrastructure investments: network, hardware, software; maintenance expenses: repairs, supplies, replacements, updates; subscriptions to online databases; personnel salary expenses (keeping technical personnel often means paying more), training for personnel and users (computer literacy, information literacy, library literacy). All these expenses need to be foreseen in the budget in order not to be faced with the unpleasant situation of lacking the necessary funds. For example, when we think about buying a computer, we need to be aware that it has a purchase price, to which repairs and updates should be added. At the same time, computers should be replaced for good every five years.

The management problems refer to the selection and purchase procedure for electronic resources, to the legal implications and the organization of the information. At present, diverse ways of access for electronic resources are available, so the situation is no longer as simple as in the case of traditional documents, as there are different editors and aggregators. The access may be full text (online or when the document is delivered) or through annual subscription, on mention that the subscription needs to be re-evaluated each year. The legal implications refer to copyright and license aspects limiting the access. In this sense, we have in view that there are users who have no copyright and so we need to consider a way of access, and also the fact that some editors forbid the download of the whole paper. As far as the organization of the information is concerned, first of all we need to know what is available on the information market and what is relevant for our information needs. The existence of user guides for the information would be a plus point able to convince us to buy the respective resource; just as important is the way of maintaining the access, if we decide to no longer buy the respective resource (archiving). The statistics of the use of the electronic resources can provide important information for a good management, in the sense that we can appreciate what is more convenient to buy or if an inter-library loan or the buying of distinct papers would be more economical.

The aspects related to the training refer to all the categories of library users: bachelor, masteral and doctoral students, teachers, researchers,

librarians, for whom different strategies need to be adopted. They need to know:

- how to use a computer;
- to be aware of the type of resources the university has access to;
- how to find relevant information sources.

We can notice that the investment in technology requires an investment in people as well. In the case of bachelor and doctoral students, an information literacy course would be necessary, to make them able to manage the multitude of information available. The teachers and the researchers are interested in what is new in their domain of interest, so that it would be useful to inform them on the new acquisitions. The librarians, as mediators between the different types of users and the electronic resources, have to improve themselves continually in point of the ways of access to information. The lack of knowledge concerning the new technologies, the lack of funds for buying online resources and services lead to the limitation of their use; so, training is an aspect that should be considered in the managerial policy of higher education institutions.

The content of the electronic resources may come from electronic books, online periodicals or institutional repositories. At the same time, it would be useful to assure the access to the electronic resources belonging to less developed countries, such as: SCIPRO (Scientific Publishing and Information Online) or SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library On line). (2) An important institutional repository is that of the Central University Library of Bucharest, which includes papers of the teachers of the University of Bucharest; doctoral theses defended at the University of Bucharest; masteral dissertations of the students of the University of Bucharest; papers edited at the Central University Library of Bucharest.

The information support is provided both by the traditional and by the electronic environment. Printed collections are still important in the academic environment given their easy use and given the fact that they do not require the use of a technology. Electronic collections, in exchange, require technology, mean costs and training but also the possibility to create an electronic archive.

### **The role of the university library in providing solutions**

For a long time, it has been considered, even in the academic environment, that the Internet shall replace the library, and that it will no

longer be necessary to spend important sums of money to buy information resources. This opinion has not been confirmed during the last few years, as it has been demonstrated that not all the information accessible on the Internet is free and pertinent and that the users need to possess certain abilities related to the information literacy in order to be able to master the information and to use it efficiently.

The idea of information literacy has in view (3):

- **IT habits**, which refer to knowledge and abilities allowing an individual to find his way in the search systems of the databases and to be able to receive a search result. At the same time, they refer to the knowledge and the use of a calculation system;
- **library use habits** in the sense of abilities of efficiently finding the information via the tools provided by the library: classical catalogues, online catalogues, databases, web sources etc. ;
- **information habits**. This concept is equated, more often than not, to information literacy. It mainly relies on the intellectual process of the use of information. Yet, the habits in this sense are not applicable only in the library; they are rather oriented towards the information than towards the library. The most representative taxonomy of the information-related habits is the so-called “Big 6 Skills” (4): Defining the problem (determining the nature of the problem); Research strategies (determining the types of sources and strategies for finding information); Locating and accessing the information (finding the sources and detecting the necessary information); Using the information; Synthesizing it (structuring, integrating the information to better meet the information needs); Evaluating it. For instance, the use of the electronic sources available on the Internet is not at all risk-free. The responsible use of the new information environments requires the possession of adequate tools and knowledge for the users to be able to select and filter the information.

The university library is the department assisting the educational and research activity on the university level, yet a series of technological problems cannot be covered by the library, but only in collaboration with the Information Technology Department. The access to Internet and to computers is essential and the number of computers and peripherals needs to be sufficient. The facilities have to do with the computer use schedule, which needs to allow plentiful access. Concerning the authentication, it is necessary to restrict the access to certain materials by using passwords, and

to preserve the bandwidth. In case of bandwidth limitations, preserving the bandwidth is necessary to obtain good performances and to have efficient costs (reduce the random search techniques by taking information search courses, reduce file dimensions, not share too many files, download files at night).

In the selection of the electronic resources, the decision actors will need to consider:

- Is the online environment well received?
- Does its content fit the University's educational needs?
- What are the costs?
- What type of supply involves the lowest costs and is the most efficient?
- How are copyrights awarded?
- Is it possible to make an archive?
- Is the electronic journal identical to the printed one?
- Are there links to other resources?
- Is there flexibility in the search in the databases?
- How frequently is the information updated?

When the answers to the above-mentioned questions have been provided, and if they agree to the university's managerial policy related to information and documentation, next, the way of acquiring the electronic resources needs to be chosen, which can be an annual subscription bought by the institution or a shared acquisition, if the institution is part of a consortium. An aspect that should not be neglected is the monitoring and evaluation that can be realized by means of statistics providing information concerning who is accessing the electronic resources, when and how. In this way, it is possible to find out the cost per downloaded paper and if it is more economical to buy only the most requested papers instead of the whole journal or if individual subscriptions could be made, in the case of certain titles. In exchange, if the results of the statistics show an insufficient use, this may indicate either that the users are not informed or that there are technological problems.

Concerning the guiding towards the electronic resources, the librarian is the one called to facilitate the navigation in the multitude of information. He should be able to answer questions such as:

- What online resources can be accessed from the library?
- What are the most adequate resources for a certain information need?

- Are there library portals (5)?
- Do they provide links to materials not available in the own library but which can be accessed in other libraries?

It should be noticed that the librarian is indispensable to the user, being the one that realizes what the user's needs are, who obtains feedback from the users and who has the obligation to transform feedback into services.

By its specific function, the library gives access to information in agreement to the curricular demands, assisting its specific users in the informational and librarianship alphabetization. Due to the fact that the library needs to continually adapt to the new services and products that it has to provide, also the aspects related to the knowledge of the information literacy have become increasingly necessary. This is valid both for librarians and for the users, who have become dependent on the electronic information resources, which facilitate the research work.

Going through an information literacy course, the user will become able to locate, organize, evaluate and use the information respecting the ethical norms, combining the technological and the research abilities. (6) What is important to emphasize in this context is the need to get the academics involved in the domain of the activity with the information; they will need to become aware of their role and to learn to play their major role in assuring the information literacy. Not knowing the classifications of the documents, the strategies and the techniques needed to locate the informational resources, and the ways and manners of disseminating the information, or knowing the information resources and their location but not having the possibility to access them, are just as many barriers in the access to information. The aim of the information literacy is to provide each individual with a minimal knowledge luggage, allowing him to use the information, to have different competencies, all these in a context related to the information resources.

The new technologies are the ones facilitating the direct knowledge of the information by the user. In order to rapidly find the information useful in particular situation requesting information, one needs to have an information literacy, to know the information and documentation methods and techniques specific for the new environment, one need abilities allowing the use of the new technologies. The acquisition and the mastering of the information and documentation methods and techniques, corroborated to the abilities specific to the work technologies and instruments used represents

an important condition in the development of the information literacy of the users of the university area.

In the university area, the documentary training has become indispensable, considering the different information-related training of the students enrolled in the first year of studies. In this sense, it is necessary to include in the curricula classes of Information Literacy, as most students do not know the organization of the library catalogue, do not know how to look in it, do not know how the library collections are organized or what search techniques and strategies they should use to find the information they need in the online databases.

Therefore, the need to acquire certain abilities in this domain related to the information literacy has become acute, especially in the university area, where the activities requiring the knowledge of certain research strategies are much more numerous. A person knowledgeable in the Information Literacy domain should be able:

- to recognize the information demand, its nature and its extent;
- to access the necessary information effectively and efficiently;
- to evaluate the information critically and to be able to use it in the final product he/she is creating;
- to classify, store, use and handle information;
- to be able to bring a plus of value to the final product, by creating new knowledge;
- to recognize the importance of the information literacy in the research process.

Seeing that e-Learning is increasingly present in the Romanian university environment, it should be taken into account that this process is dependent on the presence of the electronic resources, on the existence of e-Learning platforms and also on the existence of a digital library providing courses, access to resources and research guides.

The integration of the electronic resources with the traditional ones is another aspect that needs to be considered, especially concerning the acquisitions policy, which relies on the selection process. This process will be envisioned in the sense of combining and comparing the existing sources with the ones one wants to buy. An important role goes to the integrated access to all the library resources through OPAC (book code and link).

Due to the fact that at present the educational system is also faced with a financial crisis leading to numerous constraints, the acquisition of electronic resources has become increasingly difficult, even through the

belonging to a consortium created especially for this reason. The lack of funds leads to the degradation of the infrastructure, to the demoralization of the personnel, to the lack of users and finally to the marginalization of the library. However, some actions can be taken:

- create policies on an institutional level able to assure support for the libraries in the acquisition of digital resources;
- assure a long-term access to the resources;
- promote the use of the electronic resources on a university level;
- include the libraries among the decisional actors;
- campaigning to obtain the necessary funds;
- improve the communication channels.

### **Conclusions**

As one can easily deduce, the access to electronic resources costs, it is a complex process, and the library plays an essential role in their implementation and use. Yet, in this sense, the library needs funds, specialized personnel and the support of the tutelary authority in order to accomplish its role of informational mediator in the knowledge society.

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