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Information Literacy Promotion for Undergraduate Students of Rajabhat Universities: Current Situations

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ABSTRACT

This research study is aimed at exploring the current situations of information literacy promotion for undergraduate students of Rajabhat Universities. Content analysis technique, annual reports, self-assessment reports and 38 websites of the universities and libraries were collected as the main data sources. For semi-structured interviews, the key informants, selected by the purposive sampling method included 10 library directors/librarians who were responsible for information literacy promotion. The instruments used for collecting data were a content analysis form and an interview form. Qualitative data was analyzed and synthesized using thematic analysis approach whereas quantitative data analysis covers the frequency and the percentage. As a result, for all Rajabhat Universities, the term 'information literacy' was not explicitly incorporated in the university policies, philosophies, visions, missions, and administrative plans. Nonetheless, some relevant concepts were found in the documents on desired characteristics for the graduates. All Rajabhat University libraries, however, organized surrounding environments that enhanced learning atmosphere and were well equipped with infrastructure on information technology. There were also internal and external links of the internet. In most university libraries, the service section was in charge of information literacy promotion, particularly as user education activities (97.37%) as well as Q&A and information retrieval support services (81.58%).

All Rajabhat University libraries did not allocate budgets to promote information literacy specifically; the activities organized by all University libraries did not cover all Standards specified by the Association of College and Research Libraries, ACRL. Such activities included library orientations/library tours, providing library manuals, brochures and printed media (100%), and training sessions (94.74%). Mostly, the contents regarding information literacy focused on Standard 2: Access the needed information effectively and efficiently; namely, via information retrieval and on-line databases services (94.74%). The contents also concentrated on Standard 5: Understand many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally, especially in bibliographies and references (26.31%). In Standard 3: Evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into one's knowledge base and value system, such contents were not found in the included documents. A few Rajabhat University libraries produced a video to introduction on how

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to use the library (28.95%). All Rajabhat Universities had a faculty-librarian relationship through a cooperation requested by the faculty members (81.58%), but it was not officially stated in the policy.

Keywords: *Information literacy, Information literacy promotion, Undergraduate students, Rajabhat Universities*

INTRODUCTION

The current trend in tertiary education focuses on student-centered learning. According to the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF), there are five domains of learning outcomes students are expected to achieve upon graduation including 1) ethical and moral development, 2) knowledge, 3) cognitive skills, 4) interpersonal skills and 5) responsibility, analytical and communication skills (Office of Higher Education Commission, 2009). These characteristics are in accordance with Thailand's 12th Higher Education Development Plan (2560-2564 B.E.) which strives to produce well-qualified graduates, foster learning skills, promote life-long learning, and develop cognitive, logical and critical thinking skills.

To prepare students to become independent learners, information literacy is a part of the desired core competencies for students in the 21st century (The Partnership for 21st century skills, 2013). Information literate persons are able to specify their needs, access, evaluate and use information legally and ethically. These skills are crucial for life-long learning. As an important part in human development, higher education institutions are responsible for developing information literacy skills for students so that they can and achieve the learning TQF outcomes.

Distributed throughout Thailand, Rajabhat Universities are a group of regional higher education institutions which were developed from Teacher Colleges and then repositioned to become multidisciplinary government universities for local development. They produce graduates in various disciplines at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. However, a number of research studies found that the levels of information literacy of students in some Rajabhat Universities range from moderate to low levels (Sirirat, Sacchanand, & Panmekha, 2013; Cha-um, 2016; Hiangrat, Sacchanand, & Choemprayong, 2018). Therefore, Rajabhat Universities need to find various alternatives to promote students' information literacy level so that they could become independent learners upon graduation.

On a quest to find an appropriate model of information literacy promotion, this study aims to observe Rajabhat Universities' current efforts in promoting information literacy. It is expected that the results from this study would inform recommendations on the roles of all stakeholders including the university administrations, academic staff, libraries, and students in developing high quality human resources not only for Thailand but also for the global society as a whole.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to explore the current situations of information literacy promotion for undergraduate students of Rajabhat Universities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilized a mixed method gathering both quantitative and qualitative data from document research and semi-structured interviews.

Population and samples

The population of this study includes administrative functions and libraries of all Rajabhat Universities. The samples are divided according to data collection and analysis methods. For document research, the main data sources were institutions' and units' annual reports, self-assessment reports as well as universities' and libraries' websites of all 38 Rajabhat Universities. For semi-structured interviews, the key informants included 10 library directors and librarians responsible for information literacy promotion, selected via the purposive sampling method. The informants must hold at least master's degree and have gained experience in information literacy promotion.

Research instruments

For document research, a data extraction form was used to collect related constructs related to information literacy promotion in the sample documents. For semi-structure interview, an interview question guide was developed and used. To validate the content validity, both instruments were reviewed by five experts including lecturers, library directors and experts in information literacy. The instruments were edited according to the reviewers' feedback prior to collecting the data. The data extraction form contains 12 main elements for collecting university philosophies, visions, missions, plans, projects and activities related to information literacy promotion of Rajabhat Universities. The interview guide lists 8 open-ended questions for exploring the current situations of information literacy promotion for undergraduate students of Rajabhat Universities.

Data Collection and Analysis

For document research, the authors collected related documents in both printed and electronic format. At first author reviewed and extracted documents according to the data extraction form. Interviews were carried out through a face to face and a telephone mode. Quantitative data were analyzed to determine the frequencies and the percentages; qualitative data were analyzed, synthesized and summarized.

FINDINGS

Regarding the policy on information literacy promotion of Rajabhat Universities and Rajabhat University libraries, all Rajabhat Universities did not state the keyword 'information literacy' in their policies, philosophies, visions, missions, and administrative plans. Nonetheless, all Rajabhat Universities have integrated information literacy concept in their policies, philosophy statements, visions, missions, and administrative plans. Particularly, information literacy is present in the documents expressing desired characteristics of the graduates. These included some keywords, for example, information and communication technology (ICT) skills, computer literacy, digital literacy, seeking knowledge, information searching, evaluation, discernment and reasoning, independent learning and life-long learning.

All Rajabhat University libraries have organized to a certain extent, the environments to enhance learning atmosphere through information technology, computers, information technology equipment and instruments, as well as the internets and intranets. Moreover, they have master

plans to enhance university technology and communication infrastructure including the development of digital libraries.

Most libraries of Rajabhat Universities provided user education services as a way to improve students' information literacy. Information literacy promotion activities were conducted by library service section (97.37% of all libraries), information literacy promotion section (2.63% of all libraries), and reference and information retrieval service section (81.58% of all libraries). Seven libraries (18.42% of all libraries) have set up a counseling section to give advice to students. Interestingly, none of Rajabhat University libraries specifically allocated budgets for information literacy promotion.
In general, provided activities included library orientations and tours, library manuals, brochures and printed media (100% of all libraries), training programs (94.74% of all libraries). In thirty-six libraries (94.74%), librarians served as resources persons or guest lecturers on information literacy topics. Moreover, thirty-one libraries (81.58%) addressed that their library staff were invited to assist in training programs organized by faculty members.

The activities organized by all Rajabhat University libraries have not covered all ACRL information literacy standards. The majority of the libraries (94.74% of all libraries) conducted activities in correspondence to Standard 2: Access the needed information effectively and efficiently. Certain policy statements and activities are in accordance with Standard 5: Understand many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally. Related library services are bibliographies and references, provided by 26.31% of libraries. Interestingly, no policy statements or activities at Rajabhat University libraries addressed Standard 3: Evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into one's knowledge base and value system.

In making use of information technology to promote information literacy, most Rajabhat University libraries (81.58%) did not make use of information technology for information literacy promotion. However, thirty-one libraries (81.58%) produced online handbooks. A few libraries (28.95%) produced a video presentation on how to use a library.

In terms of collaboration between librarians and faculty members, it was found that all libraries had put an effort to build a librarian-faculty relationship. Thirty-one universities (81.58%) indicated that the collaboration was presented in the form of requests by the faculty members to engage in information literacy training in classrooms.

DISCUSSION

There are four major points of discussion regarding the findings from this study. Firstly, the fact that Rajabhat Universities rarely include the term 'information literacy' in their policies and strategic plans may be due to the confusion of such term in Thai context. Although the idea of information literacy has been introduced in Thailand for more than a decade, such term is still ambiguous (Takennouchi, 2004; Brooks, 2010; Sacchanand, 2014). Information has a broad and dynamic meaning and could refer to multiple constructs (Bates, 2010). It could be challenging for people outside the information field to comprehend. Besides, its meanings are similar and confusing with competitive concepts such as 'digital literacy' and 'media literacy.' These two

concepts are more widely known in Thailand since they are highly cited in the National Digital Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (2016).

On the contrary, several universities in developed countries have clearly included the term 'information literacy' in their strategies, educational policy, strategic plans, and/or university missions to easily turn into practical use (Ellis, Johnson & Rowley, 2016 ; Corral, 2008) such as 'Information Literacy' as a part of TUT strategy for 2016-2020, (Tampere University of Technology, 2016) 'Information and digital literacy: a strategic framework for UQ Library 2016-2020' (University of Queensland library, 2016).

Secondly, the finding indicates that all Rajabhat University libraries organized activities to promote information literacy focusing on ACRL Standard 2: Access the needed information effectively and efficiently. This is in line with findings of other studies (for example, Julein, Gross, & Latham, 2018). However, Standard 3, addressing an ability to evaluate information, was not addressed by any Rajabhat Universities. Lacking of such aspect may be in part causing students' low level in evaluating information (Sirirat, Sacchanand, & Panmekha, 2013; Hiangrat, Sacchanand, & Choemprayong, 2018).

Thirdly, according to the results, most Rajabhat University libraries promoted information literacy by means of library orientations, library tours, and traditional user education services. Information technology was applied in information literacy promotion at a low level. In the present digital age, students' behaviors in reading, learning and acquiring knowledge are changing. In developed countries, it was found that information technology has been extensively applied to promote information literacy, especially a production of online lessons through which learners can have interactions. Online lessons have become an additional channel for self-learning and effectively helped develop students' information literacy skills (Mole et al, 2013; Li, Leung & Tam, 2007).

Lastly, the faculty-librarian cooperation has proven to be one of the successful strategies to help develop students' information literacy (Adams et al., 2016; Igbo & Imo, 2017). Nonetheless, the study found that Rajabhat University libraries had variously collaborated with faculty members, mostly through engaging in classroom. However, it was conducted upon faculty members' requests. This may indicate that the librarians did not play a proactive role in building a relationship with faculty members. This finding corresponds to other studies (Goonrat, 2013; Truong, 2015) indicating that collaborations between the faculty members and librarians in Thailand were at a low level, comparing to libraries in other developed countries where the faculty-librarian relationships are established through program coordination, lesson plan preparation, and integration of information literacy topics in other courses (Sacchanand, 2012). In order to achieve a successful relationship, it also requires library supporting roles, cooperation potentials and clear university policy statements regarding collaboration (Matthies, 2004).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, some recommendations may be addressed for Rajabhat University libraries and librarians as follows:

1. Rajabhat University libraries should regard information literacy promotion for students as an important issue and should play an active role in this matter to cover all ACRL Standards by stating clearly in the policy, visions and missions of the university and the library. Having a clear statement in the strategic plans would put information literacy as a focus for every unit in the university in developing students to hold desired characteristics and carry them to everyday life after graduation.
2. Rajabhat University libraries should work proactively and specify cooperation between librarians and faculty members as 'formal collaborative partnership' to develop their cooperative work and competencies for librarians including teaching and presentation skills.

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