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An Investigation of Graduate Students' Views on Information Literacy

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Abstract: Information literacy, which is defined as the ability to access, evaluate, use and communicate information in different forms, has a special importance in every period of individuals' lives. The competencies sought in an information literate individual vary according to the level of education they are in; a linear relationship is established between the level of education and the areas of competence. The rapid development of technology and the subsequent information explosion have revealed the importance of qualified information, and societies have started to need individuals who access the right information, use it, produce and share it, and use technology effectively in these processes. It has become imperative for individuals to access the most up-to-date and accurate information in their own professional field. Information literacy qualifications of graduate students are of great importance in terms of both the studies they will put forward and their self-development. This study was carried out to determine the views of graduate students studying at a university in the 2022-2023 academic year affiliated to the Institute of Educational Sciences on information literacy. The information literacy interview form developed by the researcher was used as a data collection tool. Information literacy interview form developed by the researcher was used as a data collection tool. Content analysis was used in the analysis of the views of 20 postgraduate students affiliated to the Institute of Educational Sciences.Graduate students' views on the dimensions of information literacy were examined in the context of knowing, accessing, evaluating, using, ethical/legal issues. When the results of the research are examined, it is seen that graduate students see information literacy as the ability to use the stages of information literacy, determine the information they need when they encounter a problem situation, the sources of access to information are mostly the internet, question the accuracy of the sources in evaluating information, use information for academic development, and point out the presence of unrealistic information as a problem. In line with these results, it is suggested that information literacy should be added to the content of the research methods in education course, which is one of the courses taken by graduate students, and students should develop the skills of questioning the authenticity of the information obtained from the internet that they use in their academic development.

Keywords: Information literacy, Graduate students, Content analysis

Introduction

In the 21st century, continuous developments in knowledge and technology make it necessary to review existing knowledge and skills and to engage in lifelong learning. In this century, it is desired to raise individuals who are researching, problem solving, innovative, entrepreneurial, communicating, using technology, learning to learn and making learning a way of life together with information literate individuals who know how to access information.

This century has led to the "information age" with the awareness that people should be information literate (Farmer & Henri, 2008). The rapid development of technology and the subsequent information explosion have revealed the importance of qualified information in naming the period we live in as the information age, and societies have started to need individuals who access the right information, use it, produce and share it, and use technology effectively in these processes. It has become compulsory for individuals to access the most up-to-date and accurate information in their own professional field.

Literacy is a communication tool with a wide range of uses in various fields. For this reason, various definitions emerge. Information literacy, library literacy, computer literacy, technology literacy, media literacy and digital literacy are some of the types of literacy encountered. However, information literacy is seen as a combination of other literacies (Curzon, 1995) and a concept that encompasses other literacies (Breivik, 2000).

The concept of information literacy was first emphasized by Paul Zurkowski in 1974. In 1989, the American Library Association (ALA) revealed the importance of the concept of information literacy. UNESCO (2003) defines information literacy as the ability to identify and locate information in order to address questions and problems in a healthy way. According to Doyle (1992), an information literate person is aware of information needs, uses the right information, identifies information sources, uses technology to access information sources, evaluates the information obtained and uses it in problem solving. An information literate person knows the ways of accessing information and can use it appropriately (Henderson & Scheffler, 2003). An information literate individual should have all these characteristics and should continuously improve these skills. Information literacy, which includes the processes of acquiring, using and evaluating the information needed, is one of the most important concepts of scientific communication. The most important institution that is effective in gaining this skill is schools. However, since learning is a lifelong process, individuals should continue to use these skills at every stage of their lives.

Developments in information and communication technologies have enabled information to be presented in digital environments. This situation has led individuals to search for information in electronic environments. Electronic information sources provide individuals with the opportunity to access and store information (Al & Al, 2003). The most common tools that enable and support communication between individuals include computers, phones, tablets and televisions. Technological tools create a communication environment based on the Internet (Cantoni & Tardini, 2006). Web 2.0 is among the technologies used to teach information literacy (Godwin, 2009). This technology offers a social structure that enables the user to participate in the environment rather than presenting information (Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006). Web 2.0 technology tools include web logs, player and video streaming subscriptions, Wikis, social networks, image and video sharing Web sites (Genç, 2010).

Different definitions, stages, models and standards have been proposed by different researchers regarding information literacy. Information literacy models systematically address and explain the stages to be followed in solving information problems. These stages are defined by Eisenberg and Berkowitz (1998) as defining the need for information, searching for information, finding information sources, using information sources, communicating information and evaluating information. In addition, different standards have been set for various levels including primary, secondary and higher education. ACRL's 2000 study "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" has been a guide for the effective acquisition of science literacy by university students. According to the study, the competencies that an information literate student should have are examined in five standards. These standards include identifying the structure of information, accessing information, evaluating information, using information, and being aware of ethical, legal and socio-economic issues related to information and information technology.

The Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education are designed to meet the expectations of students at all levels. The standards consist of performance indicators and outcomes (ALA/ACRL, 2000). In these standards, an information literate student demonstrates the ability to determine the nature of the information needed, access the information needed effectively and efficiently, critically evaluate information and its sources, use information effectively, and access and use information ethically and legally. These standards required for higher education are also required for graduate education.

Information Literacy literature is largely based on librarian-centered frameworks (Johnston & Webber, 2003). However, the number of studies on information literacy in the field of education is quite high in the literature. When these studies are examined, it is seen that they are related to teachers (Akkoyunlu & Kurbanoglu, 2002; Akkoyunlu & Kurbanoglu, 2004), prospective teachers (Akkoyunlu & Kurbanoglu, 2003; Aldemir, 2004; Kurbanoğlu & Akkoyunlu, 2002) and students (Caravello et al., 2001; Head & Eisenberg, 2010; Hunt et al., 2006; Mittermeyer & Quirion, 2003; Polat, 2005a; Polat, 2005b). When the studies on students are examined, it is seen that there are primary, secondary, higher education and graduate education levels. Information literacy skills are necessary for graduate students. Because students studying at this level use information literacy skill in their assignments, term papers, presentations and thesis writing. However, when the studies were examined, it was concluded that quantitative method was used and the information literacy skills of students studying at the graduate education level were not sufficient (Adeleke & Emeahara, 2016; Černý & Potančok, 2023; Dorvlo &

Dadzie, 2016; Kızıl, 2007; Lwehabura, 2018; Ozel, 2016; Polat, 2005b; Safdar & Idrees, 2021). Studies conducted with qualitative methods are not at a sufficient level (Lwehabura, 2018; Safdar & Idrees, 2021).

The study conducted by Lwehabura (2018), which aims to examine the information literacy skills of graduate students, showed that although there is information literacy among students, a large number of students have significant deficiencies in basic subjects such as applying various information seeking techniques. Safdar and Idrees (2021), in their study aiming to evaluate the information literacy skills of undergraduate and graduate students, showed that the majority of the participants were not sufficient in information literacy skills. The research conducted by Ozel (2016) was conducted to determine the perceptions of research assistants regarding their information literacy skill levels. As a result of the research, it was determined that the research assistants had difficulties in the sub-dimensions of information literacy. As a result of the research conducted by Polat (2005b) in which he investigated the difficulty levels of university students regarding information literacy, it was determined that there was no improvement in all aspects of information literacy skills of graduate students.

During their studies, postgraduate (PG) students take a large number of courses and are required to complete a large number of assignments. During this process, postgraduate students are required to conduct in-depth and comprehensive research. Therefore, it is important for graduate students to have sound knowledge and skills to use knowledge. Graduate study requires students to locate, analyze and interpret information and sources relevant to their field. This enables students to learn how to access, evaluate and use information. These skills can also be useful in students' professional life and other areas of their lives. Therefore, this study aims to examine the views of graduate students on their information literacy. It is thought that this study will contribute to the literature in terms of examining graduate students' experiences in information literacy. In this study, it was aimed to examine the views of graduate students on information literacy. For this purpose, it was aimed to examine graduate students' views on the definition of information literacy, their views on the dimensions of information literacy (knowing, accessing, evaluating, using, ethical/legal issues) and their suggestions on information literacy.

Method

Research Design

This study, which aims to determine the views of graduate students in terms of the dimensions of information literacy, was designed in phenomenology design. This pattern describes the meaning of the experiences that individuals have had regarding a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Study Group

The study was conducted at Eskişehir Osmangazi University in the academic year 2022-2023. Twenty graduate students studying in Educational Sciences participated in the study. Of these students, 12 are master's students, 8 are doctoral students, 13 are female, 7 are male, 3 are research assistants, and the others are continuing their graduate studies. In the selection of the study group, maximum variation sampling techniques were used from purposive sampling methods.

Data Collection Tool

Data were collected using a semi-structured Information Literacy Interview Form developed by the researcher. Before the interview form was created, the literature was reviewed and interview questions were prepared for the purpose of the study. Information literacy competency standards for higher education were utilized in the preparation of the questions (ACRL, 2000). Afterwards, it was submitted to expert opinions. The interview form included 7 questions about the definition of information literacy, opinions on the dimensions of information literacy (knowing, accessing, evaluating, using, ethical/legal issues) and suggestions on information literacy.

Data Analysis

In this study, the standards and stages specified by ACRL (2000) were taken into consideration in the interview form developed to determine students' views on information literacy and its dimensions and also in the

evaluation of the responses to this interview form. In these standards, an information literate student shows the ability to determine the quality of the information needed, to access the information needed effectively and efficiently, to evaluate information and its sources critically, to use information effectively, to access and use information ethically and legally. Postgraduate students' opinions on information literacy were analyzed by content analysis within the framework of the standards (knowing, access, evaluation, use, ethical/legal issues) specified by ACRL (2000).

With the content analysis technique, the answers given to the questions formed the data and the data were analyzed in depth. A 45-page transcript was obtained from the interviews. Each data was then coded with open coding, and then the codes were summarized and explained under categories and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to ensure internal validity, the views of the graduate students were given in direct quotations, while in order to ensure external validity, the method of the research was tried to be defined in detail. For the reliability of the study, two researchers in the field of science education coded the data separately and these codes were compared by the researchers. No calculation was made in the comparison, and a few codes that did not fit were agreed upon. As a result of the comparison, it was seen that the level of agreement was close to each other.

Findings

The findings obtained in this section were examined within the scope of graduate students' views on the definition of information literacy, their views on the dimensions of information literacy (knowing, accessing, evaluating, using, ethical/legal issues) and their suggestions on information literacy (Table 1).

When the findings obtained in this section were examined in terms of graduate students' thoughts on the definition of information literacy, the students mostly expressed information literacy as the ability to use the stages of information literacy. Regarding this issue, a student (P5) expressed his/her opinion as follows: "In my opinion, information literacy is the ability to use the information about a subject in the right place, at the right time, to use it effectively, to evaluate it, and to be able to use the stages of accessing that information effectively when he/she needs information." Another opinion (P17) supporting this view was "Information literacy is the ability to access information on any subject, to distinguish accurate and reliable sources, to understand, interpret and use information." This opinion was followed by the ability to integrate information into one's life and to access reliable information. Other ideas were identified as the ability to distinguish between different types of information, awareness of finding information, an indicator of information literacy, the ability to solve a problem one encounters, knowing how to use the information obtained, investigating the accuracy of the information obtained, having a reading culture, a competence of individuals with research and questioning skills, and the way to access the information they need.

Graduate students' views on the dimensions of information literacy were evaluated within the framework of knowing, accessing, evaluating, using and ethical/legal issues. Students mostly determine the information they need when they encounter a problem situation. Regarding this issue, a student (P8) stated that "When I encounter any problem situation in daily life and I cannot find the right solution with the information I have, I decide when I need information." Another student (P14) who supported this view was "needing information, in my opinion, occurs when we encounter a problem and feel the need to solve it, as it is the basis of scientific research." This view is followed by the situation of lack of knowledge, reasoning, research, analyzing the current state of knowledge and natural flow.

Students' sources of access to the information they need are mostly the internet (library, web 2.0, online platforms). The opinion of a student (P15) on this issue is as follows. "I access the information I need in the 21st century through the internet". Another opinion (P17) supporting this view is as follows: "The information sources I can access are generally internet-based. This is followed by literature review (primary and secondary sources), people (experts and other people), scientific process skills (observation and experiment).

Students mostly question the accuracy of the sources in evaluating information. A student (P6) expresses his/her opinion on this issue as "I try to do research from places that can guarantee the accuracy of the source from which I obtained the information". Another student (P10) who supports this view is as follows: "I confirm the accuracy of the information by comparing it with different sources." This code is followed by intuition, interviews with experts, examining information features, questioning, knowledge accumulation, summarizing and filtering.

Table 1. Graduate students' views on information literacy

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency
Opinions	Definitions	Ability to use the stages of information literacy	7
		Integrating knowledge into your life	4
		Ability to access reliable information	4
		Ability to distinguish between different types of information	2
		Awareness of finding information	1
		An indicator of information literacy	1
		The ability to solve a problem one encounters	1
		Knowing how to use the information obtained and how not to use it	1
		Investigating the accuracy of the information obtained	1
		To have a reading culture	1
		A competence of individuals with research and inquiry skills	1
		The path followed to access the information they need	1
Dimensions of Information Literacy	Knowledge	In case of problems	5
		Where there is a lack of information	4
		Reasoning	4
		Conducting research	4
		Analyze the current state of knowledge	3
		In the natural flow	1
	Access	Internet	33
		Library	10
		Web 2.0	9
		Online platforms	8
		Literature Review	18
		Primary Sources	17
		Secondary Sources	1
		Contacts	12
		Expert person	8
		Other	4
		Scientific process skills	3
		Observation	2
		Experiment	1
	Evaluation	Querying sources	26
		Intuition	3
		Interviews with experts	2
		Analyzing information properties	1
		Inquiry	1
		Knowledge accumulation	1
		Abstract extraction	1
		Filtering	1
	Using	Academic development	13
		Personal development	12
		Problem solving	9
		Facilitating daily life	7
		Professional development	6
	Ethical/legal issues	Untrue information	10
		Difficulties in accessing information	8
		Proliferation of resources	7
		Information pollution	7
		Accepting information as true without research	4
		Plagiarism cases	2
		Lack of a mechanism to verify the accuracy of information	1
Recommendations	Add-ons	No suggestion	15
		Responsibility for information belongs to the person	1
		Including a research course in undergraduate education	1

	Improving information literacy	1
	Critical approach to sources	1
	Embed information literacy in programs from an early age	1

When the purpose of students' use of information is examined, it is seen that academic development is mostly emphasized. While one student's opinion on this subject (P15) was "To serve the subject I am researching", another student's opinion on this subject (P16) was "I use the information I need in tasks and projects related to my professional field and field of education". Academic development is followed by codes related to personal development, problem solving, facilitating daily life and professional development.

When the students' views on the problems related to information and information technology are examined, it is seen that they mostly state unrealistic information. While a student (P18) stated that "The biggest problem with this subject is the difficulties in accessing accurate and reliable information", another student (P5) stated that "With the rapid development of information and communication technology, while it has become easier to access information, it has become difficult to access and select accurate and valid information." and mentioned the difficulty of finding the original sources of information. Other opinions are difficulties in accessing information, proliferation of sources, information pollution, accepting information as true without research, plagiarism and lack of mechanisms to verify the accuracy of information.

When the suggestions of graduate students regarding information literacy were examined, it was seen that the students mostly did not specify any suggestions. The stated suggestions were that the responsibility for information belongs to the individual, research courses should be included in undergraduate education, information literacy should be developed, critical approach to sources, and information literacy should be placed in programs from an early age.

Discussion

In this study, graduate students' views on the definition of information literacy, their views on the dimensions of information literacy (knowing, accessing, evaluating, using, ethical/legal issues) and their suggestions on information literacy were examined. The results of the research are presented in this section. Graduate students see information literacy as the ability to use the stages of information literacy. Students determine the information they need when they encounter a problem situation. Studies supporting this result are found in the literature (Maybee, 2007; Polat, 2005). In a study conducted by Polat (2005), graduate students had difficulty in identifying and expressing their knowledge needs. Maybee (2007) mentioned that the way of experiencing information use described in the process category includes steps or stages that start with the realization of an information need. These results are similar to other research results. In addition, information literacy is defined as the ability to solve information problems (ALA, 2000).

Graduate students' sources of access to the information they need are mostly the internet. There are studies in the literature supporting this finding (Akkoyunlu & Yılmaz, 2005; Polat, 2005). In a study conducted by Akkoyunlu and Yılmaz (2005), it was determined that pre-service teachers utilized the internet for accessing information. In a study conducted by Polat (2005), it was revealed that graduate students have inadequacies in access issues. In particular, advanced search techniques on the internet and databases were mentioned among the difficulties. In addition, Li et al. (2007) mentioned that a training for using the Internet would be effective in providing information literacy skills to individuals. The findings of this study regarding the source of access to information coincide with the findings of other studies in the literature.

Graduate students question the accuracy of sources in evaluating information. Studies supporting this finding are found in the literature (Aldemir, 2004; Bruce, 1997; Maybee, 2006, 2007; Ozel, 2016; Polat, 2005; Webber et al., 2005). Aldemir (2004) also found that pre-service teachers were ambivalent about evaluating web resources in terms of various aspects such as timeliness, reliability, accuracy and objectivity. Bruce (1997) examined academics' views on information literacy and mentioned information sources as one of the seven concepts of information literacy. In a study conducted by Ozel (2016), it was determined that students had the most problems at the stages of "evaluating information critically", "evaluating information sources in terms of accuracy, reliability, impartiality and timeliness criteria" and "evaluating information in terms of quality and quantity". In a study conducted by Polat (2005), graduate students also have difficulties in the evaluation stage. The most difficult issues at this stage are the evaluation of information with criteria such as reliability, validity, impartiality and timeliness. This finding coincides with determining the accuracy of information, which is one of the qualities that students should have within the scope of information literacy (AASL & AECT, 1998).

Sayers (2006) emphasized the reliability of information as one of the most important concerns about information. It is important for individuals to have the ability to question the accuracy of the information they acquire. At this point, Li et al. (2007) emphasized that information literacy education programs that include the evaluation of information sources are very effective in providing information literacy skills to individuals. As a result, they obtained similar findings with other studies in the literature at the point of questioning the accuracy of sources in evaluating information.

It is seen that the purpose of postgraduate students' use of knowledge is academic development. There is limited research in the literature that is similar to this research finding (Safdar & Idrees, 2021). A study by Safdar and Idrees (2021) aimed to assess the information literacy skills of graduate and undergraduate students of one of Pakistan's leading national universities. The results of the study showed that a large proportion of the respondents felt that the information literacy program was valuable to meet their research and academic needs. This finding is in line with the finding of the current study.

The presence of unrealistic information is pointed out as a problem related to information and information technology by graduate students. There is limited research in the literature that is similar to this research finding (Polat, 2005). In a study conducted by Polat (2005), it was revealed that graduate students felt inadequate in obtaining and using information in ethical and legal ways. Information theft was emphasized among the issues they had difficulty with (Polat, 2005). This finding coincides with the students' qualifications of exhibiting ethical behaviors in the use of information and information technology and respecting copyright within the scope of information literacy (AASL & AECT, 1998). Graduate students did not have any suggestions regarding information literacy. The stated suggestions were that the responsibility for information belongs to the individual, research courses should be included in undergraduate education, information literacy should be developed, critical approach to sources, and information literacy should be included in programs from an early age.

Conclusion

When the results of the research are examined, it is seen that graduate students see information literacy as the ability to use the stages of information literacy, identify the information they need when they encounter a problem situation, their sources of access to information are mostly the internet, question the accuracy of the sources in evaluating information, use information for academic development, and point out the presence of unrealistic information as a problem.

Recommendations

Based on these results, the following suggestions can be made: Considering today's technological opportunities, it has become very easy for people to access information, but this convenience has also created the danger of spreading false or manipulative information. Therefore, since confirming the accuracy of the information needed in any subject is only possible with information literacy skills, it is necessary to spread the importance of this concept in society and raise the necessary awareness on this issue. In order to achieve this, information literacy should be added to the content of the research methods in education course, which is one of the courses taken by graduate students, and students' ability to question the authenticity of the information obtained from the internet that they use in their academic development should be developed. The needs of graduate students should be identified and an innovative information literacy course should be included in their programs. Graduate students can be provided with trainings on information literacy needs. A Web site that graduate students can use when they need information literacy can be designed. This study was conducted with the participation of 20 graduate students studying at Eskişehir Osmangazi University Institute of Educational Sciences in the 2022-2023 academic year. Other studies can be conducted with graduate students studying in different universities and programs. In addition, studies examining the information literacy of master's and doctoral students at the beginning, middle and end of graduate education can be designed. Studies that examine information literacy in research assistantship in depth can be planned.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

The author declares that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the author.

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