CHAPTER FIVE

MAJOR FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to determine out how postgraduate students and librarians at the University of Malaya perceive the impact of the Internet to be on the library. The research used two different methods, questionnaires and interviews.

The sections below present the major findings, some recommendations, and the overall conclusion.

Major Findings

The study found that a majority (88.7%) of the postgraduate students used the Internet for research related purposes. A considerable percentage (18.3%) used both e-mail and the Web. Others services used were litservers, newsgroup and Internet Relay Chat (IRC). The students need to be made aware of these functions and be taught how to utilize them.

Many postgraduate students saw access to Internet as difficult and slow. They were not well introduced to use the Internet.

The Internet has influenced the postgraduate students' research because a considerable percentage (19.7%) stated that they browsed less print materials. In addition (32%) said that the Internet has allowed them a faster access to electronic databases in remote libraries.

The library rendered help to students in different forms such as practical training, workshops, and print material, brochures and lectures. A large percentage

of them (11.3%) stated that they received help in form of practical training, and 65% were satisfied with the library help.

Postgraduate students in the sample indicated that they will continue to use the library for research purposes. They will also seek help from librarians to surf the Net looking for information of good quality. In this context, 35.2% wanted the library to provide training on the use of the Internet, and 49% asked librarians to work as guides to Internet resources.

The majority of the respondents (71.4%) did not expect the Internet to replace the library in the future, and 80.3% preferred to use both Internet and library resources to do their research.

The respondents generally felt that the library and librarians will not be made redundant with the emergence of the Internet. The library will still maintain its role as repository of information as not all information can be obtained via Internet.

The challenge in selecting relevant and accurate information from books and other print material is now applied to electronic sources including the Internet. Thirteen of the librarians interviewed indicated that it is necessary for the librarians to work as guide for information sources in order to meet the challenge of the Internet. The Internet is a massive and often confusing resource for researchers with no one in central control of its contents. There are no definite or complete guides to resources, which are growing and changing at incredible pace. Librarians have been surfing the Internet, locating useful documents and advising library patrons on some of the useful sites on the Web. Thus librarians who already have the expertise to locate information are most suitable to work as a guide for information resources.

Ten librarians indicated that human resources of the library will be affected, since electronic materials need no handling like that of the print ones. Information in electronic format is readily available, just a guide to how to search these formats is enough. For this reason human resources of the library should be retrained and relocated to new areas of work.

Although there will be less emphasis on the print media as claimed by 9 librarians, it will not be a total disappearance. Information sources readily available in electronic format are not a substitute for actual documents. Internet collections do have their limitation. For example, they are not well classified and indexed. Librarians have to prepare themselves for the challenge of the Internet. The print collections would still be needed because not all that is available in print format can be digitized, although more new information will be available in an electronic format. For some years to come there will be dependence on both print and electronic formats. One of the librarians stated that this is a transition period. Young and enthusiastic librarians who think that the Internet will solve all their reference inquiries would be disappointed to know that much still remains in printed format. Senior librarians who feel safe behind printed materials would soon realize that the frontiers of knowledge are advancing using electronics. The information profession will have to face the challenge boldly and master new information sources and searching techniques.

The library will still continue to play its role as a repository of information, both in print and non-print format. The library will continue to buy books, which will continue to be used and read. This is true since 6 librarians indicated that the Internet has helped them to find out books available for purchase.

With the emergence of the Internet, information services will witness some changes. Ten librarians indicated that fast acquisition and exchange of data is going to be a prominent feature of library of the future. Another important feature is that there will be a greater emphasis on information seeking skills in relation to electronic sources.

The Internet may easily overwhelm information seekers with its vast amount of data. Those who know the nature, characteristics of Internet and how reliable information is can survive. Fourteen librarians indicated the information professional's responsibility to repackage it by providing its own collection or at least links to the accurate and reliable sources in search for information of a good quality. The Internet will become the key information resource, as more and more is published on the Web. There will be few technical limitations indeed the major limiting factor will be the knowledge and competence of users.

The Internet has helped to increase efficiency in the library through speedier consultations, paperless communications, quicker acquisitions, and access to online databases. Fourteen librarians indicated that the Internet has made communication within and outside the library through e-mail and other services very fast and efficient. It also made possible and available large areas of accessible information for free.

Thirteen librarians indicated that the library itself is a major source of information provision and postgraduate students cannot access every source of supply, they need guidance on the best and most appropriate sources for them.

Ten librarians indicated that the Internet would open a whole new world of information to librarians and postgraduate students. Databases and full text

journals can be accessed through the Internet, and since the information obtained is more current, it will help postgraduate students produce quality research. By accessing databases and full text journals, the students do not have to search volumes and issues of journals, which are not on the shelves.

Eleven librarians indicated that the role of librarians as an educators/trainers on the Internet resources to become increasingly important. As a result of the multiplicity of Web sites and the various search, display and download protocols, a novice may find the Internet rather daunting. Herein lies the role of librarian to guide and train students and other library users on the use of the Internet for information retrieval. Currently the library has a core of Internet trainers whose job is to train other staff of the library to become Internet trainers as well as teach students to obtain information via the Internet.

However, the traditional role of academic librarian in relation to print resources will not diminish at the moment because:

a) print resources still constitute a major proportion of literature

b) Student's level of knowledge of information skills is still weak.

The library's role as a repository of information will not diminished. Libraries will still need to purchase a lot of materials in print format because:

a) Print resources still constitute a great proportion of literature.

b) Print formats of textbooks are usually cheaper than the format via the Internet.

c) The existing communication infrastructure is not sufficiently reliable as far as speed and downtime are concerned.

d) A lot of archival materials are still in print format.

The Internet has no formal rules for organizing its materials. Any one can create a subject guide and organize it according to his own taste. There are many subject guides to the Internet but none is complete and all are arranged differently. On the other hand the library collection is organized according to a certain standards. So, to search effectively in a library, students need to learn the system for organizing materials (the catalogue and the call number system). To search effectively on the Internet, one needs to be willing to learn to search, browse, experiment and try different approaches. Though one can search the Internet by typing a keyword about his topic, Internet searching tools are very different from the library catalogue. Web subject access is non-standardized and covers only a tiny portion of the entire web. In some cases, searching tools will find the material wanted on the first try and other times the results will not make much sense.

Ten of the respondents expected the Internet use in libraries to change different aspects of information transfer processes such as organization, storage, and preservation of information. The Internet provides a medium in which to organize and store the vast new amounts of information available. New technologies such as hypertext have organized information in hopefully searchable formats.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the following recommendations are seen as important, and should be taken into consideration for further investigation of the topic concerned.

The librarian's role should be to train users in general, and postgraduate students in particular, to evaluate and select information from the vast amount of information brought to them by the Internet.

Librarians should work to upgrade their information skills to meet the challenge of the Internet.

A comprehensive training program should be designed to help postgraduate students use and benefit from the different service available on the Internet. The program should include an introduction to the library which should include training on the OPACs and bibliographic databases, and training on how to find relevant information from the Internet.

In this sense, librarians should consider shifting the emphasis of their services at least partially from providing searches to providing courses.

The library should develop ideas on how information could be presented to postgraduate students. This is especially important since they have understood the importance of the Internet for their work. In addition reference librarians should select and compile relevant Internet sites (e.g. for electronic journals, etc..) for the benefit of postgraduate students.

Librarians should continue to be the mediators of information between resources and the users, librarian must keep trace of information resources, electronic or print.

Librarians should be knowledgeable and innovative to have more positive attitude towards the Internet.

All librarians should know intimately the various information services offered through the Internet and be able to advise their users accordingly.

Librarians should encourage users to access Internet to obtain information and teach them how to generate reliable information with reliable quality.

The library and librarians should see themselves as facilitators of information from the Net and not to aimlessly surf it.

In this era of information technology, librarians should work as interface or information brokers. This is why there would be more professionals needed rather than clerical or technical staff.

Librarians should work as organizers of networked resources, that is to say they should take the initiative in creating better organization and access to what is available on and through the Internet. With the increasing use of the Internet librarians may find it necessary to expand their skills in this era.

Conclusions

The Internet will grow in increasing importance and libraries and librarians should do their best to provide information to their users. The changing roles of library and librarians, as facilitated by the use of the Internet, should be of great concern to the profession. However, to conclude one can say that, the emergence of the Internet will definitely affect the different library functions. It will enhance the role that library is playing but will never substitute the library as a physical entity.