More Than Just Students: Personal Information Needs of ESL Community College Students

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ABSTRACT

Over a million international students attended U.S. colleges and universities in the 2015-2016 academic year. International student enrollment has risen steadily over the past decade, and the majority of these students come from countries where English is not the primary language (Institute for International Education, 2016). Furthermore, the Pew Research Center reports that "future immigrants and their children will account for 88% of the U.S. population increase between 2016 and 2065" (as cited in Ramakrishnan, Barker, Vervoordt, & Zhang, 2017, p. 1).

Existing studies of international and English as a second language (ESL) students have focused mainly on their academic information needs, while relatively few have considered information needs related to their personal lives. However, as suggested by Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, it can be difficult for a person to focus on learning and self-actualization when safety and belonging needs are not being met (as cited in Ramakrishnan, Barker, Vervoordt, & Zhang, 2017).

Furthermore, academic level may be a predictor of information behavior (Alzougool, Chang, Gomes, & Berry, 2012; Sin, Kim, 2013; Yl, 2007), yet few studies address the information behavior of ESL students attending community colleges.

Thus, this study seeks to understand the information behavior of ESL community college students and to explore how academic libraries can develop holistic strategies for meeting their information needs not just as students, but as whole persons.

EARLY QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

A pilot test with 7 ESL community college students was conducted to refine the survey questions. Students recommended limiting the survey to 10 questions to increase participation. For demographic information, they suggested checkboxes for gender, age, years in college, and years in the U.S. to overcome language barriers in having to write out answers. Students also recommended providing ranges for age, years in college, and years in the U.S. for a sense of increased anonymity. This resulted in the following questions:

1. What is your age? Choices: 19 or younger, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35 or older
2. What is your gender? Choices: female, male
3. How many years have you been in college? Choices: less than 1, 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, 4 or more
4. How many years have you lived in the United States? Choices: less than 1, 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, 4 or more
5. What is your native language? (open-ended)

For information behavior questions, information needs (or topics) were selected from studies by Alzougool et al. (2013), Chung & Yoon (2015), Sin & Kim (2013), and Sin, Kim, Yang, Park, & Laugheed (2011), and the list was narrowed based on student recommendations to increase participation. This resulted in the following questions:

7. How often do you search for information about the following topics?
8. How difficult is it to find information about the following topics?
9. Where do you search for information about the following topics?
10. Would like help from your college library about the following topics?

REFERENCES