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# LIFELONG LEARNING & THE LIBRARY CONNECTION: A PERCEPTUAL MODEL FOR TERTIARY LIBRARY CUSTOMER EDUCATION

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The Lifelong Learning and Library Connection as a model for tertiary library customer education examined the transitional skill and ability expectations of undergraduate tertiary education students to propose a Perceptual Model of lifelong learning as an alternative to behavioural and relational models which are more experientially or practice based. The hypothesis of a recent study was that the personal perceptions of customers can mirror personal reality. What customers believe can predict what they will pursue. Therefore a Perceptual Model can offer the advantage of facilitating lifelong learning through library customer education approaches geared to the sequential levels of skills needed by customer groups.

The perceptual model proposed is comprised of areas that, according to literature, can most affect the lifelong learning skills and abilities of students. It considered the affect of perceptions on these areas rather than measuring skills as in other models. The model may be visualized as a ladder that sequentially leads to higher level skills as perceptual awareness of information needs increases.

Using details obtained from literature reviewed about the theoretical and practical applications of lifelong learning and the role of tertiary libraries, questions on the perceptions of customers were raised. Literature was categorized into four foci: customer group segmentation; library use issues; library skills assessment; and

library integration into tertiary life. Literature portrayed gaps in customer perceptions research in these areas. These gaps were manipulated to encapsulate the key questions, concepts and principals for the study. These were:

- *Segmentation (Focus A)* - What are the most appropriate divisions of customer groups to facilitate a lifelong learning development through library customer education? What are the segments customers belong to and do these groups have homogeneous customer education needs? What are the lifelong learning needs to be met or assisted by the library through customer education?

- *Library Issues (Focus B); Skills Assessment (Focus C); Course Integration (Focus D)* - What are customer's personal methodologies for using libraries and information resources, and the library use rationale or personal feelings and motivations associated with using libraries and information resources? What are the personal perceptions of students regarding the value of library customer education required for the library to positively influence lifelong learning behaviour and philosophies? What are the future directions for the library to improve their lifelong learning role through customer education?

One of the primary goals of libraries is to facilitate lifelong learning. These are the pivotal points for lifelong learning but because personal perceptions are developed by individuals over many years, library customer education is required to help

develop a lifelong learning attitude.

This case study targeted the students of a tertiary institute to assist in identifying the most affective library customer education segment focus for fostering lifelong learning attitudinal and skill development. It investigated how lifelong learning can be used as a focus for customer education programmes by suggesting a Perceptual Model of lifelong learning based on library customer education motivators and student perceptions.

## INTRODUCTION

Librarians need to develop a better understanding of the lifelong learning habits and needs of customers. An understanding of the relationship among library customer perceptions, practices, and personal philosophies would aid planning of library customer education to best meet customer needs. It would heighten customer awareness of the library and facilitate more affective promotion of library facilities and services, particularly customer education (*Nicholson 1994:17; Wright 1994:14; Gruppen 1990:165; Keane 1990:116-126*). The personal perceptions of customers can mirror personal reality and people are more inclined to participate in skill and knowledge building activities if they believe they will be beneficial. Analysis of customer perceptions can lead to increased and more efficient library use (*Wells 1995:128; Groen 1989:76*).

There has been extensive literature on the many means of library customer education including Grosser (1988) and Tomaiuolo (1990). Few articles consider the skills customers feel they require and how these can best be acquired. Coombs and Houghton (1995:261) endeavoured to clarify customer perceptions about library use skill needs and whether skill development through customer education is beneficial. However, they only considered one customer group, new students.

## BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

There has been much written, particularly in recent times, on the relationship between education and lifelong learning, and increasingly more is being published on the relationship of education, lifelong

learning and libraries. There have been detailed reports on tertiary library customer education, the teaching of the information skills required to use the library efficiently. Research in information skills and teaching methodologies for specific customer groups was undertaken by Breivik (1993). Bruce (1990;1991) examined the information skill needs of postgraduate students. Wilson (1994a;1994b) examined the information needs of external students while Coombs and Houghton (1995) examined the information needs of new entry tertiary students. Novak and Lidstone (1992) examined the information needs of academics; and Bruce (1997) examined the perceptions of Australian academics. There have been few studies dealing with lifelong learning, and libraries, especially library customer education, and even fewer considering tertiary libraries and consulting all customer groups including new students.

The connection between lifelong learning skills evaluated by library customer studies in the planning and implementation of customer education has a long history. Lifelong learning skills and customer needs are a reliable foundation for customer education programmes (Wilson 1994b) yet this is more evident in library practice than in documented research. Determining perceived needs is the first stage in understanding customers. Recognizing the self-perceived needs of customers and catering for preferred learning styles facilitates the creation of appropriate customer education programmes.

Library customers' perceptions of their needs historically differs from librarians' perception of customer needs. Librarians need to develop a better understanding of their market in order to meet self-recognized customer needs. An understanding, by librarians, of the lifelong learning and customer education self-perceived needs of customers would lead to increased knowledge of customer education needs in a given environment. An efficient and affective means of planning customer education services can be developed from a thorough understanding of the lifelong learning information and skills required by customers.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The hypothesis of the study is that customers' personal perceptions of their lifelong learning skill needs are able to mirror their personal reality or philosophical base. This means, put simply, that by determining at what strength customers feel their information needs and skills are in certain areas, strategies may be planned that lead to more effective customer education.

The connections between lifelong learning and the tertiary library were compiled through a literature review. At a sample tertiary campus, the personal perceptions of students about various issues related to these connections were then analyzed. This analysis was used to determine what areas of customer education might develop the lifelong learning skills of customers. A model is needed that facilitates examination of issues through the perspective of customers and that places learning at the heart of library services. This study developed a model that focuses on students' perceptions of personal lifelong learning skills and needs as a basis for the development of lifelong learning skills through library customer education at a tertiary campus.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study included all internal students at a particular college site during 1997. It examined, through a study of the student market and investigation of the college documentation, the perceived connection between lifelong learning and the library. The resulting information was used in the development of customer education approaches to meet the self-perceived needs of students. It also ensured that library customer education programmes are offered in ways that facilitate the development of lifelong learning skills and that customer education is directed at appropriate groups or segments of customers.

This study investigated how lifelong learning could be used as a focus for customer education programmes. The subjective aspect of information systems, procedural efficiency as viewed by library administration rather than customers, means that the human perspective and the views of

customers is often neglected. Failing to realize the opinions of customers disregards the fact that particular groups or segments of people will accept only those modes of information transfer perceived as personally relevant or applicable (Kunz, Rittel & Schwuchow 1977:9).

Literature reviewed tended to indicate that the hypothesis would be supported and conclude that the lifelong learning and library connection is implicitly acknowledged and practiced on campus. It was expected that patterns of perceptual overlap between customer groups would be discovered. Library customer education would help develop positive customer perceptions of lifelong learning through the role of the library.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Bruce (1997:10) examined information literacy, a component of lifelong learning, in Australian universities from an academic's perspective. Bruce concluded that the unaddressed issues related to how lifelong learning, specifically information literacy, programmes be "designed, implemented, evaluated?" Do students' needs in this area "differ at different levels, and if so how?"; and what is the role of libraries and in the design, teaching and resourcing of customer education, and furthering the experience? There appears to be no studies that have considered the varying customer education needs of customer segments in a tertiary education setting. This includes the development of positive information retrieval skills perceptions leading to lifelong learning skill development. This current study endeavoured to address these issues and expand on them.

There has been extensive literature on the many means of library customer education but few articles consider the skills customers feel they require and how these can best be acquired. Bruce (1997:157) stated that "within the higher education sector, we have as yet no picture of information literacy as it is experienced amongst students. This is a significant gap in a picture". This current study commenced at this point examining lifelong learning, of which information literacy is a component.

The gaps in knowledge were primarily:

i) Respondent Perception - (Clayton 1988; Marchant 1980; Sell 1980; Anderson & Miller 1983; ACDP 1986; Delbecq, Van den Ven & Gustafson 1975; Marshall 1989 Ginn, Pinkowski & Tylman 1987; Freedman 1985; Toy 1984b; Fjallbrant & Malley 1984; Naisbitt 1984). Specifically, issues related to respondent perceptions on customer education were raised in the literature, prompting the need for this study.

ii) Customer education - The most notable area of omission from existing literature was that no studies considered the varying customer education needs of segments in tertiary education settings for the development of positive information retrieval skills perceptions leading to lifelong learning skill development. (Rice 1983; Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994; Wilson 1994; Coombs & Houghton 1995; Welborn & Kuehn 1988)

iii) Skills Assessment - The existing literature found that there needed to be an existing interest or need before respondents benefit from library customer education. The skills of lifelong learning, found in libraries, were not described in any great detail in the literature.

iv) Segmentation of Respondent Groups for Library Customer Education - There is both support and opposition to the hypothesis of segmentation for library customer education with much of the existing literature recommending further research into the area of grouping or segmentation of respondents according to needs and interests.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to obtain data for this study. A questionnaire was developed from gaps seen in previous research and reinforced by the 1997 doctoral thesis by Bruce, and constructed with regard to results of the analysis of college documentation. The development, implementation, and analysis of this questionnaire was considered in detail and began to uncover the consistencies of differences and similarities of results across respondent segments in regard to their perceptions of issues about lifelong learning and library use.

The questionnaires gathered the desired data and drew attention to the library. Questionnaires implicitly advised respondents that the campus has an active library and that the library personnel are anxious to serve the information needs of all customers. Completion of the survey was optional, although all students were given a copy of the questionnaire. The decision to involve all students was, in itself, a means of systematic customer education designed to acquaint actual and potential respondents with the library.

The questionnaire investigated the possible relationship between the attitude of students to the extent and timing of information skills education and the involvement of the library in the development of these skills. Benefit segmentation principles, the analysis of the benefits respondents desire in their utilization of the library service, were used to analyze results. Part A of the survey identified homogeneous segments (groups with similar characteristics), interest and resource potential needs, and a population for each segment. Market segmentation was fundamental to the structure of the survey, because any new customer education approaches would be developed to meet the specific needs of the segments. Lifelong learning approaches would be trialed, implemented, and targeted at market segments identified and defined as measurable, accessible, and viable.

The homogeneous groups established from Part A of the survey identified ten segment variables. The first five (1-5) represented tertiary year-level or status and the second set of five (6-10) represented principal academic field of study:

**TABLE 1 - SELECTED STUDY GROUPS**

- 1) Year One
- 2) Year Two
- 3) Year Three
- 4) Year Four
- 5) Postgraduate
- 6) Bachelor of Teaching
- 7) Bachelor of Arts
- 8) Bachelor of Ministries
- 9) Diploma of Ministries
- 10) Bachelor of Education

The study of segment groups determined the validity of different demographic segmentation for categorizing library customer education needs. The validity was demonstrated under the four areas formulated from questions of relevance to the topic:

**TABLE 2 - FOCI**

**A. Demographic (Focus A)**

- What are the most logical divisions of respondents to facilitate a lifelong learning library education approach and are there identifiable similarities in key areas of respondents' backgrounds?

**B. Library (Focus B)**

*B1. Library Use*

- What personal methodologies are implemented when using libraries and information resources and do these indicate a lifelong learning philosophy?

*B2. Library Use Rationale or Perception*

- What personal feelings and motivations are associated with using libraries and information resources and do these indicate a lifelong learning philosophy?

**C. Skills Assessment (Focus C)**

*C1. Skills Assessment and Library Use*

- Do respondents present similar responses when self-assessing their information skills and their library use and what do these indicate about their lifelong learning abilities?

*C2. Skills Assessment Rationale or Perception*

- Do respondents expect to develop their information skills and their library use abilities throughout their time at college and do their expectations indicate lifelong learning desires?

**D. Integration of Lifelong Learning Skills (Focus D)**

*D1. College, Course and Library Integration and Library Use*

- Do respondents feel college subjects integrate with library use, and do respondents view the library as a lifelong learning facilitator?

*D2. College, Course and Library Integration and Library Use Rationale or Perception*

- Do respondent library behaviours and

motivations reflect integration of college, course and library, and does this reflect a respondent view of the library as a lifelong learning facilitator?

**CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS**

Statistical analysis of results from the questionnaire resulted in five major factors creating scales which form the basis of a model related to the nature of perceptions regarding lifelong learning and library use. The data was refined to suggest an alternate model by showing how these perceptions of lifelong learning and library use may be formed into a model for library customer education.

**SUMMARY OF DATA COLLECTION ANALYSIS**

The massive changes of the late twentieth century are demanding highly flexible and mobile people, capable of adapting to rapid change and continued learning throughout life. The hypothesis of this study is that libraries are a pivotal point for lifelong learning and this study has demonstrated that this, at the sample institute, is identifiable in some areas, developing in others, and requires further attention in other areas.

Personal perceptions are developed by individuals over many years. Patterns of overlap in the data, as expected, between respondent segments' perceptions were discovered. The hypothesis was supported, concluding that the lifelong learning and library connection was implicitly acknowledged and practiced on campus and that continual customer education becomes required to consolidate the lifelong learning role of the library. One of the primary aims, successfully achieved by the tertiary library, is the facilitation of information access contributing to academic achievement. Student learning and assessment methodology demonstrated that library use improvement and education becomes beneficial.

The majority of statements from the survey questions proved, using benefit segmentation principles of response diversity, to be more applicable to course segmentation. Reasons for this are greatly affected by external variables, many of which impinge on library attitudes and alter

perceptions of the lifelong learning and library connection. Statements such about course content and about assessment reflect this. Some specific topics strongly reflected developing lifelong learning philosophies, primarily issues reflected proved more desirable of year-level segmentation.

Respondents may be said to possess the broad pre-requisite for lifelong learning listed by Cropley and Dave (1978:12) which were motivation and self-image. These attitudes, values and motives allow learners to believe that learning is desirable. Lifelong learning attitudes, therefore, promote the desire to participate in education.

Lifelong learning skills were identified as being evident. This is seen in the development of the capacity to recognize the need for information; define the purpose of tasks such as assessment; formulate and pose questions related to the task; use a wide range of information sources; select appropriate information; organize information; communicate and present information; and evaluate results.

The survey examined the identifiable generic or context-free characteristics or qualities of the lifelong learner applicable to all different types and contexts of learning and found that these were present to varying degrees in respondents. These qualities are affected by variables including background, and subject speciality, as expected, in varying degrees and combinations in different people.

Results of the survey indicate that the level of use and interest in library resources and services varied. It was shown that integration of library skills into the college programme becomes preferred probably because of time investment outside of lectures. This was not consistent with results of studies by Mueller and Foreman (1987), Marshall (1989), Robertson (1989). Research by Breivik (1993) and Wilson (1994a,1994b) supported the full integration of library customer education in the tertiary curriculum and this becomes the ideal. This requires greater levels of co-ordination and considerable co-operation across all levels of college life. This will become increasingly more difficult, as a goal, as the college continues to grow.

Intrinsic adult independent learning skills were discovered to be evident in respondents, particularly the concepts of information literacy and critical thinking. Libraries have long been recognised as having a role in developing skills in the location and manipulation of information sources this was evident through survey results. Recently it has been realised that critical thinking skills are also intrinsic to information seeking behaviour and while the library has a role in developing skills in this area this was not evident through study results.

The educational role of the library seems to often be considered secondary to its custodial and service functions and this campus proved no exception. This means that generally, attempts to improve the quality of teaching practice and the effectiveness of customer education programmes have been under-funded and understaffed. This, data analysis confirmed, is definitely an area requiring both further consideration by personnel and library promotion to alter perceptions.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

Tertiary libraries have usually been evaluated through the level of library service and resource usage, often compared with academic results. These studies have, universally been unable to make concrete conclusions related to the tertiary library and the development of lifelong learning skills because they have taken a bibliographic rather than skills approach. It may not be possible for the library to function far removed from the policies and aims of the campus but data analysis indicated, broadly stated that:

i) Student perception of their information literacy/lifelong learning skill levels, needs, and ambitions are indeed an indicator of their own personal reality.

ii) Previous experiences do not produce generalization that can be considered for segmentation of students into groups for library customer education for lifelong learning skill development.

iii) When information on the customer education lifelong learning skill needs perceived by students was segmented, more

similarities could be made more on the basis of course of study rather than year-level of study.

iv) Library use data analysis indicated that perceived needs varied per course, but that with years studying at tertiary level the variety and extent of library expanded. This indicated that exposure to tertiary study created in students the perception that library use, a component of lifelong learning, was applicable to many areas of life and that the recognition of the need for lifelong learning skills developed through library customer education was desirable.

v) The self-perceived skill level of students varied per segment, awareness of personal skill levels was evident across the segments, but the acceptance of personal responsibility for development of skills was most evident in final year students. Recognition of library customer education as a resource for the development of lifelong learning skills was not as evident with results varying according to the course of study of students. Interest in library customer education methods varied per segment but was of different value to different courses more than to different year-levels. Some courses valued the development of lifelong learning skills and thought that they would use libraries following graduation, but that libraries do integrate with life.

vi) The integration of libraries within life was most evident in the courses where library use was encouraged through a variety of means, either assignment requirements, recommended readings, or, particularly in the case of education students, further reading. Courses that required less academic development, practical courses such as the course focusing on practical ministry, the Bachelor of Ministry, presented students who viewed the library more broadly and not from the purely academic stance of providing course related information. Student course groups who did not rely heavily on the library for academic requirements and who did not present with a history of academics or library use took the stance of seeing the library as a life-wide resource and the librarians as co-ordinators of lifelong learning skill development.

Librarian responsibilities for lifelong learning have traditionally come under four broad categories and these were supported by this study: working with students; maintaining the collection; working with staff; and working with the community. These responsibilities all require an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the lifelong learning and information literacy skill needs of the respondent market, provided by this study.

This study has discovered the need to expand this list considerably, through revealing the need to change the perception of students, particularly in some courses, for the need for the library in their life after college. This firmly unites the principle that integrating library promotion with customer education skill building is also required. Promotion of the library and implicit skill building activities are required to increase student expectations of their skills at the end of the course. Students expressed a desire to increase skills, but suggested a lack of time and desire to invest their own time in non-assessed activities.

#### PRESENT RESEARCH COMPARED WITH EXISTING LITERATURE

The main findings of the present research relate to the affect or constraints imposed by variables, the documented policies of the campus within which the library must operate and the perceptions of library respondents. Further, the research related to the impact of shared characteristics of respondent segments on the most appropriate approaches for customer education to develop lifelong learning skills and philosophies in respondents.

Although commonalities with previous research have been found, important new perspectives have been developed. The range of similarities between most appropriate segmentation for the various categories considered was surprising in the light of most earlier research. The fact that a significant number of respondents expressed beliefs that could be easily segmented, fitted with what a few researchers had suggested, but was a much clearer result and much broader in application than expected.

Other perceptions were also addressed

by many of these respondents - shared responsibility for their present learning, the desire to be independent learners by the time of their graduation, and recognizing the place of self in the learning and knowing process.

The present research was also able to trace possible pathways of customer education leading to higher level lifelong learning skills and philosophies not observed by previous studies, and to report the important impact of common background of respondent segments on this process. The rate of lifelong learning skill and philosophy growth through existing, primarily implicit, approaches suggested general gradual development through exposure to the tertiary environment.

These findings have important implications for considering models of lifelong learning skill development, understanding factors influencing development and presentation of customer education programmes in tertiary libraries, researching other library areas, and for the development of lifelong learning skills.

#### **CUSTOMER EDUCATION PRACTICE**

The development of any customer education programme must consider the interests, education levels, and subject expertise of potential respondents. These variables affect and influence the content and methodologies chosen for any customer education programme. Customer education should be designed to improve and reinforce attitudes in addition to providing information.

In terms of awareness of the affective skills that go to make up the successful independent learner, respondents show some sophistication. Overall, they agreed that they found searching for information a satisfying experience, that they enjoyed practising the skills of independent learning and that they were not intimidated or embarrassed by the processes involved.

Section C2. Skills Assessment Rationale or Perception considered respondent expectation to develop information skills and their library use abilities throughout their time at college. It determined that results were very course specific with expectations from education courses

demonstrating expectations of high lifelong learning desires and ministry students with very low expectations.

The Australian Library Association's Education Statement indicated that libraries are committed to the provision of services and products "directly tuned" to the needs of respondents (ALIA 1992), but library effectiveness is often measured by the quantity of resources and services. Very little research has considered respondent perceptions. It has been suggested that this is due to respondent perception of libraries and the perceived difficulty of assessing specific library contributions to learning (Wells 1995:121).

Educational psychologists have established that confidence levels adult learners have in their ability to perform any particular tasks is a direct reflection of subsequent performance levels of the tasks. The Wilson (1994a) study found that exposure to the academic environment was sufficient to increase confidence levels in various information skills. The present study would support results from the Wilson (1994b) study and indicate that any lack of confidence was not a barrier to information seeking behaviour, as had been suggested by other studies.

Students who lacked experience in the psychomotor skills of information seeking may fail to overcome elementary barriers to successful information seeking. Psychological barriers exist about reluctance of tertiary students to ask for assistance in the library. Oberman (1991:193-194) and Wilson (1994a) found that this was a widespread and persistent library problem. Wilson (1994a) found that students who displayed good affective skills acquisition demonstrated initiative, confidence and independence and gained satisfaction from using the library.

A lack of confidence amongst students can act as a barrier to affective information seeking behaviour. The last two statements in this section look at the confidence levels of the students from two different aspects; their level of confidence in asking for assistance when they need it and their confidence in their independent information seeking skills. The respondents appeared quite confident about approaching library

staff if they needed help, in contrast to the findings of studies conducted with students in the Hatchard and Crocker (1990:101) study. There was also a reflected increased perceived confidence and familiarity with library resources. Again, percentages decreased with years at college.

Library customer education includes any activity which creates the opportunity to learn. When librarians provide instruction that fosters skills development there is a significant increase in library use and expectations by respondents (Wakeman 1990:37). Respondents become aware of the opportunities available to them and view the role of the library from a new perspective. The library becomes a venue for self-directed learning and is transformed into a centre for active learning (Hubbard & Wilson 1986:22).

Library customer education services will be targeted to meet the needs of segments with homogeneous information needs. Considering each respondent segment as a set of individuals with specific needs dictates the need to facilitate different library customer education activities. Survey results indicated that education was needed to make respondents aware of the purpose of the library, its facilities and services. Promotional education activities are clearly required.

Self-directed learners in a problem-based programme would benefit substantially from a one session library workshop which uses a lecture on finding and evaluating information, a library tour, and a workbook they may use independently. This format may be too ominous to consider initially, but should be considered in any five-year customer education plan. It would permit self-directed learners to progress at their own pace in line with currently supported adult learning theories.

The primary role of the library should be to empower increased competency in any area contributing to higher self esteem. The techniques for customer education offered by the library must be as varied as possible and, to encourage participation, be linked to the direct needs of respondent segments. The study demonstrated how respondents may be segmented to direct

*(continued on page 69)*