Factors influencing digital literacy skills among visually impaired undergraduates: a qualitative analysis of viewpoints of academic staff

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Digital literacy skills of undergraduates with visual impairments influence their use of digital resources. Academic staff is the principal group who work closely with the students on their academic work, whose views of the academic staff members on the digital literacy of undergraduates with visual impairments were equally important. The objectives of the study were to investigate the impact of digital literacy skills of undergraduates with visual impairments on their academic performance and find out the issues facing them in accessing digital information resources from the viewpoints of academic staff. Three state universities in the Western Province of Sri Lanka were purposively selected. Undergraduates with visual impairments are attached to the Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Education of those three selected universities. The study population consisted of the academic staff members of the respective faculties of the selected universities. Researchers administered questionnaires among 20 academic staff in respective faculties. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with purposively selected respondents in the academia who teach undergraduates with visual impairments. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data obtained from the survey. NVivo 10, qualitative data management software, was used to visualize the findings, where 80% of the respondents stated that undergraduates with visual impairments who perform well in their academic work use digital resources effectively. Meantime, 70% of the respondents had observed that undergraduates with visual impairments who perform well in their academic work have good digital literacy skills. The researchers identified 38 different observations by analyzing the respondents' comments. These observations were categorized under 10 different themes, among which, lack of IT skills, lack of devices, lack of audiobooks and accessibility, and poor knowledge and skills were the main issues identified. Apart from that subject-specific issues were also noted. Researchers recommended that training programmes should be conducted to develop digital literacy skills and enhance their motivation and encourage attitudinal changes of students with visual impairments. Furthermore, the academic staff members should be given an opportunity to train in 'disability inclusive education'. Moreover, faculties and libraries should work towards developing the audiobook collection.

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