



The Ph.D.-candidate as an information literate resource: developing research support and information literacy skills in an informal setting

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Abstract

This article aims at suggesting a new way of developing research support for PhD-candidates. Previous research on the field of research support greatly focuses on the librarians' competencies and how to assist researchers with what they lack in information literacy (IL) skills. There is little focus on collaboration with researchers to achieve a mutual learning outcome in regard to developing research support and IL skills. A socio-cultural view on IL indicates that IL skills are developed in a context, and therefore are situated. A high level of IL in one situation could be regarded as insufficient in another. Therefore, a librarian's view on IL could be incomparable to a PhD-student's everyday information needs. Many liaison librarians do not have a PhD, but are still expected to provide PhD-candidates with research support of high quality. How can we do so if we only see the librarian's perspective? Can informal settings and user involvement be a productive way of developing research support and IL skills? As librarians it is not always easy to know what researchers need. However, if the threshold has been lowered, in an informal setting, one might obtain the questions that reveal difficulties for researchers when it comes to library services and resources. Also, through user involvement, the researchers can teach librarians about the research process. This study includes an anonymous survey among PhD-candidates at the Faculty of Humanities and Education at the University of Agder (UoA) and interviews with two of the PhD-candidates

in addition to interviews with all of Agder University Library's (AUL) liaison librarians. In general, PhD-candidates that interact informally with their liaison librarian have a higher confidence in their own overview when it comes to library resources. They do not have problems contacting their librarians for help, but they do not expect the librarians to do their searching for them.

Key words: library; research support; PhD-candidates; humanities

1. Introduction

This article aims at giving an alternative way of developing research support for PhD-candidates. In spite of numerous liaison librarians not having a PhD themselves, they are still expected to provide PhD-candidates and other researchers with research support of high quality. The average completion ratio for PhD-candidates in Norway after 6.5 years is only 35–50% (St.meld. nr. 35 (2001–2002), 2002). This indicates that changes need to be made in support of candidates to give them a realistic chance of achieving a doctorate within the stipulated 3 or 4 years. Library services may help in this process. Research in the field of research support greatly focuses on librarians' competencies and how to assist researchers with what they lack in information literacy (IL) skills. There is little focus on how the librarian can learn something from participating in the research process. One exception is a recent study from Vestfold University College (VUC) which shows how collaboration between researchers and librarians proves to be useful for both parties (Olsen, 2012). Other studies have shown that PhD-candidates wish to interact with librarians in less formal settings, outside of the library (Drachen, Larsen, Gullbekk, & Westbye, 2011). What a PhD-candidate needs has to some extent been explained, but actual documented experiences from functional cases seem to be not represented in the research area.

UoA is a relatively small university; in 2011 the total number of active PhD-candidates was 130 (DBH, [s.a.]) distributed over 16 doctoral programmes. None of AUL's liaison librarians have a PhD. How can liaison librarians without a PhD provide PhD-candidates with research support of satisfactory quality? What do the PhD-candidates need, what do they already know, and how do librarians provide this? Can the PhD-candidates themselves be a useful resource in developing research support through user involvement, and

are the informal meetings with the librarian desired from PhD-candidates a practical way of improving IL skills?

2. Theoretical framework

One of academic libraries' main tasks is teaching IL skills to students and researchers. In the report "Analysis of Research Support Services at international Best Practice Institutions" research support is defined as "a primary researcher support service offered to academics at the university in order to support their role as researchers" (Larsen, Dorch, Nyman, Thomsen, & Drachen, 2010, p. 7). Doing research without IL skills would be very difficult. CILIPS' definition of IL says that "Information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner" (CILIP, 2013). Furthermore, CILIP states that this demands several skills that require an understanding of one's need for information and where to find this. This implies a behaviouristic view of IL; that it is commonly taught and developed in educational settings. It could also imply that librarians are always IL experts. Librarians are information specialists and are well skilled in where to obtain information and evaluate this, but it seems self-evident that only the researchers themselves know, and can identify their own information need.

A socio-cultural perspective would state that IL skills are developed in a context and what is considered to be a high degree of IL in one context may not be considered the same in another situation (Sundin & Johannisson, 2005, p. 34; Pilerot & Hedman, 2009, p. 35). This implies that different research areas will require different sets of IL skills and the need for library services and research support will depend on the researchers' needs. To study user behaviour is a difficult area. "The study of user behaviour is mostly made on the basis of a positivistic theory, and this is assumed to be 'objective' research. But the users' behaviour of course reflects their subjective knowledge and attitudes. These subjective attitudes must be interpreted in some way. It is of little help to know what information sources are used if you don't know whether the sources and strategies used are adequate and represent the optimum" (Hjørland, 1997, p. 4). Even if it is difficult to find an absolute definition of research support, it could be a goal to make researchers capable of conducting independent research, through improving their IL skills.

According to Lloyd (2007) information literacy has traditionally been conformed to educational environments, but in her research IL is “a way of knowing about an information landscape through embodiment within context” and an outcome of IL is that an individual goes from novice to expert in this context through networks, connections and actions (Lloyd, 2007, p. 183).

Through the PhD period, a goal is to transform PhD-candidates into high quality researchers, or, from novices to experts. Handling large quantities of information is part of this process, and it is most often carried out in social situations like seminars and so on. “The process of becoming information literate about a specific context [...] is viewed as culturally motivated” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 183).

Traditionally, library research has focused on what the library can offer researchers, and not so much on what the researchers can offer the librarians. A socio-cultural framework would state that learning and IL is developed in social situations. IL is a constantly developing set of skills and even librarians need to reinforce their learning to continue to be information literates. While librarians know where to obtain information (the CILIP definition), they may not know the PhD-candidates’ information needs, and they may not know the setting of which the information is needed.

3. Methodology

This study included an anonymous survey among the PhD-candidates at the Faculty of Humanities and Education, interviews with AUL’s 11 liaison librarians, and two PhD-candidates at the Faculty of Humanities and Education.

The survey was issued by e-mail to 26 PhD-candidates¹ attending doctoral programmes at the Faculty of Humanities and Education at UoA using an online survey made in SurveyXact. 20 PhD-candidates, 77%, responded to the survey, which was completed in March 2012. The goal was to clarify if the collaboration between PhD-candidates and liaison librarians had a measurable effect on the librarian’s view of research support and the PhD-candidates’ use of library resources. The respondents are only from the Faculty of Humanities and Education, and do not necessarily reflect the candidates from the other Faculties.

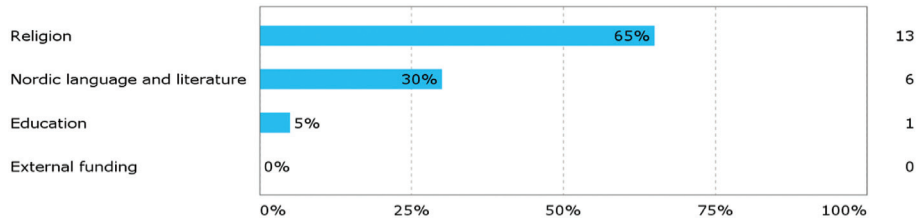
The purpose of the interviews with two PhD-candidates was to focus on how the collaboration has worked for them in their thesis work and how their reflections on the library's research support could help regarding further development. One intention was also to document a typical interaction between the librarian and the PhD-candidates concerning the library's research support. The selected PhD-candidates have participated in developing the concept "the librarian's lunch" and have also participated in reference groups for new library resources, like the AULs Citation Compass, a website for academic honesty and use of sources. One of the candidates is attending an internal UoA doctoral programme, while the other is attending an external doctoral programme, while working at UoA. They were both close to finishing their PhD at the time of the interview, and thus holding information on most stages of the PhD-process. One cannot make general conclusions based on this selection, but it can document PhD-candidates' views on library resources and research support.

All interviews were carried out in April 2012. The purpose of the interviews with AUL's liaison librarians was to document the librarians' understanding of research support. The 11 liaison librarians at AUL were asked the same five questions regarding how many PhD-candidates were linked to the programmes at their Faculty and with how many of these they were in contact, if they were included in the faculty's arrangements for the PhD-candidates, how much time they spent guiding and teaching PhD-candidates, which channels they used for marketing library resources, if contact was initiated by the liaison librarian or the PhD-candidates themselves, what kind of support was most commonly asked for and lastly if the liaison librarians had regular contact with the faculty administration and management.

The survey was conducted in March 2012, one month before the interviews were carried out. It was desirable to map out which questions needed elaboration and therefore the survey was sent out before the interviews. It was also important that the PhD-candidates chosen for the interviews were not influenced by the conversation in the interview when answering the survey. The goal of the survey was an uninfluenced and anonymous response.

The survey issued to the PhD-candidates asked them to state if they had just started the work with their thesis, if they were halfway done, if they were getting close to finishing, or if they had already handed in their thesis. They were also asked to state which doctoral programme they attended. Figures

Fig. 1: Which doctoral programme do you attend? (n=20).



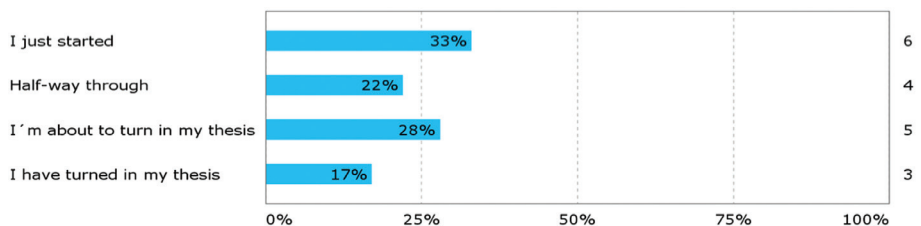
1 and 2 illustrate the mapping of the background information. The answers from the PhD-candidates at the Faculty of Humanities and Education showed that all programmes were represented in the survey (Figure 1).

When asked how far along they were in the PhD-process, all alternatives were fairly evenly distributed (Figure 2).

The survey's questions addressed the term research support itself and with what they were most and least satisfied in regard to AUL's research support, their own information behaviour, and their need for library resources. The respondents were also asked if they had suggestions on how AUL could improve research support.

The PhD-candidates in the programme for religion, ethics and society and the programme for education were also asked questions about what they thought of the "librarian's lunch", a newly started "project" developed in collaboration with the PhD-candidates and their liaison librarians. The questions asked if they attended the lunches and if they found it useful.

Fig. 2: How far along are you in the PhD-process? (n=18).



4. Findings

4.1 Findings from the survey issued to the PhD-candidates

Lloyd (2007, p. 187) argues that IL is found at the intersection point of social, physical and textual context. As this survey shows, when finding information PhD-candidates are focused on the library's collection, and access to information and databases, but tips from their advisor and other colleagues are also considered to be a valuable source of information. The lunch meetings with their librarians are also an appreciated information channel. Useful information is not only found in text, but also in relations with other people connected to their research field.

The PhD-candidates were asked an open question about how they understood the term research support. The answers varied, but what was repeated, was that they did not know, or that they considered funding as research support.

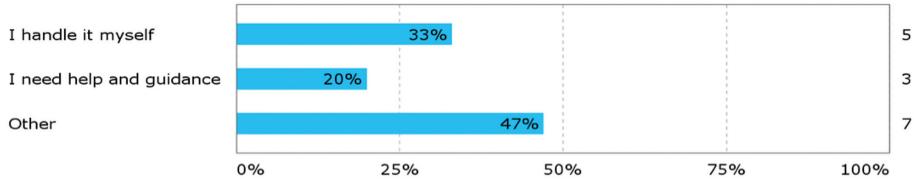
When asked if the library was something they thought of as being vital to research support, over 80% of the PhD-candidates answered yes. When asked to specify in which way this was, most answered as help finding resources, making resources accessible and handling references.

To the question of how they found information resources, the PhD-candidates preferred a combination of finding information by themselves and asking the liaison librarian for help. The respondents who answered "other" were asked to fill out a field to specify this (Figure 3). Most of these respondents answered that they handled it on their own most of the time, but that a combination of the two, depending on the situation, was preferred. The answers also reflected confidence in the liaisons librarians' overview and abilities to make good searches.

The PhD-candidates were asked to state how they found information. 100% answered the library catalogue (BIBSYS) and reference lists from other books and articles. Google Scholar was also a highly used source. Very few (only two) answered that they asked their librarian to do the searching for them (Figure 4).

The majority of the respondents (86%) answered that their need for library resources had changed since their work with their master's thesis. The main

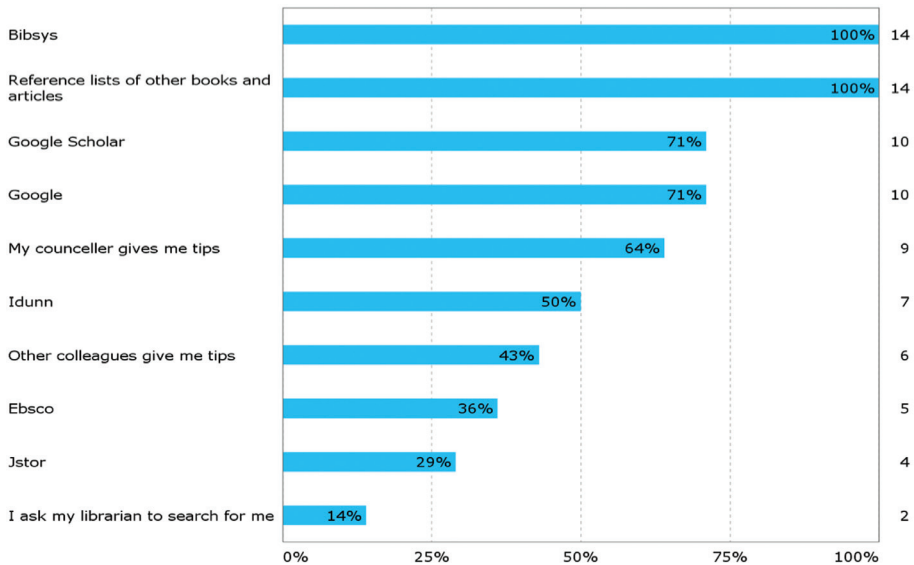
Fig. 3: Do you need the research librarian's help finding information or do you handle it yourself? (n=15).



reason stated was that they worked more interdisciplinary and needed more information. Some of the respondents also answered that more information had been made available online since then. This would suggest that the PhD-candidates' IL skills are developed in a context and further developed when meeting new requirements.

The answers to the question of what they would consider to be the most important thing that the library could offer them and their research, show

Fig. 4: How do you find information? Choose the alternatives you normally use (arranged in descending order) (n=14).



that the PhD-candidates considered access to sources, both in the library collections and interlibrary loans, to be highly important. In addition friendly support and help in finding literature was ranked highly.

The PhD-candidates listed the library's service and friendly attitude as the thing they were most satisfied with in regard to the library's existing research support. When asked what they were least satisfied with, many of the PhD-candidates answered nothing, and some answered that the collection of AUL was missing some material in comparison to some of the established university libraries with more comprehensive special collections.

There were few answers to the question whether the respondents had suggestions for improvements to AUL's research support, but some answered that they wanted some specific sources to be added to the library's collection.

The PhD-candidates at the programme for Religion, Ethics and Society and the programme for Education were asked additional questions about the librarian's lunch. 4 of the 9 PhD-candidates, or 44% attended or attended sometimes. When asked if they found this useful 100% of the attending answered "yes".

4.2. Findings from the interviews with AUL's liaison librarians

The librarians were asked the same questions on how much time they spent guiding PhD-candidates, with what the PhD-candidates needed help, how they marketed the library's products and services and what they considered to be a success criterion when it comes to assessing their own research support.

The interviews showed that most of the liaison librarians had a strong belief in the PhD-candidates' abilities when searching and using library resources. Yet marketing was a difficult area for most of the librarians. They did not want to seem "pushy" and were reluctant to issue too much information. When asked what they considered to be a success criterion of their own research support, most of the liaison librarians answered that they wanted to achieve a low threshold to the library and increased use of library resources. AUL liaison librarians found it difficult to measure their impact on research, but a good reference list that shows that the PhD-student has searched the

right databases, a correct reference list, and no plagiarism could be considered criteria of success.

4.3. Findings from the interviews with two of the PhD-candidates at the Faculty of Humanities and Education

Two PhD-candidates were interviewed to elaborate on how PhD-candidates can contribute to develop library services and resources to make them more useful and relevant to researchers and to further develop the library's research support. This selection was based on a collaborative experience with several projects and a continued informal contact throughout their work with their theses. They were asked questions about research support in general, AUL's resources, services and research support as such, and their own information behaviour.

The main findings from these interviews were that the library provided a sense of security for the PhD-candidates. The fact that every department has its own liaison librarian made it easier to contact the library, and the "help-desk" function in regard to EndNote was highly appreciated. Knowing that there was a person they knew there to assist them gives a sense of security.

When asked if they preferred personal guidance in the office or to participate in library courses, both PhD-candidates thought that office guidance was more useful and efficient. Still, one of them answered that:

"The advantage about courses is that you get to know the other PhD-candidates, and that makes it easier for you to spread the knowledge. Because this makes it easier to ask someone else, and give tips to each other. And you will get an idea about who's racers on the technical stuff and so on. I think that [PhD-candidates name] is well informed and on top of technical things. That's the main advantage of courses, I think" (PhD-candidate A) [Author's translation].

The courses must be spot on, and not too long if the PhD-candidates are going to make this a priority. The other PhD-student, preferring one-to-one guidance to library instruction courses stated that:

"I prefer to get something that is "spot on", that I need. For some of us it is enough just to have the required prerequisite knowledge articulated as a

competence. There could also be demands to required prerequisite knowledge” (PhD-candidate B) [Author’s translation].

The answers imply that the PhD-candidates know what their information needs are, but the library offers are at times unclear. As they do not want to risk spending hours on something they already know, or something they have no need of learning, they often give less priority to this.

When asked how they performed source criticism and if this had changed since their master thesis, the answers were:

“That has to do with the ability to refine what you are really asking. And it is in a way a competency that makes me able to say “I want to exclude this”” (PhD-candidate B) [Author’s translation].

“What I consider to be quality criteria has changed. My main criteria of quality now are publication channels. What is scientific on level 1 or 2. Publications that are pure dissemination are disregarded” (PhD-candidate A) [Author’s translation].

The interviews also revealed that the PhD-candidates had a high awareness of the use of sources and information seeking.

“It [searching] is a big part of the PhD-work. And it is kind of ironic how it is not reflected in the education. Because this is quite random. If I had worked more systematically with this, I could probably have saved some months on my PhD, I think. You can’t use Google searching in your PhD. You shouldn’t in your master’s thesis either [...] You have to make good Bibsys² searches, and use EBSCO and subject guides and stuff like that. And if you have received library instruction for searching, you should be on top of that. But how much more difficult is searching in EBSCO than in Google, right?” (PhD-candidate B) [Author’s translation].

“It is part of the craftsmanship you have to show that you master. And when it comes to literature, I have become more and more conscious and more preoccupied with being informed. And I have become aware that the old methods I use to retrieve literature are leading me backwards in time, and no, I want to go forward. And then I have to change my methods; I have to change my information behaviour. It’s as easy as that. [...] I think that I make

good footnotes along the way and keep track of my sources. I have very few notes to check this or that book. Very few" (PhD-candidate A) [Author's translation].

The low threshold and the fact that every PhD-programme has its own liaison librarian was also greatly appreciated.

"It is often the low-threshold-profile that enables me to speak to my librarian and this develops into me seeking out specific products and services and getting better service" (PhD-candidate B) [Author's translation].

5. The librarian's lunch

After working together with the PhD-candidates systematically for some years, it was clear that the PhD-candidates wanted a forum for informal contact to discuss different kinds of problems and challenges that arose throughout the research process. We decided to have lunch together once a month and call it "the librarian's lunch". This is an informal meeting place where it is possible to bring along some material to hand out and market some of the library's services and resources. Informal meetings like this are also one of the recommendations for libraries in the recent report "Information behaviour and practices of PhD candidates" (Drachen et al., 2011, p. 29). Often the questions brought up by one PhD-student are common for several of them. As a result of the lunch, courses are set up at a time that suits all of the PhD-candidates wanting to attend, and then opened up for all researchers at the university. Experience shows that courses open to all academic staff have little effect. The reason is that the PhD-candidates have little time to spare and do not want to risk spending time on something that is not useful for their thesis or that is too general (Fleming-May & Yuro, 2009, p. 215). A course where there will be 5–6 attendants will still be a more effective use of time than potentially reaching 50 researchers by inviting them to an open course. Most of the time these open courses result in one or two researchers actually showing up. This is probably because they do not know what to expect or if the course is really useful to them. A study also shows that in higher education environment it is important to earn the respect of the researchers if you want to teach researchers something without being a researcher yourself (Macauley & Green, 2009, p. 72).

This monthly lunch is useful to the PhD-candidates, but also to liaison librarians who do not have a PhD themselves. In many ways this can be “field-work” to observe and interview the PhD-candidates and learn about their challenges and what they do and do not know about the library. Librarians may think that they know best when it comes to organisation of knowledge and making it accessible, but it is difficult to do this if they do not know the process. PhD-candidates are also good evaluators of content because they are heavy and critical users. Using informal conversations like these can help develop library resources in cooperation with PhD-candidates. When the threshold is lowered you will not only get information about what they are uncertain about, but also on what they are less happy with when it comes to the library’s resources. In guidance, informal settings can often be helpful as “the context is often initiating or liberating for the conversation” (Høigaard & Mathisen, 2008, p. 296). And in a liberated conversation one is more likely to get an honest opinion and evaluation.

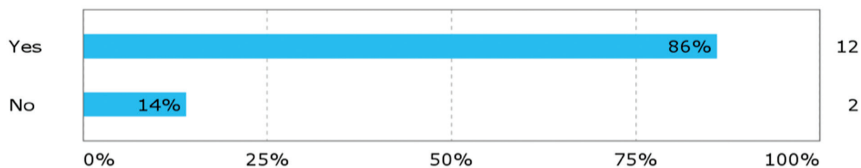
5.1 Do the PhD-candidates attending the librarian’s lunch differ in information behaviour?

Most of the PhD-candidates were confident in knowing what the library could offer them. Of those not attending the librarian’s lunch 78% thought they had a good overview of what the library could offer them.

Of the PhD-candidates attending the librarian’s lunch 100% answered yes to the same question.

No great differences were detected between the PhD-candidates attending the librarian’s lunch, and those who did not attend when it came to the

Fig. 5: Do you think you have a good overview on what the library can offer you as a PhD-candidate? (n=14).



use of information sources. However, Figures 6 and 7 show that none of the PhD-candidates attending the librarian’s lunch ask their librarian to do their searching for them. PhD-candidates attending the librarian’s lunch had a slightly higher use of the library’s databases like Idunn and EBSCO. The PhD-candidates that did not attend the librarian’s lunch used the database JSTOR more and Google less.

The librarian’s lunch has been a forum for discussions about academia. edu, several blogs the PhD-candidates were following, and the fact that PhD-candidates are less confident in their abilities to search and find the resources and literature they need. This can also be a good marketing channel for library resources. Presenting the resources in connection to the discussion at hand and thus showing how this can be relevant and useful for their thesis is a good way to get the PhD-candidates to attend library

Fig. 6: How do you find information? (Choose the alternatives you normally use). Answers from PhD-candidates not attending the librarian’s lunch (in descending order) (n=9).

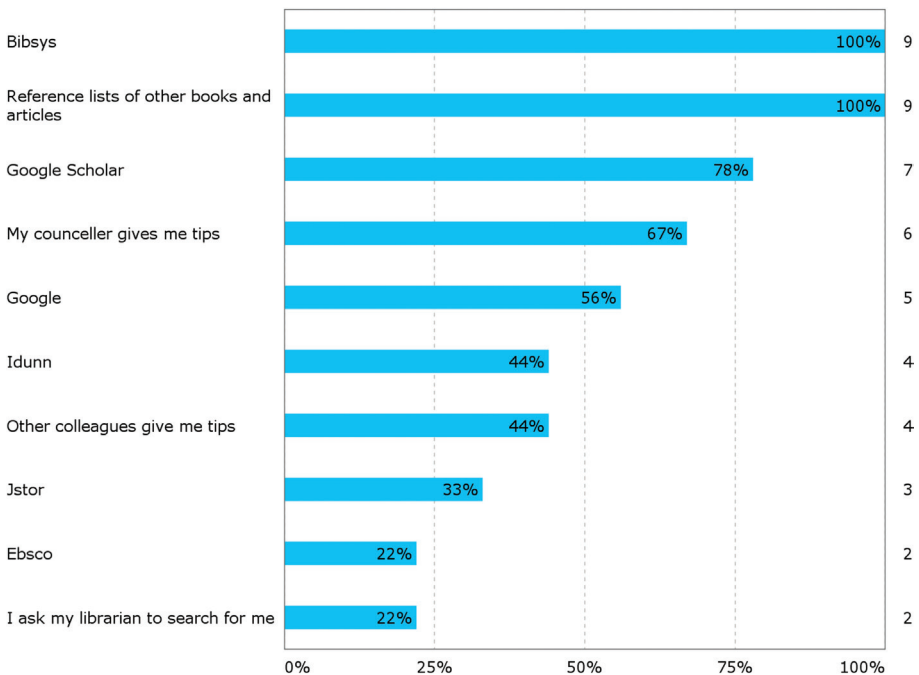
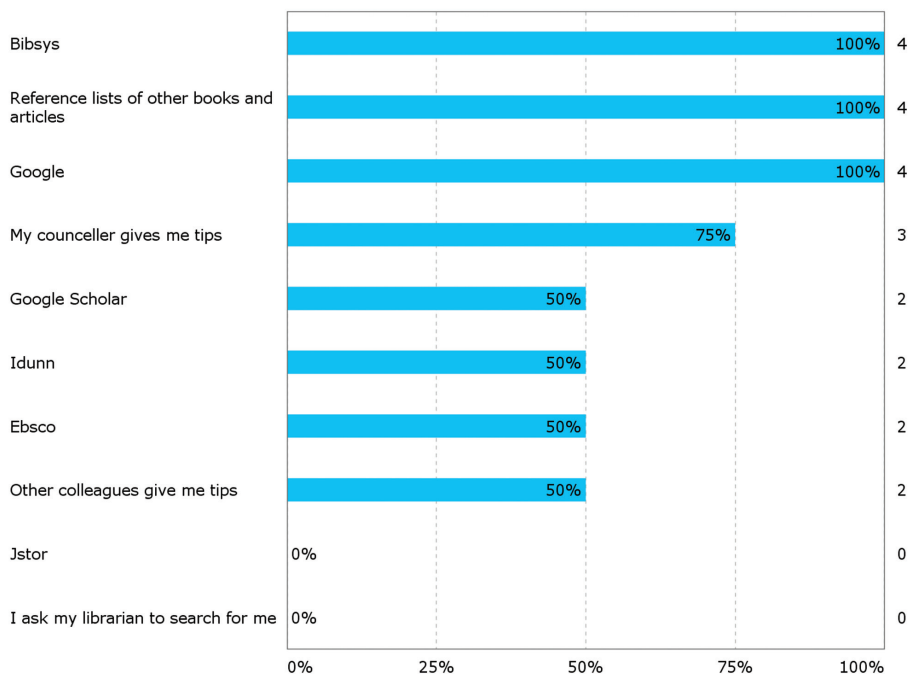


Fig. 7: How do you find information? (Choose the alternatives you normally use). Answers from PhD-candidates attending the librarian's lunch (in descending order) (n=4).



courses. "The main aim of the library is to offer knowledge and valuable information and data to a growing number of users." (Le Deuff, 2009, p. 22). This could also improve the librarian's knowledge of the research process and help understanding when and how library services and products are needed. The librarian can act as a novice in the PhD environment, developing understanding of the research process and being able to offer better research support.

The main aim of the PhD-candidates is to finish their thesis in the period they are given. Many PhD-candidates experience time pressure to make this happen and very few complete their programme in the 3 or 4 years given. Statistics shows that after 6.5 years, only 35–50% of PhD-candidates had turned in their dissertation (St.meld. nr. 35 (2001–2002), 2002). Our goal as academic librarians must be to do our part to make it possible to complete

dissertations within the regular time. Tools like better search strategies, EndNote and RSS-feeds can help PhD-candidates reach their goal.

6. Discussion

As previously mentioned, CILIP's (2013) IL definition gives a behaviouristic perspective of IL and states that this implies several skills, normally developed in an educational setting. A socio-cultural perspective would state that these skills are developed in contexts and what is considered to be a high degree of IL in one context, may not be considered the same way in another situation (Pilerot & Hedman, 2009, p. 35). This implies that different research areas will require different sets of IL skills and the need for library services and research support will depend on the researchers' needs. Lloyd (2007, p. 187) argues that IL is found at the intersection point of social, physical and textual context. As the survey shows, PhD-candidates are concerned with the library's collection, and access to information and databases, but also tips from their advisor and other colleagues are considered to be a valuable source of information. The lunch meetings with their librarians are also appreciated information channels. Useful information is not only found in text, but also in relations with other people relating to their research field in different ways.

PhD-candidates have, in the work with their application, been searching widely for information in their research area to make a new research question. CILIP's (2013) definition of IL would apply to this, because they need to show that they are familiar with their information needs, and where to obtain the information to get the PhD funding. Most of them are also accustomed to handling large quantities of information and then processing and presenting this to others (Maccauley & Green, 2009, p. 73). Some may recently have completed their master's degree, and hopefully also participated in library courses for search strategies and ethical use of sources. Others may have been working in their subject area for years before starting their PhD. One should be careful in regard to branding PhD-candidates' searching abilities as poor and insufficient (Gullbekk, Rullestad, & Torras i Calvo, 2012, p. 86). Even though they may use other channels to search for information than a librarian would, they still are able to do research in such a way that they get a scholarship for a PhD.

But even though many PhD-candidates are capable of searching themselves, they may not know about all that the library has to offer. The library's

services are often insufficiently communicated and unknown (Fleming-May & Yuro, 2009), and they may not even know what to ask for (Macauley & Green, 2009, p. 75).

Making the library's services known to the PhD-candidates can help them make their research more efficient, but it can also help us assess our services. PhD-candidates often have a new approach to traditional services and may help librarians evaluate their processes and work methodologies as well. Contributing to the PhD-candidates' sense of control and overview over library resources should be preferred to the approach of focusing on what they do not know (Gullbekk et al., 2012, p. 87).

Librarians have little doubt that the library's resources are useful to students, PhD-candidates and other researchers. Otherwise they would probably be doing something else. "Interviews with American and Australian academic librarians regarding their interactions with doctoral candidates across several academic disciplines indicated an underlying belief that being information literate assures academic, intellectual and socio-cultural success" (Green, 2010, p. 314). One can of course discuss what it means to be information literate. This can mean different things to different users. Librarians' view of IL skills may differ from what PhD-candidates will rank as necessary skills in order for them to conduct their research in a good and ethical manner. The way librarians would define IL would most commonly be using CILIP's definition in a behaviouristic perspective and that being information literate is to master the fixed skills of creating and passing on information in text (Pilerot & Hedman, 2009).

From a socio-cultural view IL means that the skills needed in order to be information literate depend on the research subject and methodology. "The view that emerges from the research described here is that IL is more than just the development of skills. IL is a way of knowing about an information landscape through embodiment within a context" (Lloyd, 2007, p. 183). The majority of the PhD-candidates answered that their research had become more interdisciplinary and broader from their master's thesis to their current PhD-work. This requires an understanding of where to find information on other subjects and how to evaluate this information.

Librarians are often reluctant to push resources onto the library's users. In many cases, PhD-candidates are unaware of what the library can offer

(Fleming-May & Yuro, 2009, p. 214) and it is the librarians' responsibility to market this. But to do so one needs to know what the PhD-candidates need and when they need it. When many librarians experience difficulties even getting through to the PhD-candidates, this is easier said than remedied. Libraries, being non-profit organisations, have had little need to market their offerings. Still, if librarians are to fulfil their jobs, they need to be salesmen. When talking to the library's users, librarians need to offer more than they ask for and achieve additional "sales".

It is clear that the library's services often are insufficiently communicated, and that means that libraries pay a great deal of money for resources that few people use or even know about. To improve this, liaison librarians need to do a better job of marketing the library. But, as the interviews with AUL liaison librarians show, librarians are afraid of being nagging. E-mails are sent to the department of Humanities every month with a list of books that have been purchased for the library. This service has received a lot of positive feedback. One of the PhD-candidates stated when asked if they had ideas or tips on how the library could improve its research support: "Advertising. I get SO much corporate spam (from [...]). I would really appreciate a monthly reminder of the competencies and services offered by the library's personnel, and the offered research support. Also notifications about new services or updates to existing ones"(PhD-student).

It is clear that librarians can spend more time and energy marketing library services without the fear of spamming. Library services are free, and information about this is, in most cases greatly appreciated.

6.1 Can PhD-candidates contribute to the development of research support?

In informal meetings with PhD-candidates one is able to show them new services and ideas at an early stage. In this way one can get an evaluation and tips on how to progress with this. In regard to the library's subject guides the PhD-candidates asked "why don't you divide it into different levels? In this way you could add information about publishing and impact factor without spamming information to the undergraduate candidates".

A study carried out at VUC shows that close collaboration between the liaison librarian and the researchers is useful to both parties. The researchers

improved their skills in the use of library resources and “The librarian developed a sharpened attention and greater knowledge about the different phases of a research project” (Olsen, 2012).

One should never underestimate the effect of talking to researchers to find out what they need. “Properly serving your customers requires that you first listen to their needs and, second, respond quickly” (Collier, 2011). PhD-candidates are, as we know, pressed for time, so quick responses are highly appreciated. This is also a recurring issue in the surveys conducted among the PhD-candidates, independent of which programme they belonged to. Either they mention quick response time as a positive thing about the library’s research support, or they mention access to be the most important thing the library can offer as research support.

The book “Mastering your PhD: Survival and Success in the Doctoral Years and Beyond” (Gosling & Noordam, 2011, p. 120) stresses the importance of using the library. “Introduce yourself to the reference librarian(s) and explain that you want to carry out a literature search on your thesis topic. These individuals are great sources of information and are there to help you in your search.” However, could we not also as librarians say: introduce yourself to the PhD-student(s) and explain that you want to develop the library’s research support. These individuals are great sources of information and will almost certainly help you develop research support in the most practical way.

7. Conclusion

This article has been an effort to discuss alternative ways of developing research support through informal settings and collaboration with PhD-candidates. The survey at hand shows that PhD-candidates participating in the “librarian’s lunch” had higher confidence in their own overview of library resources, and none of them asked their librarian to do their searching for them. Still, they have a low threshold for contacting their librarians for help. The interviews also show that close contact with the liaison librarian provides a sense of security for the PhD-candidates.

The surveys and the interviews with the PhD-candidates showed that both their need for information and their information behaviour have changed.

Their role as PhD-candidates is different from their previous situation as master students. They need more interdisciplinary sources, which forces them to further develop their IL skills in order to find the information needed.

Although many liaison librarians do not have a PhD, they still are expected to support research. And although most PhD-candidates are not trained as librarians they are expected to use the resources in the right way. Both librarians and PhD-candidates have their area of expertise and, working closely together, we can all benefit. PhD-candidates are new and heavy users of library resources as researchers. Making an informal meeting place to discuss this, will give liaison librarians the response and feedback they need to improve services instead of being oblivious to resources going to waste. PhD-candidates will also have the possibility to ask their questions in an informal meeting place and improve their IL skills.

Informal settings like “the librarian’s lunch” may provide the social aspect in developing IL in a socio-cultural perspective, not only for the PhD-candidates developing IL, but also the liaison librarian’s IL. Learning more about the research process through conversations and observing PhD-candidates, can be a good starting point in further developing the library’s research support. Universities should create informal meeting places where research challenges and their need of information can be discussed and where library resources can be advised. This is also recommended to all liaison librarians in order to further develop research support.

This study is based on PhD-candidates in the humanities, and may not apply to the needs in other disciplines. The social-cultural view states that different IL skills are needed in different disciplines, and this could also mean that this approach of developing research support is best suited for the Humanities. However, close contact with one’s target group, in this case PhD-candidates, would probably be a good strategy. Still, further research in the field of research support in other disciplines is needed in order to draw final conclusions.

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Notes

¹ This is the official number reported to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (DBH, [s.a.]).

² Bibsys is AUL's library catalogue.