

Utilization of Institutional Repository of Kotelawala Defence University with Special Reference to Undergraduates of the Faculty of Law

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the utilization of institutional repository (IR) among Law Undergraduates at Kotelawala Defence University (KDU), assessing awareness, purpose of use, pattern of access and perception of undergraduates as it is uncertain whether the law students at KDU possess knowledge of the IR and utilize it for their academic endeavours. This study applied a mixed methods research design employing qualitative and quantitative methods. A questionnaire and a focus group discussion were used to collect data from the sample of 101 respondents. Descriptive statistics were adopted to analyze the data. Key findings showed a moderate awareness of KDU-IR among respondents regarding its existence and benefits. The prominent sources of awareness were library Orientation programs and library websites. Respondents aware of KDU-IR had highly utilized it for their learning tasks, finding theses and research papers, searching information not available in other formats, updating their knowledge and finding author information. The majority of them used it for learning support and to find author information. However, overall utilization among the undergraduates of the Faculty of Law was at a moderate level. The majority of the students who were aware of KDU-IR held a positive perception. In contrast, others needed a clear understanding of the content covered and its relevancy and quality. Most students prefer to access the IR at home to download information. They also suggested incorporating additional resource categories into KDU-IR, along with modifying the user interface and ensuring the provision of up-to-date information. The study found that lack of awareness of the function, how to use it, and continuous power interruptions are the key barriers that hinder undergraduates' utilization of IR. The study recommends addressing

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barriers through continuous awareness programs, assessing strategies, and upgrading KDU-IR services for better alignment with user information needs.

Keywords: Academic libraries, Undergraduates, Institutional Repository, Open Access, KDU-Sri Lanka

Introduction

In recent years, the transformation in scholarly information has been marked by new applications of digital technologies such as Open Access, linked data, Artificial intelligence (AI), Application Program Interface algorithms (API), machine learning, and natural language processing. (Bahrami et al., 2018). The digital revolution has considerably influenced scholarly publishing, creating challenges with the concept of Open Access (Dury, 2017). These advancements in emerging technologies underpin the importance of institutional repositories (Digital Libraries) in facilitating students to access focused knowledge across disciplines (Gidlund & Sundberg, 2022; Schwandt, 2020, 2022; Margo et al., 2017). Therefore, the concept of Institutional Repositories (IRs) came into existence in information dissemination to overcome access barriers.

An institutional repository is a repository that enables access to a variety of electronic resources, encompassing research articles, newsletters, journal articles, AV materials, and images that pertain to a particular institution (Bankier et al., 2009). Kotelawala Defence University (KDU) established the KDU Institutional Repository (KDU-IR) in response to the changing nature of higher education. This repository, especially for law students pursuing their undergraduate degrees, provides an essential forum for exchanging and disseminating academic research. KDU-IR promotes collaborative education and ongoing learning by giving unrestricted access to various scholarly resources. However, it remains uncertain whether the law students in their third year at KDU possess knowledge of the university's institutional repository and utilize it for their academic endeavours. Reviewing past literature, the researcher came to know that no single study has been conducted on the utilization of KDU-IR by its undergraduate Law students.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of current usage, the purposes for which the repository is utilized, the patterns of information-seeking, the obstacles and barriers encountered by the students, and develop effective strategies for overcoming these hindrances and enhancing IR utilization by undergraduates at KDU. Moreover, it is expected that this study will provide suggestions and approaches that similar institutions can implement to improve the efficiency of their IRs.

Objectives

Main objective

To Explore the utilization of the institutional repository of Kotelawala Defence University (KDU-IR) by the undergraduate students in the Faculty of Law.

Specific objectives

- (i) To Identify the awareness about the KDU-IR among undergraduates
- (ii) To investigate the purpose of using the KDU-IR
- (iii) To analyze the patterns of accessing the institutional repository
- (iv) To measure the level of perception of undergraduate students of KDU-IR.

Methodology

This study adopted an inductive approach integrating a mixed-method research design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The population of this study is 137 students who are in 3rd year in the Faculty of Law at KDU. The sample selected 101 respondents out of 137 total populations based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. Quantitative and qualitative data collected from the respondents to evaluate the variables, including awareness, purpose, patents, and perception of students that affect in the utilization of KDU-IR. The student enrollment list 2021 was used to collect the students' email addresses.

The researcher used a convenient sampling technique to collect primary data by sending a questionnaire to the total population. The study employed a self-administered semi-structured questionnaire, closed-ended questions, a few open-ended questions, and a focus group discussion to collect data for this study. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze quantitative data, while qualitative data was analyzed through narrative text analysis. Though the sample is 101, only 76 respondents to the questionnaire responded, which indicates that the respondent’s rate was 75.2%. All the analyzed data was presented appropriately in a table or graph.

Results

Awareness of KDU-IR by undergraduates of the Faculty of Law

It was observed that 64.5% of the respondents were aware of KDU-IR, while 35.5% were unaware of the KDU-IR. Therefore, this finding indicates that the majority of the students were aware of the existence of KDU-IR.

The source of awareness about KDU-IR by undergraduates of the Faculty of Law

library orientations conducted by library staff was the prominent source that helped undergraduates be aware of KDU-IR, representing 28.6% followed by 24.5% of respondents being aware through the library website. Additionally, 22.5% were aware of their friends and lecturers, while 2.0% were aware of the faculty staff.

Awareness of the benefits of KDU-IR

Table- 1 Awareness of Benefits

Benefit	Fully Not Aware	Not Aware	Slightly Aware	Aware	Fully Aware	Total	Mean
Full-text Access	17.1%	7.3%	14.6%	51.2%	9.8%	100%	3.29
Relevance to Curriculum	9.8%	17.1%	9.8%	46.3%	17.1%	100%	3.44
Learning Support	2.4%	24.4%	19.5%	41.5%	12.2%	100%	3.37

Table -1 illustrates that there was a dynamic level of awareness of the benefits of KDU-IR among the 3rd year undergraduate students of the faculty of Law. Accordingly, students were aware of all the benefits of KDU-IR, and the majority of them recognized full-text access as the most valuable benefit of It, following its relevance to the curriculum.

Purpose of Use

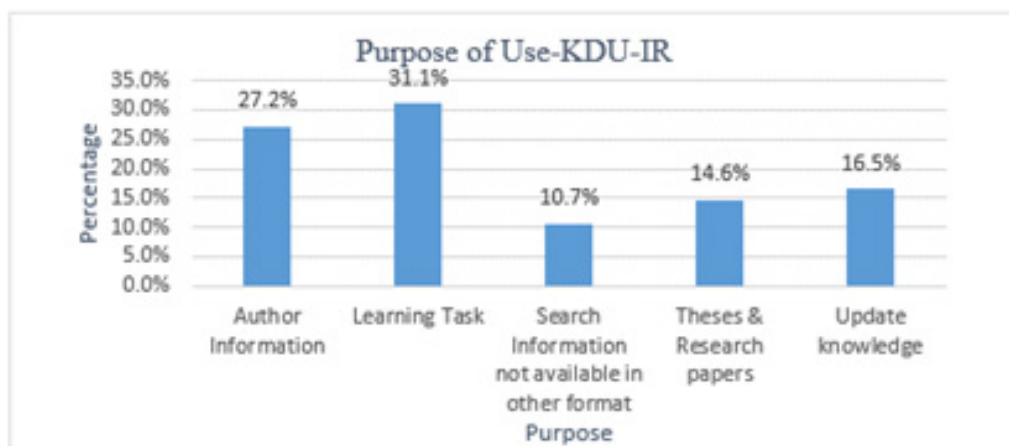


Figure -1 Purpose of Use KDU-IR

The figure -1 illustrates that all the undergraduates who are aware of KDU-IR use it for learning tasks, author information, search information not available in other formats, theses, and dissertations, and to update their knowledge. Further it reveals that majority, representing 31.1%, used the KDU-IR for learning tasks.

Discussion

Descriptive data collected from the students uncovered that majority were aware of KDU-IR while a significant portion was not. Therefore, identifying key factors that affect awareness is crucial to maintaining an effective IR service. This study found that students were aware of IR through various channels, and library orientation programs were the primary sources among them. This finding confirmed by (Gunasekera et al., 2021) that library orientation was the primary source of user awareness.

Although the IR was used for different purposes by the students, the majority were used to get support in different learning tasks, whilst a significant proportion used it to find author information for their academic works. Notably, there was a low utilization of IR for theses and research works, highlighting the students' ignorance and lack of understanding towards KDU-IR.

Moreover, it uncovered a dynamic pattern of undergraduates accessing the KDU-IR, and the majority of them accessed it once a month. Accordingly, the findings highlighted that students did not perceive the IR as the primary source for their information needs. Furthermore, the findings showcase that students preferred to access the IR at home rather than while travelling due to the poor reception of mobile networks in Sri Lanka. Also, the undergraduates recognized the benefits associated with full-text access, relevance to curriculum and learning support through KDU-IR. Apart from that, the focus group discussion concluded that submitting papers and sharing knowledge are recognized as benefits gained through the KDU-IR. This study revealed the students' belief that IR is helpful to their study work, especially for their exams works and project work. Confirming this finding (Akinlolu, 2023) asserts that many students used digital libraries for exam preparation.

Conclusion

The study showed a moderate awareness level among 3rd-year law undergraduates regarding the KDU-IR, but it was below a satisfactory level. The primary sources of awareness were orientation programs conducted by the library staff and the university's library website. Students recognize its benefits for academic support in various ways, emphasizing its relevance and full-text access as valuable benefits. The primary purpose for accessing the institutional repository was to seek support for various learning tasks, highlighting its role as a valuable academic resource. However, challenges such as lack of familiarity with IR functions, power failures, and interface issues hinder its full utilization. Therefore, Future initiatives should be arranged to ensure reliable power sources, conduct comprehensive user training programs, raise awareness about the IR's functionalities, and implement interface enhancements to create a more user-friendly environment.

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