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Graduated Summer 2012

Dissertation Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of a tutorial in enhancing eight education graduate students' information searching in digital libraries for problem solving activities. The tool centered on "idea tactics" that expert searchers employ to "help improve their thinking and creative processes during searching" (Bates, 1979, p. 280). These tactics also represent metacognitive strategies and twelve of these concepts are incorporated in a tutorial to improve users' search strategies during a problem solving exercise. The mixed method study targeted education graduate students, an underserved population in library information seeking research (Earp, 2008, p.74). Quantitative measures were utilized to track participants' accesses to the tutorial components, number of revised searches and records examined, as well as time spent in the tutorial, devising search strategies and reviewing results. Scores comparing students' initial (pre-tutorial) search with their post-tutorial search were also considered. For the qualitative part of the research participants verbalized their actions as they located resources in the library's commercial databases. Follow-up interviews considered participants' satisfaction level with the results, the helpfulness of the tutorial, difficulties with the think aloud protocol, and any additional information they chose to offer. The research adopted two coding schemes for the transcripts including the use of pre-figured codes as well as an open coding format. Reliability was enhanced through the availability of two individuals for the coding process. Overall, students benefited from the application of various idea tactics or metacognitive strategies to their problem solving in library databases that was illustrated in improved scores for their final search.