Epistemological belief structure of Law undergraduates in using electronic information resources: A case study of the University of Colombo

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Epistemology from a psychological and educational aspect is how an individual develops conceptions of knowledge and utilize in developing and understanding of the world. Even though personal epistemology is typically held at an intangible state of students, these beliefs have influences on their study strategies, comprehension and are significant predictors of grades. The objective of the present research is to configure epistemological beliefs of the law undergraduates at the University of Colombo, in using electronic information resources. The target user population was law undergraduates from first to fourth academic year in 2018 (999students) and a sample of 608was selected randomly according to the Morgan table. The data was gathered by a survey instrument developed referring Schommer's Epistemological beliefs model (1990) with integration of five different values of electronic information resources in academic activities; information need, motivation, searching process, searching speed and searching outcome. Five epistemological belief measures; time, amount, speed, integration and simplicity were used as the basis of the coding schema. Results were subjected to quantitative multivariate factor analysis utilising generalized least squares extraction and cluster analysis was applied to obtain groups with different epistemological belief patterns. The study confirms the multidimensional character of epistemological beliefs in using electronic information resources with a 6-dimension model; speed of knowledge acquisition, knowledge product, autonomy of knowledge, dynamic knowledge, procedural knowledge and comprehensive knowledge. Cluster analysis resulted in three clusters and each cluster indicates a unique six dimensional pattern of epistemological beliefs. Three clusters were pessimistic, optimistic and comprehensive knowledge believers. Epistemological belief patterns of these three groups show a distinct difference. The present research has proved evidence towards contextually unique, quantifiable structure of personal epistemological beliefs in using electronic information resources and enable to understand the factors influential to these learners in both positive and negative ways. This understanding could be used in order to positively enhance the experience of the learner, increasing their capability and desire towards constructive life-long learning practices in digital era.

Keywords: *electronic information resources; epistemological beliefs; epistemological belief structure; university libraries*