Easy as ABC (Acceso a Bibliografía Científica): Increasing Access to Scientific Literature in Panama

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About ABC (Acceso a Bibliografía Científica) and the Study

ABC (Acceso a Bibliografía Científica) is an initiative of Panama’s National Secretariat of Science, Technology, and Innovation (SENACYT) designed to increase access to scientific and academic literature across the country. ABC Platform comprises a set of bibliographic resources initially piloted for use at eight institutions in January 2014. ABC currently provides access to 1,714 ScienceDirect publications and has added eight more institutions to its network of partners. The ABC project constitutes a key component of Panama’s Strategic National Plan for Science, Technology, and Innovation, 2015–2019, which intends to increase research productivity and impact in the country.

To date there has been no formal assessment of ABC. Some literature has been written about the success of Latin America’s larger access projects, like SciELO and CONRICyT, but little attention has been devoted to the strategies of smaller countries also attempting to improve access to scholarly information. This study intends to help build a model of information access for countries like Panama, and will do so by examining the influence of ABC on researchers’ information-seeking and publishing behaviors.

Methodology

Respondents: 49 Completed, 20 Partial (as of May 31, 2016)

This study used an exploratory, 19-question survey to better understand the current use and views of ABC by those who are provided access under the program. We are interested in better understanding if this national strategy is meeting researcher needs, and obtaining a clearer picture of the information access and publishing behaviors of these researchers.

The survey was distributed via a link through the Sistema Nacional de Investigadores (SNI) database, which contains 85 researchers. It was also posted on the website of Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá and distributed via SENACYT’s social media. The survey closed on June 15, 2016. Results through May 31 are presented here. The next phase will include in-depth interviews with researchers across the country.

Does the Platform Meet Researchers’ Needs?

Fig. 5

Impact of ScienceDirect on Research and Publication Output

Fig. 6

Full-Text Articles Downloaded

Fig. 7

Amount of ABC Use

Fig. 8

How Else Do Researchers Meet Their Needs?

Fig. 9

Does the Platform Meet Researchers’ Needs?

Fig. 10

Criticisms of ABC

Fig. 11

Funding Questions:

How can we distinguish “inadequacy of resources” from “discomfort with the system” when assessing satisfaction with the project?

What can be addressed with more education, and what has to do with technological infrastructure?

Linking satisfaction to institution - As a “national” strategy, who truly benefits?

Future Questions:

What percentage of research is done using ABC? If other resources are more effective for research sharing resources across borders?

What is the legalities, and ethics involved in use of these services?

Panamanian researchers. What are the regulations, legalities, and ethics involved in use of these services?

Do researchers with wider collaborative networks turn to social networking sites, repositories, international colleagues, and other databases as alternative sources of information when ABC did not meet their needs. Interviews in the future may shed light on the reasons why these resources attract Panamanian researchers as well as the ethics and sustainability of these alternative solutions. Overall, given the large standard deviation in survey responses, it is evident that individual interviews will be crucial to better understanding the range of experience in Panamanian research activity as it relates to ABC. Future research will give SENACYT the tools to make more informed decisions about resource allocation to improve access and distribution as it continues to evolve its strategy for providing access to scholarly publishing.