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Developing a Subject Gateway for Accessing Online Resources on Korean Studies

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Abstract

The growth of online resources on Korean Studies (KS) has increased over past several years. They cover almost all facets of the discipline ranging from Korean Art to Korean Sociology. Majority of these resources offer free and unrestricted access and are managed by various institutions and individuals.

The demand for KS has increased as a fast growing discipline in South Asia. There are number of institutions in the region which offer various academic programs related to KS, especially on Korean language and culture studies. However, despite of little collections, majority of libraries and resource centers in these institutions do not have sufficient and updated resources which are necessary to meet the information needs of KS students and teachers. Institutions in Sri Lanka also have no exception in this regard.

The above mentioned freely available online resources can fill this void by meeting the information needs of KS students in Sri Lanka to a greater extent. However, most of the students are not fully aware of the availability of these resources. Also they are lack of necessary skills and encounter language barriers in selecting authoritative online resources. As a result, the valuable yet free resources are under-utilized.

Objective of creating a 'Subject Gateway' is to assist Sri Lankan students to find relevant and authoritative online resources, related to KS, through their local languages. Weblog technology is used to create the gateway by using the Blogger, a free service offered by Google. The Gateway is created and maintained by an academic librarian who has basic training and skills on KS materials and Korean language.

Online resources are evaluated by using several criteria including the creator, content, accuracy and up-to-datedness. Selected resources are critically reviewed and annotations are provided in three languages (i.e. Sinhalese, English and Korean) and the blog posts include necessary links to and images of online resources. The listed resources will be periodically reviewed in order to check their consistency and modifications will be done accordingly. Each blog post will be tagged and indexed by using subject headings especially developed for KS by the Library of Congress (LCSH). Interfaces for major South Asian languages can be developed in collaboration with the other institutions in the region. An 'Ask a Librarian' service is planned at the second phase of the project as well.

Keywords: Korean studies--Online resources; Korean studies--Subject gateways; The Internet; Weblogs

1. Introduction

Korean studies is an academic discipline focusing on the study of Korea. As Chun (1999) defines, “Korean studies is an interdisciplinary field which draws upon the Korean aspects of disciplines in the arts, humanities, and social sciences”. Areas commonly included under Korean studies are Korean history, Korean literature, Korean art, Korean music, Korean language, Korean sociology, Korean political science, Korean economics, Korean folklore, and Korean ethnomusicology. It may be compared to other area studies disciplines such as American studies. Korean studies is sometimes included within a broader regional area of focus including ‘East Asian Studies’, ‘Oriental Studies’, or ‘Asian Studies’ (Wikipedia).

The demand for Korean studies has increased as a fast growing discipline in South Asia. There are number of institutions in the region which offer various academic programs related to Korean studies, especially on Korean language, literature and culture studies. Regional nations such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka offer Korean studies related academic courses at the University level.

Information sources play a key role in studying any discipline including area studies. The traditional information sources are primarily paper-based ones including printed books and periodicals. With the advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), they have transformed in to electronic formats. Among them, online resources which are accessible via computer networks such as the Internet have become more popular. Online information sources include e-journals, e-newspapers, e-books, websites, web search engines, web portals, databases, etc. They provide easy and real-time access to up-to-date information with multimedia features from anywhere at any time and contain great volume of information in comparison to their traditional print counterparts. While majority of them are freely accessible the others needs paid subscriptions to access them.

These freely accessible online resources can play a vital role in Korean Studies especially in countries such as South Asian nations. Because the institutions in these countries often

lack of necessary materials to support the information needs of Korean Studies students, teachers and of scholars.

The number of online resources related to Korean studies has increased. A simple search on “Korean studies” on Google would end up with over 1.5 million (Figure 1). Although majority of these information are freely available online, this type of vast information is not manageable for a typical internet user. Also online information is not organized in a proper manner, constantly changing and sometimes obsoleting, and the authenticity of information provided is questionable. Furthermore, the students, teachers and scholars are not fully aware of the available resources and lack of necessary skills (technical skills, etc.) to access them. The need for a formal guide to these online resources arises in light of above background.

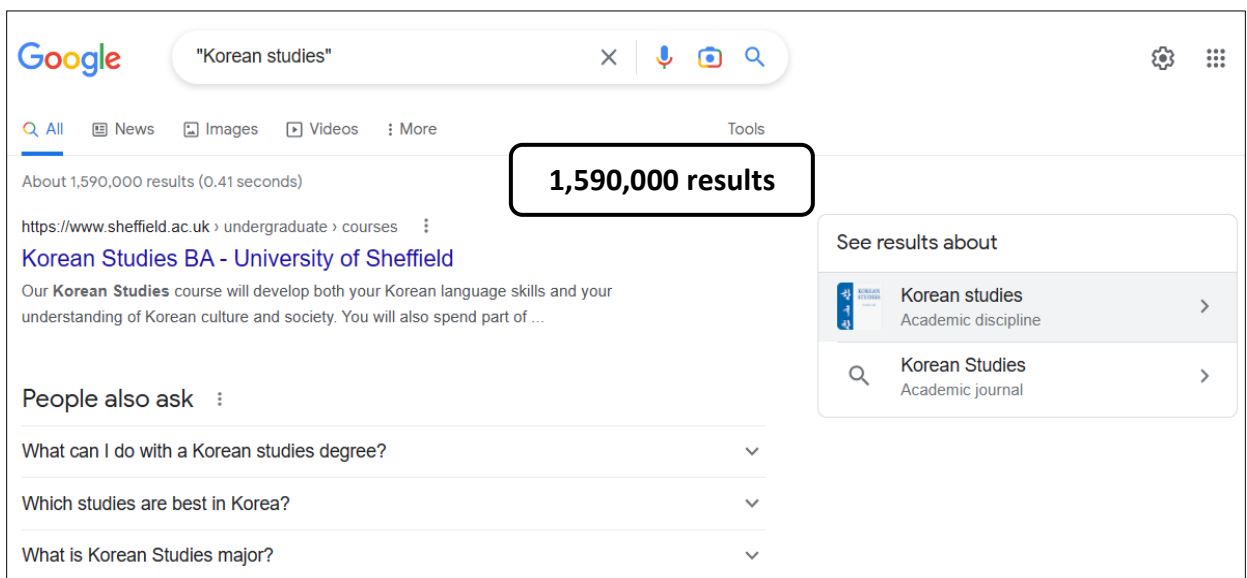


Figure 1: Google search results page on ‘Korean studies’

2. Korean Studies in Sri Lanka

As far as the situation in Sri Lanka is concerned, Korean studies has emerged as a specific discipline very recently. However, in majority, Korean language, culture & literature are studied in several institutes. The present study pays particular attention on Korean studies at undergraduate level in local universities. In that sense, University of Kelaniya is a unique university which considers Korean language for a degree program in

Sri Lanka. The Department of Modern Languages of the Faculty of Humanities of the University offers a B.A. General and Special Degree programs in Korean language and Korean Studies.

Although the Korean language degree program was started in the year 2002, it was well established in year 2003. In 2006, the first group of Korean language candidates graduated. At present, there are over two hundred (200) students who are enrolled in the three-year general degree program and nearly 50 students who are enrolled in the four-year special degree program. In addition to the degree program, the Department of Modern Languages also offers a two-year certificate course in Korean language. This certificate course is opened to the 1st and 2nd year students of the University. In addition to that, a comprehensive one and half year Korean language diploma course was inaugurated in the year 2008.

2.1 Korean Studies related Information Services in Sri Lanka

However, the information resources and services available for Korean studies are not at a satisfactory level. For an example, the Main Library of University of Kelaniya houses nearly 100 books and audio-visual materials, etc. related to Korean studies (Korean language, culture, history, politics, economy, etc.). Despite the limited collection, the library also does not have a subject specific information service related to Korean studies. Also, these materials are housed along with the other library materials and are not organized as a special collection.

In addition to the Main library collection, The Korean Centre (KC) of the Department of Modern Languages houses over five hundred (500) books and over hundred (100) audio-visual materials. However, materials of the KC are not classified using a classification scheme. Also, there is neither a card nor computerized catalogue to help the users to locate materials. Although the materials are lent to the students they are not properly processed for circulation purposes. This had led to some management difficulties in the circulation process, including unreturned and misplaced materials. Also, the Korean

Centre does not have a qualified library professional to organize and maintain its collection whereas the collection is managed by the volunteers (Ranasinghe, 2009).

2.2 Information needs of Korean Studies students

A survey was carried out among Korean studies students of the university to identify their information needs and online information seeking behaviors related to Korean studies. Seventy-five (75) students, who follow the general and special degree programs, were selected for the study. Semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data.

According to the findings, all the students (100%) seek additional information for their studies, other than the materials given at the lectures. However, they find that the materials available in the library system are insufficient. Majority of them are not satisfied about the library services related to Korean studies in the University. Language barrier is another major problem as the materials are not available in local languages. Furthermore, Korean studies related materials are not published locally and not available in local book shops although they wish to buy them (Figure 2). As a result, they have to heavily dependent on lecture notes and recommended text books only.

As far as the Internet use of these undergraduates is concerned, over ninety percent (90%) of them use the Internet for finding information related to Korean studies (Figure 3). Especially, they seek for online information related to Korean language, literature, culture, history, traditional/popular arts, cuisine, news, etc. Majority of them use search engines such as Google for finding online information. However, they do not get the desired information frequently via the Internet.

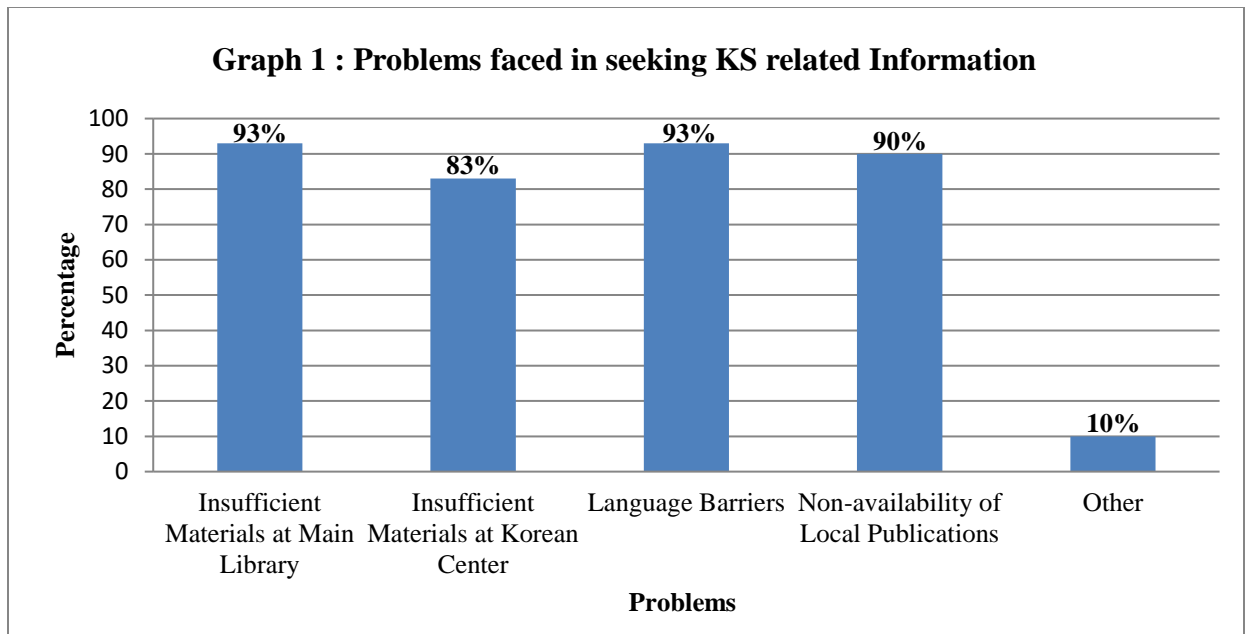


Figure 2: Problems in seeking KS related information

Lack of awareness of the websites related to Korean studies, lack of skills in finding and selecting appropriate information sources, enormous hits retrieved as search results, issues related to the accuracy and reliability of online information, and the language barriers are the major problems faced by undergraduates in using online information sources for their studies (Figure 4).

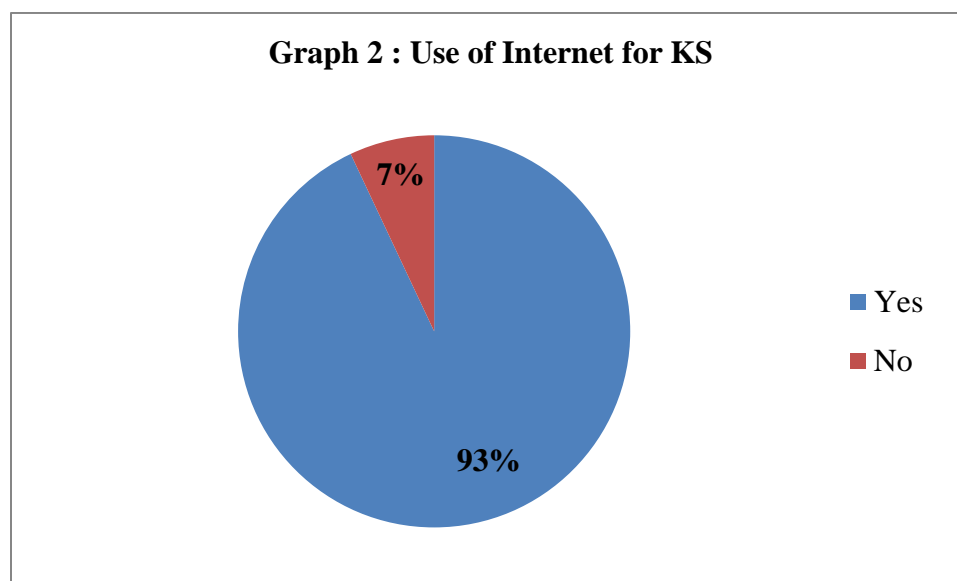


Figure 3: Use of the Internet for KS

Findings of the study reveal the demand for an Online information service which could guide and help students in accessing selected and authoritative online information resources related to Korean studies.

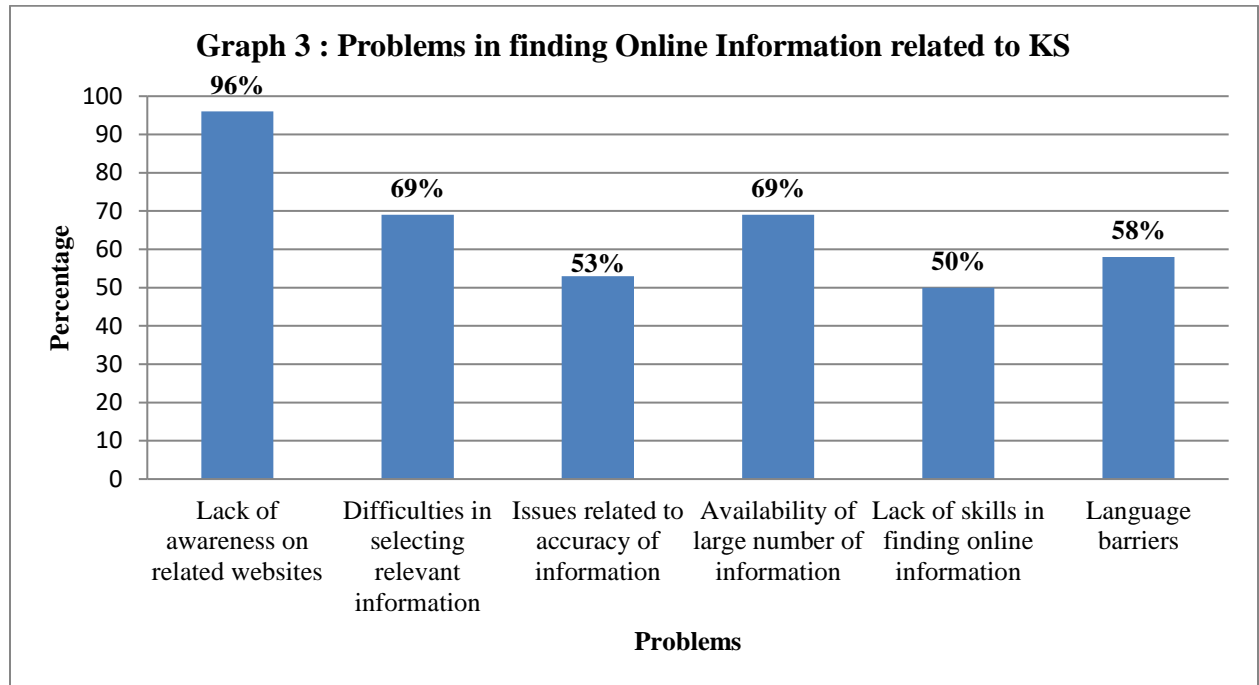


Figure 4: Problems in finding Online information related to KS

3. Development of a Subject Gateway on Korean Studies

Main objective of the proposed project is to meet the above demand, by introducing an Online information service related to Korean studies. This project is entirely volunteered by a university library professional who have training and exposure to Korean language, culture and Korean studies related information services.

3.1 Specific objectives of the Project

The specific objectives of the project are to:

- a) Suggest trustworthy online information resources related to Korean studies

- b) Guide the effective use of online information resources related to Korean studies
- c) Reduce the burden on finding relevant online information for Korean studies
- d) Categorize and organize online information resources related to Korean studies in a helpful manner
- e) Provide a Korean studies related information service (including an ‘Ask a Librarian’ service)
- f) Enable to find online information related to Korean studies through local languages
- g) Fill the void of inadequacy of resources in local libraries related to Korean studies
- h) Build an online community of Korean studies students, teachers, and scholars

3.2 Strategy of the Project

Strategy of the project is to create a ‘Subject Gateway’ to provide access to selected online resources related to Korean studies. A subject gateway in the context of network-based resource access can be defined as some facility that allows easier access to resources in a defined subject area. The simplest types of subject gateways are sets of Web pages containing lists of links to resources (Kirriemuir et al... 1998). Subject gateways are also known as subject-based information gateways (SBIGs), subject-based gateways, subject index gateways, virtual libraries, pathfinders and other variations thereof. They are web portals to information that are usually limited to a specific domain or subject area. The resources accessible through these gateways are reviewed, selected, evaluated and catalogued by information professionals or subject experts.

3.2.1 Technology used

At the initial step, the ‘Weblog’ technology is used to create and maintain the Subject gateway. Weblog is a web page containing brief, chronologically arranged items of information (Clyde, 2004). Each piece of information in a weblog comes as a blog entry

(blog post) which includes an entry title, date & time, content and tags. A typical blog post combines text, images, and links to related external resources such as the other blogs, web pages, etc. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs.

There are several free blog-publishing services on the Internet to create and host weblogs (i.e. WordPress, Blogger). The 'Blogger' is used in this project to create the subject gateway. According to Wikipedia "Blogger is a blog-publishing service that allows private or multi-user blogs with time-stamped entries. It was created by Pyra Labs, which was bought by Google in 2003. Generally, the blogs are hosted by Google at a subdomain of blogspot.com".

Blogger has following features and advantages in selecting it for creating this particular subject gateway. It offers a free service for hosting weblogs and comes under Google, which is one of the biggest online services. It offers number of templates to select which are easily customizable. Blogger also provides a mobile application which enables the blogs accessible via mobile devices. It has interfaces in number of languages including major regional language such as Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, Tamil, etc. and also supports Unicode. Its' posts are RSS (Really Simple Syndication) enabled and can be read via a RSS reader. Blogger maintains an archive which enables access to previous blog entries. Taking backup of data is possible at any time which avoids any loss of data and enables to restoration and/or migration to another platform easily.

3.2.2 Selection of Resources and Evaluation Criteria

The Subject gateway uses number of methods to identify resources related to Korean studies. They vary from accessing existing subject gateways created by Korean studies institutes and Korean studies librarians around the World, accessing portal sites of Korean government, utilizing search engines, subscribing to mail groups related to Korean studies, etc.

Identified resources are carefully selected for the Subject gateway by using following criteria:

1. **Authenticity of information:** The person or the organization behind the origin of information is vital in selecting online information sources. Because, today's technology has enabled any one to simply add anything to the Internet. Therefore, the accuracy of online information has become questionable. The resources for the proposed should have originated from a trustworthy source such as a government agency, an academic/ research institute or from an affiliated to such agencies. The resources originated from well-known academics, researchers, or information professionals are also considered for the inclusion.
2. **Up-to-datedness of information:** One of the major advantages for going online is the ability to obtain updated information. In comparison to the printed sources, online sources can be easily and regularly updated. Outdated or obsoleted information has less or no value in an Online environment. Therefore, in this proposed subject gateway, the up-to-datedness is considered as a major criterion in selecting online information resources.
3. **Relevancy of information:** The resources, although they come from authoritative sources & provide up-to-date information, must be relevant to the information needs of local students. Priority is given to the areas highlighted under 3.2.3
4. **Form of presentation of information:** The systematic organization of information, the simplicity of language and technology used, easy accessibility and searchability, multi-media features (i.e. images, sound clips, and videos), etc. are considered in selecting online resources for the proposed subject gateway.

3.2.3 Subject Coverage

Various sub disciplines of Korean studies are covered by the proposed subject gateway including Korean Language, literature, culture, history, cuisine, art (traditional and

modern), reference sources (encyclopedias, dictionaries, databases, etc.) and contemporary news related to Korea. The areas were selected as per the findings of the survey done with Korean studies students. Students have selected above as their preferred areas in searching for online information. In addition, the syllabi for the general/ special degree program at the Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya was also used for selecting subject areas.

3.2.4 Annotation and Categorization of Resources

A subject gateway is not merely a list of online resources with hyperlinks. Each resource introduced should accompany with a brief description of it. This description would help the end user to identify, select, understand, and use the prescribed information source effectively. Therefore, each online resource in the proposed subject gateway comes with a brief annotation. For the moment, they are given in both Sinhalese and English languages. The annotations will appear in Korean language in near future.

Each blog post will be tagged or indexed by using Korea related subject headings introduced by the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH 2007 ed.) list. Sometimes, these headings are modified according to local needs and for collocation purposes. This helps the uniformity of categorization of blog posts and creates an easily browsable A-Z list of subject headings.

The resources listed in the Subject gateway will be reviewed periodically in order to check their consistency. Obsoleted resources will be removed while outdated resources are replaced by updated resources.

3.2.5 Promotion of the Services

The new subject gateway will be introduced to the Korean studies student community at the University through an informative brochure and through the University Library website. The subject gateway will be visible to the entire Internet community via the

Google search engine. In addition, this Subject Gateway will be promoted globally via the International Network for Korean Studies Librarians (INKSLIB) of the National Library of Korea.

4. Future plans of the project

An Information service should always meet the needs of its end users. Therefore, this subject gateway is designed by considering their information needs and information seeking behavior of them. Furthermore, this gateway is always open to be revised or upgraded based on the comments and suggestions made by the end users and experts of the field. Also it is planned to develop this subject gateway from a simple weblog to a fully-interactive website and host it independently under a dedicated domain name (or URL). However, this will cause some financial expenses related to web development, hosting and maintenance.

This subject gateway can be further upgraded to a collaborative service by joining with the other higher education institutes related to Korean studies in the region. So that, interfaces for major South Asian languages can be developed and it will serve as a single gateway which meets the information needs of Korean studies students and scholars of the region. Furthermore, an ‘Ask a Librarian’ service can be introduced in collaboration with information professionals and subject experts in Korean studies institutions in the region. This type of service will collaboratively answer the questions posted by end users related to Korean studies. Ultimately, this subject gateway will create an Online community of Korean studies individuals in the region.

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