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## **Information literacy for empowering the society: The readiness of libraries, librarians and other stakeholders**

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## **Abstract:**

*Information literacy is recognized globally as an essential skill for the information society. We are in a rapidly growing and complex digital environment which in turn led to our continued dependence on information. People need to use the information at their disposal effectively, whether at home, at school, or at workplace. They need to find things out, assemble, process, evaluate, manage and communicate information. Increasingly, a fundamental part of being information literate and independent learner is being e-literate. Teaching of information literacy to learners helps them to be conscious of what it means to be information literate and e-literate and to use information effectively. In an age where the information overload becomes the norm, it is crucial for students of higher institutions of learning to understand the quality and organization of information. Information literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning. It empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It equips them with the skills necessary to become independent life-long learners. It enables library and information professionals to create, develop and manage library and information centres to meet the specific information needs of the organization. As gate taker of information, library and information professionals and other staff whose role is to assist learners become independent, must have the ability to convey the concept of fundamental information literacy to students, be able to provide challenging, engaging lessons and exercises that will give the foundation they need to distinguish between the easiest sources to find and the best sources to use. Information literacy is best enhanced when it is integrated into the curriculum. As information literacy curriculum should be problem-based, inquiry-based, and resource-based, makes effective use of instructional pedagogies and technologies, and is integrated and articulated with a discipline's learning outcome, librarians should collaborate with stakeholders in their institution to ensure information literacy policy formulation and implementation. The paper explores some of the key aspects which teaching librarians must consider as they undertake this challenge of empowering students to have information literacy skills.*

**Keywords:** *Information literacy, Empowerment, Library and Information Professionals, Libraries, Librarians, Teaching information literacy, Empowering society.*

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## **Introduction**

Information is at the core of education, and we are in a rapidly growing and complex digital environment which has in turn increased our dependence on information. But there is increasing evidence that our information skills are not keeping pace in any systematic fashion. We need to sharpen the techniques and skills to manage information. of new technologies. The overload of information on the Internet makes clear that a responsible and capable use of the information provided is crucial. As the world moves fast towards an information explosion of unprecedented magnitude, this role of learning how to learn or become information literate becoming more critical than ever.

The global information explosion has urged the modern societies to explore and develop new intelligent search skills and behaviour while accessing and using information from different sources. Such skills are known as information literacy (IL) skills (Hassani & Nfissi, 2015). Information literacy enables people to interpret and make informed judgments and decisions as users of information sources as well as to become producers of information in their own right. Information literate people are able to access information about their health, their environment, their education and work, empowering them to make critical decisions about

their lives, for instance, in taking more responsibility for their own health and education. Information literacy is not just a library use issue, especially if one looks at it as a tool for empowerment and liberation. It is of keen importance to all educational stakeholders, including faculty, librarians and administrators. With the explosion of information resources and sources available to learners today with the concomitant political, social and global trends attempting to control information, information literacy is a much more important concept and a greatest requirement in life and in the workplace (Thomas (ed), 2012).

### **Concepts of Information Literacy (IL)**

The Alexandria Proclamation of 2005 describes information literacy and lifelong learning as “the beacon of the information society, illuminating the courses to development, prosperity and freedom. Information literacy empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes inclusion in all nations. American Library Association (1998) states that to be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. The information literate individuals are those who have learned how to learn. Association of College and Research Libraries (2002) states that information literacy is the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze and use information. Prague Declaration of 2003 defines IL as encompassing the knowledge of one’s information concerns and needs, and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand, it is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the information society and is part of the basic right of lifelong.

IL is the set of skills that allows us to find, evaluate and use the information we need, as well as to filter out the information we don’t need (Eisenberg, 2008). IL skills are the necessary tools that help us successfully navigate the present and future landscape of information.

Information Literacy (IL) has therefore become new paradigm and the most critical set of skills in today’s and tomorrow’s advanced information and communication world. According to UNESCO, (2009) the empowerment of people through media and information literacy (MIL) is an important requirement for fostering equitable access to information and knowledge and promoting free independent and pluralistic media and information system.

### **Concept of Empowerment**

Empowerment is associated with authority, giving the means to emancipation, setting free, sharing information, and autonomy. Such words indicate the ultimate ideals for an informed and educated nation and also for empowerment. The learner is empowered to be the one in control of his/her education; in other words, he/she own his/her learning. It is a truism to state that we teach as we were taught; the further challenge is to release control of learning to the learner. This is what Frier called “authentic education”. Such authentic empowered intentional learning ought to form a grounded theory of IL that would inform our practice (Thomas (ed), 2012). It is only through engaging students in terms of students’ own experiences can an educator build in concepts of learning dialogues with those experiences to create a more dynamic, empowered, liberating educational experience. In such practice, power is with the learner and not with the educator.

We recognize that IL enables the learner to be empowered, informed and responsible learner. Learner-centred education means that the learner should feel in complete control of his own learning. Learner-centred education places the student at the center of the education. It begins with understanding the educational context from which a student comes and continues with the instructor evaluating the students' progress towards learning objective. By helping the student acquire the basic skills to learn, it ultimately provides a basis for learning throughout life. It is argued that empowerment requires a total change of attitude from all parties involved. In terms of IL, this means that the faculty, students and library must understand and accept the importance of IL and the need for student empowerment in this regard. Empowerment calls for the willingness to empower and to be empowered, and it can only succeed if all parties are committed, positive and motivated. Empowerment calls for true collaboration where all parties work equally for a specific common goal which is to empower the learner through providing teaching material and pedagogical methodology, which can help develop the skills and competences related to the future work requirements of the learner and the lifelong learning. Thus, the librarians and other stakeholders should move beyond discussing IL to issues of student empowerment.

### **The Readiness of Libraries, Librarians and other Stakeholders in Providing Information Literacy for Empowering the Society**

To transform the tertiary level of education and move beyond the boundaries of information literacy as a library only issue, librarians, educators, and administrators must continue to develop tools of collaboration and communication about information literacy in the context of teaching, learning and research. It has been recognized that faculty and administrators are the primary agents in determining the overall impact of the library on the campus community and universities need to remove the political barriers between IL specialists and academics to foster an integrated educational culture. The question is: Are libraries, librarians, educators and administrators of library and the institution ready to empower the learner through the provision of IL education and programmes in our schools?

In an attempt to address this pertinent question, we look at the result of some studies carried out in our schools. Hart's study of 2005 questioned to what extent South Africans (the province of Mpumalanga in particular) public libraries and librarians were ready to build a sustainable IL education programme. The need for the study is based on the reality that in South Africa, only 7.7% of schools have a stocked, fully functioning library (Equal Education, 2011 cited in Zinn, Stilwell & Hoskins) and a curriculum that demand project work (South Africa, 2009). They saw IL as equivalent to book education which focuses on sources of information. They view information as a source but do not look at it cognitively. The study conveys a strong impression that public libraries are not ready for IL role. In UK, Merchant & Hepworth (2002) assessed the abilities of teachers to teach IL and found out that despite that the teachers are information literate, they lacked the conscious understanding of the skills the concept encompasses. Furthermore, William & Wavell (2006) study on teachers experience. IL in the classroom found that teachers focus on finding of information because it is controllable activity such as sending students to the library, seeing projects as naturally motivating and easy to accomplish. But they do not know how to teach students to link prior

knowledge to new knowledge. The teachers admitted that students needed a variety of skills to execute a research project, but it is not their responsibility to teach it.

Baro and Keboh (2012) examined the various IL practices in five university libraries in Africa to identify the barriers facing IL programmes in Africa and to provide suggestions on how to improve IL practices. The survey revealed that they mainly practice IL training by means such as library tours/orientation sessions, introductory information skills classes, and teaching advanced information skills (e.g. database searching). Barriers identified include a lack of interest by students, professors, and library management; inadequate human resources to teach IL, lack of facilities; low use of distance education for teaching IL and an absence of IL policies. In a similar study to identify the knowledge of IL and search skills of students, examine the ability of students to distinguish information sources and assess the effectiveness of IL programmes in five selected private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria Ilogho & Nkiko (2014) found out that low knowledge of IL skills, high deficiency in identifying diverse information sources and lack of hands on various IL programmes in these schools. It recommended among others, the integration of IL skills into the curriculum of secondary and tertiary schools.

From the foregoing discussion, we can decipher that the educational environment are not favourable for effective and efficient implementation of IL programmes and instruction due to poor knowledge of IL programmes, lack of interest by stakeholders, lack of collaboration between stakeholders, lack of facilities and equipment for fostering the teaching of IL and non-integration of IL into the curriculum etc. Therefore, one may infer that the various stakeholders of education at all levels are not yet ready to empower the society through the effective implementation of IL programmes.

### **Teaching of Information Literacy**

IL is a set of skills required by a person to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information. IL is directly linked to lifelong learning, critical thinking and learning how to learn concepts in education. In a technology dependent society, the method we use to find, organize and research information involve more and more of information technology. Increasingly a fundamental part of being information literate and independent learner, is being e-literate. In an age where the information overload becomes the norm, it is crucial to students of institutions of higher learning to understand the quality and organization of information. IL lies at the core of lifelong learning. Teaching of IL involves certain steps, namely:

- (1) Planning research or posing a question; for instance, what is Greenhouse effect?
- (2) Organizing a way to search for answers. One may start by forming IL groups by dividing the students into groups and use a research model such as Big6.
- (3) Finding resources such as databases documentary films, websites, print sources, local experts, etc.
- (4) Expressing the information learned in a meaningful ways, for example, student produced wikis, podcasts, enzymes, etc.

## **Process**

Many opportunities abound for students to develop discrete skills within these simple steps like learning to synthesize and evaluate complex thoughts and ideas. The librarian or teacher-librarian can assist by:

- using an information gathering needed such as Big6 or the SCONUL 7 pillars as tried and true method to teach students to become information users extraordinary;
- teaching discrete skills in real world settings at the moment when students need to now them, like the solar system whose inverter spoilt with burnt fuses;
- providing rich opportunities and motivating materials for gathering information such as viewing actual data online at a website;
- providing a variety of ways for students to repackage information; like producing podcasts, for the school library website.

We can start by asking students to pose simple questions about topics that interest them. Once they have their questions, help them to make a plan for gathering information about the topics. Lead students to the resources and assist them with meaningful, technology-rich methods for them to evaluate and repackage the information they learn. Then refer them to sources of information.

## **Integrating IL into the Curriculum**

Integrating IL into the academic curriculum has been a core role of academic libraries globally. The subject librarians have changed their role from that of being service providers to being educators who are active contributors in curricular designing higher education of learning. To achieve comprehensive integration of IL instruction requires library and information professional to collaborate with other stakeholders to make a concerted and systematic effort to plan incorporating IL across curriculum service (Moselem & Wang, 2014).

The key to establishing IL in the curriculum requires a change in focus from the way the faculty approach collaboration with librarians to the way librarians approach collaboration with them. Both librarians and academic teaching staff need to move beyond the concept of teaching library skills; librarians providing additional teaching support and academics relinquishing portions of their timetable to squeeze in sessions in information skills. As they collectively move towards creating IL responsive curriculum and assessment, the notion of who teaches what should be seen as fluid, negotiable and subject to a range of individual contextual factors relating to skill, confidence and expertise of the academic discipline, delivery mode and even size of the student class (Bruce, 2004).

## **Library User Education and Empowerment**

Empowering user education facilitates learning within a knowledge-construction approach. It promotes the development of independent learning skills, that is, “the learn-how-to-learn” approach which is the basis for lifelong learning. In our knowledge-based economy, highly skilled workforce is required to have the capacity to learn (Andretta, 2005). To respond effectively to ever-changing environment, people need more than just a knowledge base, they also need the techniques for exploring it, connecting it to other knowledge bases and making practical use of it (ALA, cited in Skagen & Blaabjerg, 2016). Therefore, the landscape upon

which we stand have been transformed and we are forced to establish a new foundation called IL.

In our knowledge based society and economy, lifelong strategies will be necessary in order to face the challenges of computing and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life (Prague Declaration of Information Literacy, 2005). Empowerment provides library users (students and staff) with the necessary skills to find and use information they need for school, study and leisure and equip them with transferable skills which they can use for all sorts of information retrieval and usage, tasks enabling them to cope up with the Information Age. Foremost, we emphasize that the user engages in his own development of a generic set of competencies which are quite essential in the future life of a knowledge worker.

### **Role of Libraries and Librarians**

Providing the right information to the right person at the right time is the key to success for any institution. Information literacy functions of libraries imbues in the users the ability to locate, manage and use information effectively for a range of purpose. Nkiko (2005) opines that IL is an important skill which allows people to engage in effective decision making, problem solving and research. In order to empower learners, librarians need to relinquish, control of their students' learning to the students themselves. The power to learn is not under the control of the teacher but a student centred power and one would do well to recognize that in our library practice.

Librarians are bringing the library and IL into the academic curriculum where the 21<sup>st</sup> century library is an integral part of the academic experience and where students are asked to use it at the most appropriate moments in their research process. As we reflect on our theory and practice, we suggest that the agenda of the library ought to refocus rightly to helping in the development of empowered intentional learner. It is only through engaging the students in this way can we successfully develop information literate learner too.

With the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs), Libraries have become center-points of resource-based sharing Librarians are key personnel in the implementation of resource-based learning. Faculty are directly involved in setting activities and tasks in which students apply information to develop their knowledge and librarians inspire and guard users to access and evaluate information. Librarians help faculty and students to keep abreast of rapid changes in information access and manage technologies. Librarians as participants in complex, interconnected organization must be collaborative and goal-oriented. They must foster true and rich collaboration with instructors to reach classes of students engaged in structured research projects and to ensure that academic library runs smoothly and coherently.

### **The Role of Library and Information Science Schools:**

As professional educators schools of LIS education have opportunities to: diagnose the existing range of learners' information literacy experiences, deepen those experiences with which they are familiar, encourage them to explore previously unfamiliar experiences apply the skills learned on workplace, study and everyday life contexts. The curricula followed at LIS schools should embrace the full range of conceptions across an entire program of study. The schools must understand that IL is not teaching a set of skills but rather a process that should transform both learning and the culture of communities for the better through the process of constructive alignment. As Chakravarty (2015) opined an IL programme implemented in the curriculum must include resources to facilitate the learning of specific skills, eg web based information skills enhancement packages, other point of need, or self paced instruction, it should provide the opportunity to learn specific skills, either early in a course or at point of need, (from selfpaced packages, peers, lecturers, librarians), should necessitate engagement in learning activities that require ongoing interaction with the information environment and finally the curriculum should provide opportunities for reflection and documentation of learning about effective information practices.

### **Teacher's Role**

The teacher's role must evolve from the giver of knowledge to being a coach or guide. Teachers must be ready to teach students to become critical thinkers, intellectual curious observers, creator and user of information. This is to equip and prepare students for an independent lifelong learning while utilizing the skills acquired to seek needed information. Educators and researchers must grapple with defining the standards and competencies associated with IL, develop new ways to engage learner and measure outcomes and impact such learning (Ilogho & Nkiko, 2014, citing Colorado Education Association).

The new process call for a departure from the teacher-centred learning style to a more inclusive and participatory method that tasks students IL skills.. Knowledge is power, but it can become power only when we are able to acquire information and effectively utilize it to meet our need. Therefore, teachers, faculty, librarians, administrators and the community must collaborate to find ways to involve students not only in using classroom materials but also in using resources from a broader community and the mass media (Barbara, 2002).

### **Challenges to Teaching IL**

Libraries of all types have been called upon to take on challenge ranging from IL and developing reading culture to promoting social justice. Embedding IL into the curricular of schools is a difficult process and the process of advocacy by library staff has not been successful in achieving integration of IL into classes at programme level. Students are not being given the opportunity by lecturers to continually enhance their IL skills throughout the courses. There are the challenges of poverty, poor infrastructure, lack of funding, poor education, lack of well trained staff, policies and government support, low level of literacy etc. (Maswabi, Sethate, Sebusang & Taolo, 2011). Other obstacles to promoting IL include:



- Lack of cooperation among professional organization and lack of well articulated and promoted IL policies and programmes.
- Underdeveloped library and information systems and networks.
- Expensive telecommunication infrastructure service.
- Shortage of information and library educated professionals who would give the necessary impetus to the IL promotion and implementation.
- Intimidated users who are not well acquainted with the nature of information and its creation and how information is published and disseminated (Rodrigues, 2015).

### **Recommendations**

From the foregoing discussion, we make the following recommendation:

- (1) The key to effecting attitudinal change, both internal and external to the library institution is professional development and rigorous self-evaluation. Librarians must embrace and undertake a stringent individual and organizational self-development and self-evaluative process and procedure to strengthen their credibility and equip them with new palette of tools, skills and competences required for their role in the digital era.
- (2) The administration of tertiary education in developing nation like Nigeria must see the need to provide necessary facilities such as computer with internet connectivity in libraries, ensure regular power supply and train librarians on information technology to enable the function effectively in the information age.
- (3) There should be true collaboration among all stakeholders in education sector to ensure the development of information literate, skills and competencies among our students.
- (4) Information literacy program should be embedded in the curriculum of schools at all levels.

### **Conclusion**

Information literacy instruction arose from library education practices to address the requirement generated by the phenomena such as information overload caused by the rapid development of digital technologies. IL is increasingly being recognized and steadily acquainted with technological gadgets and sharing interest in guiding the users in the information searching, accessing the information through many means. Instruction should be provided in locating, accessing, evaluating and effectively using electronic resources. It is advisable to collaborate with the faculty so that there is proper utilization of ICT in planning, designing and delivery of IL programmes. Faculty also inspires students to explore the unknown best to fulfill information needs and staff development among faculty, and librarians who initiate IL programme. Librarians need to work simultaneously with faculty to ensure IL agendas which are advanced in the broad planning of the course.

To empower someone means to relinquish control, to pass along a level of trust and responsibility for learning to the learner to emancipate, etc It is high time that libraries start participating in the IL campaign to empower their uses to remain visible and significant contributor in the evolving information society. Today's students must develop literacy skills to function the society. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of individual librarians, academics,

academic libraries and their administrators, institutions and their administrators, professional associations and library educators to develop a new paradigm not only to libraries but also for our profession which will serve to enrich higher education students. Let us take the challenge.

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