

## User Education to Information Literacy: Changing Role of LIS Professionals

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### Abstract

Information literacy (IL) programmes do a great deal more than tell how to use the Library. IL is vitally tied to the strategic value and use of information. In the paper I focus on various definitions of IL, how it has evolved from library user education, and the aims of various information literacy programmes. I emphasize that IL is a signal skill for lifelong and flexible learning situations. I indicate the key role of librarians in IL and identify some barriers to librarians' effective involvement in and delivery of these programmes.

**KEYWORDS:** User Education, IL, Lifelong Learning, Library Orientation, Flexible Learning

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The greatest challenge for society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to keep pace with the knowledge and technological expertise necessary for finding, applying and evaluating information. It is acknowledged that we live in an information-rich society where the amount of information in the world is presently doubling every three years. Therefore it is necessity of 21<sup>st</sup> century to include information literacy (IL) in education.

Information literacy is not some entirely new phenomenon. The term "information literacy" was first introduced in 1974 by Zurkowski (the President of the US Information Industry Association), in a submission to the US National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, to identify people trained in the application of information resources to their work (Joint, 2005).

The idea of information literacy, which emerged with the advent of information technologies in the early 1970s, has grown, taken shape and strengthened to become recognized as the critical literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He recognized that 'information literates' would be better able to exploit information resources (Bruce, 2002).

The ever expanding volume of information available through print and digitized formats has the capacity to both stimulate and overwhelm. The digitizing of information and the development of IT based tools to access, manipulate and deliver information available in electronic formats is an element of what has been called the Information Age. The vast quantity of information available in a variety of media and the fact that especially through the Internet much information has not been through a process of peer review or scholarly editorial process before being widely disseminated means that it is imperative that users apply critical thinking to the information gathering and evaluating process if their own work is to withstand scrutiny.

### 2. DEFINITIONAL ANALYSIS

- ❖ User Education - User Education is a process of activities involved in making the users of the library conscious about tremendous value of information in day to

day life to develop interest among the users to seek information as and when they requires.

- ❖ Information - information is data that has given shape. It may be considered as processed data. Thus, information is data plus the meaning, which has to be a result of human action (Seetharama, 1999).
- ❖ Literacy - literacy involves the ability to use language in its written form: a literate person is able to read, write and understand his or her native language and expresses a simple thought in writing (Bawden, 2001).
- ❖ Information Literacy - Information Literacy is an understanding and set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed, have the ability to locate, evaluate, use effectively the needed information and create information within cultural and social context (ALA, 1905).

### **3. AIMS OF INFORMATION LITERACY**

IL aims are given by ALA (2005) is as follows.

1. To teach students how to find information and prepare them for lifelong learning because they can “always find information needed for any task or decision at hand.
2. It forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education.
3. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning.
4. To ensure that people understand how to, and why they need to learn about sources in the information society.
5. To preparing students to enter the world of scholarship. The shift in focus from teaching to learning in higher education can be paralleled in the shift from bibliographic instruction to information literacy.
6. Learning theories state that successful learning includes the person's ability to increase their knowledge, to memories and reproduce that knowledge, to apply it and understand what was done, to see something in a new way, and finally to change as a person.
7. It gives people the ability to question, research, find meaning, develop ideas, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, reason, communicate, transfer, solve problems, make decisions, understand nature of information, reflect, use technology effectively, use information safely and responsibly and produce new knowledge.
8. It is necessary to make the learners feel more confident and skill in their ability to manage information (ALA, 2005).

### **4. NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION LITERACY**

IL is the critical issue for the 21<sup>st</sup> century of keen importance to all educational stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, librarians etc. The information explosion of the late 20th century subsequently gave birth to the concept of information literacy.

IL instruction assists users in identifying and selecting necessary information, and using appropriate search strategies in evaluating, organizing and synthesizing the information thus acquired into a meaningful state. It makes them self-reliant and gives them a sense of being in control of their learning.

An additional factor that has also made information literacy an essential attainment is that participative citizenship in today's world requires that all people, not only students, become information-literate. This means that they must not only be able to recognize when information is needed, but also be able to identify, locate, evaluate and use effectively information needed for decision-making or fulfilling different goals. Information literacy is a skill that is widely relevant and extends beyond the walls of the classroom into the world of social responsibility.

The development of IL is central to the academic success. Information literacy makes the students beyond the role of passive listener and note taker and allows them to take some direction and initiative during class. The main purpose of including this in education system is to direct the students that will allow them to discover the material they work with fellow students to understand the curriculum (Faust, 2001).

#### **Need**

The need of IL may be essential due to the following reasons.

1. Rapid increase in the stream of information due to information revolution;
2. Advent of information and communication technologies;
3. Significant changes in information environment in content are affecting information users in several dimensions.
4. Changing shape of libraries ;
5. Wide dispersal of information ;
6. Increase in number of users , and
7. Research on complex and interdisciplinary topics.
8. Availability of information in abundance in various forms & formats.
9. Availability of information is free of any geographical boundaries.
10. Abundance of information makes it difficult to find exact information.
11. Information kiosks, learning resource centers etc. play key role in imparting Information Literacy to their beneficiaries to acquire compatible skills for handling printed vis-à-vis electronic sources.
12. Skills of Information Literacy would train beneficiaries to take a logical path in their search for & application of Information (Mokhtar and Majid, 2008).

#### **Importance**

IL is important from the view point of:

1. To be an independent lifelong learner it is essential to achieve a high level of information literacy.
2. Equity of opportunities among citizens is extremely important. One of the ultimate benefits of information literacy is to help close the gap between the information poor and the information rich.
3. Information literacy is required to have a critical thinking approach. An approach that would lead to economic and cultural progress of a nation.
4. IL is important for a strong democracy.
5. A sheer abundance of information in electronic format has made information literacy increasingly important. Traditional print resources could be subjected to a quality assurance process. Whereas, on line e-resources in the form of web pages look alike. "With the Internet sources, none of the quality assurance mechanisms can be assumed. The onus is on the user to apply a critical faculty.

6. IL is also important to understand the difficult questions of ownership of information and copyright.
7. IL is a prerequisite for – participative citizenship; social inclusion; the creation of new knowledge; personal empowerment; and learning for life (Bundy, 2005).

## **5. THE LIBRARIANS' ROLE IN IL AND THE CHALLENGES TO THAT ROLE**

Libraries have long been acknowledged as signal resources supporting teaching, learning, and research. They are the chief contributor to the ‘repository of knowledge’ characteristic of a university which sets it aside from other institutions of higher learning. Even these times where the “ownership/access” debate is frequently aired, and the proponents of “just-in-time” debate with those of “just-in-case” the reality is that it is not a case of “either/or” but of “both/and” and librarians in these more complex times have an enhanced role assisting users to find relevant information in the most appropriate format in a timely fashion (and at an acceptable cost to the user or the funding institution or both).

The library is, of course, not the only place for accessing information though it is expected to remain the principle source for many to access local resources which are owned and leased, and those which are obtained from a distance in response to individual requests. The librarian’s role in managing information and knowledge resources and in constantly re-examining the appropriate balance of ownership and access, and which medium to hold or access is one of continuing challenge, stimulation and even delight.

Bruce lists a number of strategies for information literacy education within the university context:

- ❖ integrating an information literacy component into curricula, articulated through a course or groups of courses
- ❖ integrating an information literacy component into one or more selected subjects only
- ❖ introducing special subjects at one or more levels of a course dedicated to aspects of information literacy
- ❖ special cross- or intra-faculty workshops for research and teaching staff providing updates on information literacy, tools, systems and technologies and information literacy education
- ❖ extracurricular opportunities for students provided by faculties, learning support counselors or the division of information services
- ❖ continuing education subjects or workshops for graduates and members of the wider community

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

In the Information Age the concept of literacy needs to be expanded to embrace information literacy. The ability to view information in its widest context, to determine needs, and then locate, evaluate, organize and apply it was key skills. IL programmes need to be integrated into the curriculum if they are to have best effect rather than being

seen as an optional extra. Librarians are well placed to have a key role in information literacy programmes as tutors and teachers of both non-curricular and curricular papers as well as providing knowledge of and access to the world of information and to apply high level evaluative skills to these resources.

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