

IL for lifelong learning: Changing roles of Library and Information Professionals in e-Information era

Abstract

Main purpose of any library is to collect information and make the information dissemination an easy process, main goal is to ensure that library users gain ready access to the information they need in a timely manner so that the information is not only collected but used appropriately. In this electronic information era there is need for designing proper information literacy programmes to help users make use of information to its maximum. In this paper we discuss about the overview of information literacy and role of Library and Information Professionals in dealing with information literacy.

Keywords: Information, Literacy, ICT, Information society, Information skills.

Introduction

The notion of information literacy, originally conceptualised in the 1970s (Bundy, 2004), is now commonly used to describe the skill set required to interact effectively in the electronic environment. A variety of literacies are required in order to use networked communication technologies, digital media, and online and traditional information resources. Information literacy can be understood as the overarching term to describe the skills needed to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) effectively, and to access appropriate digital information resources. Information literacy is related to the concepts of information skills and information technology literacy. Information Literacy skill is an aspect of information literacy and may be seen as the process of gaining the tools that assist the development of information literacy, in the same way the study skills aid learning process. Information literacy implies the intellectual capabilities involved in using electronic information.

Information literacy, digital literacy and e-literacy: Definitions

Information-literate has been defined as “having the ability to recognize when information is needed, then to be able to locate and evaluate the appropriate information and use it effectively” (American Library Association, 1989). Information literacy (IL) is thus essential for living in the 21st century, and is of equal relevance in any state or society the world over. It is inextricably linked with both information practices and critical thinking in the information and communication technology (ICT) environment. Not only is information literacy central to achieving personal empowerment and economic development, it is pivotal to the pursuit of lifelong learning. The definition of information literacy as the ability to access, evaluate and use information helps us see IL as both a combination of learning competencies and as a mixture of ways of experiencing information use. Such descriptions fundamentally relate to the learning process and to the acquisition of knowledge, concepts of higher cognitive attainment that are more familiar in the education sector (Evelyn A. Idiodi, 2005).

The perhaps best known definition of information literacy says that information literate people are able to recognise when information is needed. They are also able to identify, locate, evaluate, and use of information.

Definitions and descriptions of information literacy can be summarised as referring to: Boekhorst, 2003 said that the use of ICT to retrieve and disseminate information; the competences to find and use information in information (re)sources; and. The process of recognising information need, finding, evaluating, and using information to acquire or extend knowledge. The third option is the most comprehensive and most useful one, as it includes both the use of ICT and the information (re)sources concept (Evelyn A. Idiodi, 2005).

Information literacy and the information society:

Jake Wallis(2005) said that, as more communication and delivery of services takes place within a digital environment, there is increasing pressure for people in information societies to be prepared to interact with this medium. To operate effectively in this online environment, to be able to learn, work, communicate with others, interact with government, shop and for entertainment, we will need a set of skills that will allow us to function with sufficient competence to achieve our goals. Bundy (2004) has identified a number of areas that require a new kind of literacy in information intensive societies:

- . participative citizenship;
- . social inclusion;
- . the creation of new knowledge;
- . personal empowerment; and
- . learning for life

Information Explosion and need for information literacy:

Evelyn A. Idiodi (2005), mentioned in her paper that information explosion that the growing size and complexity of library collections in the early and middle 20th century meant that the collection and presentation of information was not enough. There was an express need for what was then termed library orientation and bibliographic instruction, with the aim of training the library user in identifying, selecting, locating and retrieving relevant information resources – that is, to ensure not just the creation of collections, but the effective usage of collections. The information explosion of the late 20th century subsequently gave birth to the concept of information literacy. Individuals were suddenly faced with myriad choices of information in both print and electronic media. The electronic media, however, do not have the variety of quality assurance processes that are inherent in print media, where the content passes from authors, through editors, reviewers and publishers and possibly through recommendations by tutors, to the learner. The quality, authenticity, validity and reliability of some of the materials in electronic format via the internet cannot be guaranteed. These uncertainties are one factor in particular that makes the need for information literacy pressing. Information literacy instruction assists users in identifying and selecting necessary information, and using appropriate search

strategies in evaluating, organizing and synthesising the information thus acquired into a meaningful state.

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. Information literacy is a skill that is widely relevant and extends beyond the walls of the classroom into the world of social responsibility. Information revolution and the resultant explosive growth of knowledge have affected all aspects of life, be they economic, social or political in the country.

Proper utilization of information can create opportunities for effective handling of the problems facing the country, such as unemployment, environmental degradation and poverty. This imperative requires information literacy skills in a unique way in India. However, this will only be possible if there is information flow, and this flow is followed by attempts at imparting information literacy skills to the people. Academic Institutions in India are now witnessing a rapid growth in computer networking and the use of computerized data bases to access information in their libraries. Most universities are undergoing some level of computerization, and their libraries are automating their processes in line with current developments in the information world.

User Education and Information Literacy

To date, earlier attempts at library user education for use of materials only in print media have not been very successful – the perception was that students did not make effective use of their libraries. All too often students entered university with little or no idea how to access information. This lack of success can be attributed to the fact that students had had restricted access to reading materials, due to non-existent or poorly developed school and public library systems. User education cannot offset the effects of such under-provision. They are now still intimidated by the size and complexity of a university library, shy and reluctant to ask for assistance from librarians, lacking awareness of the services and resources available in their library. Today, without increased levels of training, now that there are greater resources available to the student, it remains unlikely that such electronic information sources will be used effectively either (Evelyn A. Idiodi, 2005).

Qualities of the information-literate person:

Evelyn A. Idiodi (2005), gave her views on Information literacy that has become a strategic issue for academic institutions, where the emphasis is placed on teaching and learning strategies that deliver the skills needed by students to succeed in an increasingly competitive work environment. He also mentioned about the issue of information literacy has become so central that a number of bodies in the library and information world, such as the ALA's Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in the US, the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL), and the Society for College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) in the UK, have produced standards and models for information literacy as summarised by Webber and Johnston in 2003. Any country which seeks to evolve its own national information literacy policy will need to

take account of such work and make it its own in some form or other, so that it becomes implemented successfully at the level of practice.

The US Higher Education Standards have evolved from work on Information Literacy done for the American Library Association (ALA) by the ACRL. The focus is on defining the behaviour desired of the information-literate student. The US standards state that the information-literate student:

- . determines the nature and extent of information needed;
- . accesses needed information effectively and efficiently;
- . evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system;
- . individually, or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; and
- . understands many of the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

In the UK, SCONUL has identified “seven pillars of information literacy” (Webber and Johnston, 2003). These are:

- (1) the ability to recognize a need for information;
- (2) the ability to distinguish ways in which the information “gap” may be addressed;
- (3) the ability to construct strategies for locating information;
- (4) the ability to locate and access information;
- (5) the ability to compare and evaluate information obtained from different sources;
- (6) the ability to organize, apply and communicate information to others in ways appropriate to the situation; and
- (7) the ability to synthesize and build upon existing information, thus contributing to the creation of new knowledge.

The roles of Library and Information Professionals:

The direct access to the complex information environment necessitates a change in the role of librarians and information professionals, from gatekeepers to guides. In the present knowledge society the librarian must support learning at all levels. The need for all citizens to develop a skill set of technological and media literacies means that librarians will have to be incorporated into learning programmes to teach these abilities. Librarians can teach generic skills in how to access information through a variety of media whilst emphasising an understanding of issues around its validity, authenticity and currency. Information literacy programmes can inculcate good principles in the fundamental skills of information use in the knowledge society.

An information need arises from a recognised anomaly in the user’s state of knowledge concerning some topic or situation, and that, in general, the user is unable to specify precisely what is needed to resolve that anomaly. This is illustrated by an alternative formulation of the concept offered by the United States of America’s Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld:

. . . there are known knowns, there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns, that is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns, there are things we do not know we don't know and each year we discover a few more of those unknown unknowns.

Search engines such as Google (www.google.com) facilitate rough and ready searching of literally millions of information resources of varying quality, yet mediation can help in expressing a user's anomalous state of knowledge (Rumsfeld's known unknowns). Kate Wittenberg, Director of the Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia University, has noted the importance of this role: "libraries help people formulate questions as well as find answers [. . .]. Who will do that in a virtual world?" Librarians can also assist in guiding users to information resources of quality (kite-marked, for example, by peer review). Such resources within educational establishments are usually free at the point of use. This direct access to costly commercial information services exists side by side with freely available online resources. Information Literacy helps with the usage of technical layering of virtual information services and sources, through online library catalogues and virtual learning environments by emphasising that information often has to be synthesized with a wider body of knowledge in order to be useful.

Information skills and information literacy in context

As mentioned by Evelyn A. Idiodi, 2005 the advantage of providing information literacy programmes for students is that it would impart skills and training, which would in turn lead to effective and efficient use of libraries and information databases with better overall educational achievement. The student has to learn about appropriate kinds of resources (both print and electronic), how to select the right sources for different tasks, and needs to develop the ability to understand issues of accessibility, such as cost and location, and who to approach for assistance if need be. Information literacy helps the student to develop competence in constructing strategies for locating and assessing information – this skill will include the proper articulation of information need, matching needs against resources, basic use of information communication technologies, search strategies, principles of construction and generation of databases, use of data bases, indexes, abstracts and citation indexes, as well as, how to maintain current awareness.

The information-literate person can organize, apply and communicate information effectively – this skill includes accurate citation, good use of language, respect for copyright and avoidance of plagiarism. Practitioner approaches to information literacy in practice, takes the form of library user education, and it echoes traditional practices elsewhere. These would include library orientation, library instruction, courses, one-on-one instruction (via reference services) and the use of guides and manuals. With the advent of information and communication technology (ICT) in Indian academic Institutions, academic libraries are now using electronic information storage and retrieval devices, such as CD-ROMS, their catalogues are now OPACs, and beyond these, most Universities have E-resources. As these electronic devices are introduced, new skills for their use need to be developed.

New approaches to information literacy

According to Evely A. Idiodi, 2005 the ideal information literacy programme is one where information literacy is integrated into the curriculum. Total integration is often mooted by practitioners as the most effective method for enabling students to develop their information literacy skills. Parker (2003) mentioned that, an information literacy activity, such as looking for information for an assignment, “is embedded into the students’ course materials, delivered in the context of the subject they are studying, attracts marks, and is devised on the basis of collaboration between library staff and teaching colleagues”. Such an approach might answer some of the doubts previously expressed about the effectiveness of traditional user education classes. At the British Open University the issue was addressed through the development of flexible, generic resources. The most popular of these resources is Skills in Accessing, Finding and Reviewing Information, or SAFARI (see <http://ltssolweb1.open.ac.uk/safari/signpostframe.htm>). It features generic, interactive material which can be used in a variety of ways by students and the course teams (that is, the academic staff involved in the writing of the course material).

According to Parker (2003), a new approach being tested at the Open University is Making Sense of Information in the Connected Age, or MOSIAC (see www.open.ac.uk/mosaic/index.cfm). It is an assessed, 12-week credit-earning short course in information literacy. A successful collaborative effort between the library and faculty, MOSAIC was written by staff in the Library Information Literacy Unit together with a range of experts from within and outside the Open University, and is being hosted by the Faculty of Education and Language Studies. The format for assessment is integrated into the programme.

Literacy is the lack of a concerted effort by academic libraries in the consistent pursuit of a programme. Reasons could be on the library’s part lack of funding, inadequate staffing, disruptions in the academic calendar, lack of space, and inadequate support from the parent institution. It is often difficult for librarians to push information literacy to the fore as a function of the library.

Conclusion

With the practice of traditional library systems in India, the level of computer illiteracy among librarians is extremely high. You can only teach what you know, so there is a shortage of personnel for IT-supported information literacy training. So we must recognize the access to and proper use of information is a sine qua non. In order to do this, “library services must come to be recognized as an integral resource and not merely an optional part of higher education”. Students must be taught how knowledge is structured and organized by librarians who are experts in information organization and retrieval is best suited to the role of guides. Librarians cannot do it alone, however, and must be assisted by faculty whose responsibility it will be to build information usage into their teaching programmes and to encourage students to use the resources of the libraries. Success in information literacy delivery can only be achieved through collaboration

between librarians and the teaching staff who have the expertise in the various disciplines across the universities' curricula.

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