

Fostering Information Literacy through Libraries in Academic Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Information is growing at a very rapid rate and it is available in a variety of formats, the most popular being the digital platform. Information dissemination and consumption have undergone a significant change in this digital age. Accordingly, the role of libraries has also evolved in promoting information literacy. Technology plays a vital factor in the relationship between the user and information and the librarian's capability to manage digital knowledge. Therefore, digital literacy is crucial in information retrieval in the library arena. This paper deals with how libraries promote information literacy, the strategies that are employed, the challenges faced, and the future direction for libraries.

KEYWORDS: Information literacy, Literacy programmes, Digital literacy, Information sources, Academic libraries.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the present century, information literacy has become a vital criterion for the educational, social, cultural, economic and political development of every country around the world. It is the information gap that divides the nation and its citizens into rich and poor. Here information literacy helps in mitigating this gap. Information literacy may be recognized as a set of abilities that requires individuals to identify, locate, evaluate and effectively use the required information. It may be considered as an amalgamation of skills that are used for effective use of information. Information literacy collectively encompasses various literacies like information technology literacy, computer literacy, digital literacy, internet literacy, etc. and several others which are to be maintained and supervised by librarians and other information officers. In the present information-driven environment, it is necessary to recognize reliable sources and organise information efficiently to make wise decisions and remain informed. Information literacy is crucial for everyone, regardless of their age, stage in life, or profession. Professionals and students rely on information literacy to analyse the massive volume of data and arrive at well-informed conclusions. Additionally, information literacy aids the general people in their daily lives by helping them to precisely assess information to make important decisions.

2. OVERVIEW OF INFORMATION LITERACY

The term information literacy was first used in a report written in 1974 by Paul Zurkowski which refers to “the education of individuals to enable them to use information sources related to their work”. According to ALA, 1989 Information Literacy are skill that allows individuals to know when information is required and can effectively identify, access and use that information. In the year 1992, Doyle pointed out Information Literacy as the ability of a person to recognize when they need information. The person should also find suitable sources, access the information within those sources, assess the quality of the information, organize and effectively apply it. Webber & Johnston (2003) described Information literacy as the ability to engage in appropriate information behavior to identify information that meets one’s needs, regardless of the channel or medium, which ultimately fosters ethical and prudent use of information in society. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, UK states that Information Literacy involves understanding when and why one requires information, knowing where to locate it and also being able to evaluate, utilize and communicate it ethically.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kulkarni (2014) asserts the importance of information literacy in assessing, organising, evaluating and using information in the digital world underlining its key role in the information age. Comparison is also made between traditional and digital resources, stressing the vital role of LIS professionals in optimizing the use of e-resources. Kumar and Surendran (2015) emphasize the vital role of information in the technological age, focusing on the need for information literacy in helping users to obtain accurate information from various sources. They have discussed the concept, objectives, skills and advantages of information literacy education with a focus on promoting lifelong learning and enhancing problem-solving skills in students. Srikanth (2017) focuses on the role of public libraries in implementing information literacy programmes and discusses the challenges faced and probable initiatives needed for executing these programmes. Singh & Tripathi (2018) provide an overview of information literacy in higher education, emphasizing its increasing significance within the academic field. It outlines a theoretical framework covering key aspects like the outcomes of information literacy education, its nature and the roles of various stakeholders in helping staff and students to become information literate. Ranganathan (2019) explores the information literacy skills of women undergraduate students in Trichy City, focusing on their ability to find and choose information. The study emphasizes the need for colleges to embrace technological advancements in fostering an effective learning environment and helping students use information for academic and intellectual development. In the words of Faraz (2020) Information Literacy is an important skill in the 21st century, allowing individuals to efficiently find, evaluate and use information in a variety of forms, thereby supporting informed decision-making. Librarians play a vital role in promoting and teaching these skills, adapting new technologies and ensuring that information literacy is integrated into the education system, particularly in underserved communities. Inamdar (2021) examines the critical role of libraries in the 21st century by rendering access to digital resources, technology training and assisting individuals to develop skills for exploring the digital world. He further mentions that libraries act as connectors to reduce the digital divide providing equal access to resources for everyone. Athiya (2022) in his paper explores the evolution of information literacy from library user education focusing on its role as an essential skill for lifelong learning and the importance of libraries in such programmes. It further mentions the barriers for librarians, discusses how information literacy addresses real-life problems and proposes analysis of available information literacy problems. Shashikala (2023) reviewed that information literacy has become an essential skill in

the present digital era allowing individuals to access, evaluate and utilize information effectively. She further examines different information literacy skills, emphasizing their significance in managing the abundant information and making well-informed and evidence-based decisions.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives can be identified as:

- ✓ To investigate the contribution of libraries in promoting information literacy.
- ✓ To identify the initiatives undertaken by libraries to improve information literacy.
- ✓ To examine the challenges encountered by libraries in promoting information literacy.
- ✓ To evaluate the effect of the digital age on information literacy practices.
- ✓ To suggest future directions for academic libraries in advancing information literacy.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study is carried out by evaluating the literature published in various journals and other relevant resources that are available on the internet and online media. It includes a a systematic review of recent scholarly articles, digital libraries, and official reports and case studies to gather comprehensive insights into the topic.

6. CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Information literacy can be of several categories where each type addresses different needs and reflects how individual interact and utilize information. Every category of information literacy addresses certain needs helping individuals to excel in their specific filed of knowledge and in decision making activity with perfection. Some of the important types are as follows:

6.1 Media Literacy

It recognises the influence of television, radio, newspaper, magazines, etc. and critically examines those media contents.

6.2 Data Literacy

Here the aim is on understanding and effectively using the data. It includes interpretation of statistical information, understanding data ethics and maintaining privacy.

6.3 Digital Literacy

It involves operating and utilizing digital technologies and platforms. Digital literacy considers a range of resources which are accessible online and includes use of digital tools such as various search engines, social media, understanding digital rights and managing its content.

6.4 Network Literacy

It involves activities like locating, accessing and using information in a networked environment such as the World Wide Web. People who are technically trained use this skill to communicate online. In academic libraries, it involves managing digital tools resources, and platforms to improve information sharing, collaboration, and service delivery. The major aspects of network literacy for libraries involve giving access to remote databases, e-books, e-

journals and institutional repositories. Further, libraries can join networks like DELNET or INFLIBNET to share resources and collaborate with other academic institutions. By incorporating network literacy into their services, libraries can serve academic communities, promote collaboration and maintain their vital role in the digital age

7. DIGITAL AGE AND INFORMATION LITERACY

The digital age has significantly changed how information is created, accessed and finally disseminated. The augmentation of digital resources including e-books, online journals, databases, and open-access repositories has expanded the information universe. However, it has also led to certain challenges such as information overload, misinformation and unequal access to digital resources. In this context, information literacy involves not just finding information but critically evaluating its relevance, credibility and biasness.

8. NEED & PURPOSE FOR INFORMATION LITERACY

Information is the fundamental requirement for every human activity and is as vital as food, air and water. We are surrounded by a vast sea of information in various formats. But all the available information is not equal. While some are current, reliable, or authoritative some may be outdated, biased and misleading. The need for information literacy may arise due to an increase in the flow of information caused by the information explosion, giving rise to a large number of information sources. Other factors for the requirement of information literacy include the emergence of information and technology, the changing shape of libraries with an increase in the number of users and research on complex and interdisciplinary subjects. The purpose or goals of information literacy comprise several key factors designed to strengthen an individual's capacity to find, evaluate and use information effectively. The following goals aim to entitle individuals to utilize information effectively in a rapidly changing information environment, helping in their process of decision-making and overall productivity.

8.1 Satisfying Information Needs

The capacity to identify specific information need for academic, professional or personal purposes is required. It is important to understand information need of a person to find the relevant sources.

8.2 Conduct Effective Research Strategies

To locate and access relevant information from a number of sources it is necessary to develop and employ effective strategies. Knowledge regarding the location and search the relevant information is crucial in information literacy.

8.3 Source Evaluation

It is necessary to critically evaluate the credibility, quality, accuracy, bias and relevance of the source of information to differentiate between reliable and unreliable sources. It ensures that the information used is reliable.

8.4 Ethical Use

After information is located and evaluated, principles of academic integrity should be applied with ethical use of information that includes proper citation and avoidance of plagiarism.

8.5 Information Synthesis

Integrating and managing information from diverse sources is done to construct well-informed and coherent conclusions. This is necessary to create new ideas and find solutions to various problems.

8.6 Technological Expertise

Effectively using technology and tools to access, organize and manage information. Digital tools like library management software, cloud storage and effective file organization are necessary to make the information accessible and well organized.

8.7 Lifelong Learning

Information literacy forms the foundation for acquiring knowledge throughout life and initiative to become independent learners. Inculcating lifelong learning attitude towards information acquisition and staying abreast with the current technological knowhow.

9. ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN INFORMATION LITERACY

Libraries play a vital role in the education process by making the users aware of the need and use of information technology. Initially, library professionals provided guidance to the users regarding various bibliographic tools like catalogues, indexes, abstracts, etc. to locate the source of information. But today, abundant information is available in various formats like printed documents, e-resources, web pages, online databases of full-text journals and other multimedia formats. Here the librarians help to retrieve the relevant information sources with the help of new and emerging technologies. The following are the roles of libraries in information literacy:

9.1 Educational Programmes and Workshops

In order to effectively teach information literacy skills, libraries organize educational programmes and workshops which cover a range of topics, including effective search strategies, database navigation and the critical evaluation of sources. These skills help users in exploring the area of digital information.

9.2 Access to Digital Resources

Libraries provide access to an extensive range of digital resources including subscriptions to online databases, e-books and journals so that users have access to high-quality, peer-reviewed information. Additionally, many libraries provide access to open educational resources and institutional repositories containing several scholarly works.

9.3 Embedded Librarianship

Embedded librarianship involves librarians working closely with faculty to incorporate information literacy instruction into the curriculum. This may include collaborative teaching courses, creating research assignments and delivering instruction specialized to particular subjects or disciplines. This method confirms that information literacy is relevant to the academic works of students.

9.4 Online Tutorials and Guides

Libraries sometimes develop online tutorials and guides on various aspects of information literacy to meet the needs of distant users who are self-learners. These resources can be accessed at any time and often include interactive elements such as quizzes and practical exercises.

9.5 Personalized Consultations

These services help the librarians to address specific user needs. They offer personalized support for research projects, aiding users in improving their search techniques and also critically assessing the sources.

9.6 Digital Literacy

Apart from traditional information literacy, libraries also give special emphasis to digital literacy. This includes skills like understanding digital rights and responsibilities, safeguarding personal privacy online and effectively using digital tools. Libraries offer workshops and resources to help users improve their digital literacy.

10. CHALLENGES FOR LIBRARIES IN PROMOTING INFORMATION LITERACY

Regardless of their efforts, libraries face a number of difficulties in contributing to information literacy. Following are the challenges confronted by the libraries:

10.1 Information Overload

There is a vast amount of information available online. This makes very difficult and challenging for libraries to guide users in identifying the valid sources of information.

10.2 Technological Advancement

With the advancement of technology, the tools and methods used to acquire information gradually evolve. It is a continuous challenge for libraries to integrate new tools and platforms in information literacy programmes. They have to remain updated with new search techniques and online platforms for proper information retrieval.

10.3 Digital Divide

All the users do not have the access to digital resources and technology. So, efforts are needed to mitigate this gap by providing access to digital devices connected to internet for the deprived users.

10.4 Misinformation

In the digital age, there is huge possibility for the spread of misinformation and fake news. These presents major challenges necessitating the libraries and the librarians to acquire required skills in evaluating the information.

10.5 Digital Preservation

Due to paucity of space, documents can be digitally preserved and thereby increasing their life span. For this, proper storage device or cloud storage should be purchased which may be expensive for some institutions. Moreover, storage media can decay after a period and files may become corrupt.

11. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PROMOTING INFORMATION LITERACY IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Libraries should adjust and adapt themselves to the evolving digital environment for effectively promoting information literacy. So, future direction may include the following:

11.1 Artificial Intelligence

Proper Artificial Intelligence tools should be used in promoting information literacy. Libraries can provide assistance to users in understanding AI so that they can assess the information generated by it.

11.2 Broadening digital literacy

The literacy programmes should broaden their scope for including emerging areas such as data literacy, coding and other related areas. This involves training on navigation of complex information systems and handling of vast number of digital resources.

11.3 Partnership and Collaboration

There should be partnership and collaboration with educational institutions, community groups and technology providers to expand the reach and effectiveness of literacy programmes. Libraries can support the academic programmes more by these collaborations for students' success.

11.4 Awareness

Information is available in abundance and is easily accessible. So, it is important for individuals to skillfully evaluate and use that information with the help of information literacy. Awareness and understanding regarding the importance of information literacy should be spread and policies to be promoted that supports its growth.

11.5 Online Research Skills for Distance Learners

Academic Libraries must broaden their online literacy programmes as a number of courses are offered in online as well as in hybrid format. This is mainly aimed at remote students, covering e-resources, virtual consultations, video tutorials and collaborative research tools.

11.6 Skills for Managing Academic Research Tools

Managing academic research tools is an important skill for students and professionals in order to collect, organise and process information for research. This includes a series of workshops covering tools like EndNote, Zotero and references from research databases, library catalogues and websites.

CONCLUSION

Libraries play a vital role in promoting information literacy in the digital age. The ultimate aim of the library is to make sure that the users can access the information which they require. Libraries provide users with the necessary skills required to steer in the information age by providing access to digital resources, educational programmes, online training and other initiatives that help enhance these skills. There are many challenges like information overload, misinformation and unequal access to digital resources. There should be sincere efforts on the part of library and library professionals to take necessary actions and impart training to library users. With the advancement of technology, it is essential to promote digital literacy in this present time as well as in the future. Librarians have to undertake a variety of roles to face new challenges in these dynamic technological surroundings. They will carry on making decisions in the matter of all the needs and resources of libraries.

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