

The Role of Information Literacy for Effective Service Delivery in Academic Libraries

Anike, Chinenyenwa Joy
Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, UNN,
Email-joy.ani@unn.edu.ng

Nwafor, Michael Chigozie (Ph.D)
Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, UNN
michael.nwafor@unn.edu.ng
Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

In many countries, academic librarians now serve as information literacy instructors and advocates. Understanding a subject is just a single aspect of acquiring knowledge; another is knowing where to look for reliable sources. Discovering information on your own is the biggest learning process. The ability to locate, evaluate, and use information makes information literate person. With this importance in mind, this study was carried out on Information Literacy to find out the role information literacy plays in the academic library's staff education of its patrons on the part of the academic library since it is apt for users' sagacity in information usage. The study adopted conceptual approach. The study examined information literacy roles, librarian's skills, challenges affecting Information Literacy and service delivery in academic libraries and strategies that can enhance Information Literacy and service delivery in academic libraries. Some of the roles of librarians are teaching users how to locate, evaluate and use information, helping individuals distinguish credible sources of information; digital literacy skills; medica literacy; technological literacy skills and so on. Some of the strategies are training of library staff in the use of computers and other related technologies. The paper concludes by stating clearly that information literacy is central to the mission of any institution engaged in teaching, learning and research and librarians have a pivotal role in contributing to building a knowledge society which will ensure equal participation in the developmental process.

Keywords: *Information Literacy, Service Delivery, Academic Libraries*

Introduction

Information is a commodity needed by all categories of human beings and information practitioners needs special skill that can help them to access, use as well as disseminate information at the right time, in the right measure and to the right people. Information literacy is an essential skill set that helps individuals to explore with confidence and discernment the avalanche of information available globally in this age of information explosion. In the age of technological advancement, the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information

effectively has become imperative because information can easily be accessed through various platforms and sources. Information literacy goes beyond mere information retrieval; it encompasses the critical thinking, analytical, and technological skills needed to assess information's credibility, relevance, and reliability effectively (Dolinger (2019). By perfecting these abilities, individuals can make informed decisions, participate actively in society, and become lifelong learners in a world increasingly driven by information and knowledge. These activities can effectively be carried out through the services of academic libraries.

Academic libraries are those libraries founded in the institution of higher learning such as universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. They are established to help the parent institutions to meet their goals in teaching, learning and research. The importance of information literacy in service delivery in academic libraries cannot be overemphasized. This is because in the age of information explosion information providers must be conversant with the type of information available, the rights guiding the use of this information and the best way to disseminate this information to numerous seekers. Moreso, there is a paradigm shift in the way library services are being delivered in academic libraries. Before the age of technology, library services are completely rendered manually which makes it very tedious for the librarians but the advent of technology has made service delivery very easy and very effective (Aharony & Gazit 2019). Library services in academic institutions can now be delivered through the available online platforms irrespective of distance, time and space. Therefore, it is important to note that before these services can be delivered effectively, there is need for librarians to acquire information literacy skills as this will help them to critically locate, access, evaluate and disseminate information properly.

Concept of Academic Library

An academic library is a library that is attached to a tertiary or higher education to meet teaching and research needs of students and staff. These libraries serve two complementary purposes: to support the school curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students. The support of teaching requires information resources for class readings and for students. In the past, the information resources for class readings, intended to supplement lectures as prescribed by the instructor was called reserved collections (Fiste, 2013). Academic libraries are operationally defined as organized collections of information resources (print and non-print) which form an integral part of

tertiary institution. In essence, the academic libraries provide resources to support the teaching and research activities of their parent institutions.

The academic library in an educational institution also plays a part in supporting the research efforts and this role is stronger in academic libraries than in public libraries. The library helps to conserve the research potential of the university or college. Young (2008) noted that university library is the heart of the university. This is because, the academic health and intellectual vitality and effectiveness of any university depends largely upon the state of the library which is its lifeblood

Concept of Information Literacy

Information literacy can simply be referred to as the knowledge about everything that concerns information and how it can be used effectively. According to Ashikuzzaman (2021), information literacy is a critical skill set in the digital age, encompassing the ability to access, evaluate, analyze, and ethically use information from diverse sources. It goes beyond basic information retrieval and involves a multifaceted understanding of information, including its context, credibility, and relevance. Information literacy is not confined to traditional libraries but extends to various digital platforms, where an overwhelming volume of information is available. A literate individual is adept at navigating this information landscape, distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources, and critically assessing the quality and credibility of information.

Furthermore, the information literate person is not just a consumer but an active participant in creating and disseminating knowledge, understanding the ethical considerations of information use, and contributing meaningfully to the broader intellectual discourse. Information literacy is a dynamic skill that evolves with technological advancements, requiring individuals to adapt to new information

formats, platforms, and communication channels. Educational institutions and libraries are pivotal in fostering information literacy, equipping learners with the skills to thrive in an information-rich society. Information literacy is the ability to identify what information is needed, understand how the information is organized, identify the best sources of information for a given need, locate those sources, evaluate the sources critically, and share that information (Hannah et al, 2024).

Moreso, Murison (2005) argues that information skills and information technology skills are essential parts of the wider concept of information literacy. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP] (2023) describes information literacy as the action of providing members of society with information competencies necessary to operate and function effectively within a given society. Maina (2014) is in agreement that information literacy and information skills are synonyms. Therefore, information literacy entails finding information, searching information and using various tools to critically evaluate the results and apply it successfully. Moore (2015) stated that information related competencies entail several blocks of capacities in relation to information handling and use, which includes identifying, locating, gathering, selecting, storing, recording, retrieving and processing information

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2022) defined information literacy as a set of abilities that enables an individual to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.” The relevance of information literacy as an educational concept has become very necessary as a result of rapid technological change and avalanche of information resources. The uncertain quality and expanding quantity of information require individuals who possess the ability to identify credible information

and the knowledge of how to use information effectively. In a nutshell, information literacy can be defined as the ability to identify, find, evaluate and use information in an ethical and legal manner.

Information Literacy Skills among Librarians

Information literacy skills are used for academic purposes, such as research papers and group presentations. They are used by the library and information science (LIS) professionals on the job. The ability to find, evaluate, use and share information is an essential skill. Library and information science professionals also use these skills by participating fully in a democratic society as informed citizens by understanding issues and voting. It is important to note that these definitions and descriptions of information literacy, and the attributes of an information literate professionals emphasize the use of information: critical thinking, reflection, analysis, interpretation, synthesis, integration of new information with previous knowledge, i.e. they perceive the information seeking process as an integral part of the learning process, in which the individual engages in a constructive process of finding meaning. Also, Thanuskodi (2019) affirmed that the information literate person is a person who has learnt how to evaluate and disseminate information.

Moreover, with the increasing use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in education all over the world, new skills and competencies among LIS professionals are required for them to effectively disseminate needed information to the users. Some of the skills and competencies required by librarians are information literacy skill; social media and marketing skills; preservation and conservation of digital resources; knowledge of open access and scholarly communication among others. For example, there are vast array of services that one can currently find online. These services are constantly growing, some of which are of general nature while others are specialized for students such

as reference information on the Web which students can use including news, weather, sports, movies, encyclopedias, cartoons and games among others. As an educational and entertainment tool, ICT can enable students learn about virtually any topic, visit a museum, or play an endless number of computer games with other users. The LIS professionals still have roles to play here in guiding the students on the effective use of these tools.

Furthermore, in the opinion of Moyo and Okenwa, (2022), an information-literate individual possesses the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to effectively navigate, evaluate, and utilize information in various contexts. They have developed the abilities to identify information needs, access information from diverse sources, critically evaluate the credibility and relevance of information, analyze and synthesize information to derive meaningful insights, and ethically and responsibly use and communicate information. Information-literate individuals can utilize various tools and technologies to search, retrieve, organize, and present information. They are critical thinkers who can discern reliable sources from misinformation and disinformation, and they actively evaluate and question the information they encounter. Information-literate individuals are lifelong learners, continuously seeking new knowledge and adapting to evolving information landscapes. According to Dawes (2018), they are empowered to make informed decisions, solve problems, and participate in a knowledge-driven society. It is important to note that librarians are information providers, therefore it is their responsibility to create access to both domiciled information and externally relevant information and this can only be very effective when they have the required skills in handling information.

The Role of Academic Libraries and Librarians in Information Literacy and Service Delivery

A library serves as a pillar of any educational institution be it elementary schools, secondary schools, and tertiary institutions. The library provides a variety of resources print and non-print formats that are useful to different people irrespective of age. The library provides the link between the past and the present and shapes the future of society by preserving the records of human culture and providing resources to everyone. The role of librarians in information literacy and service delivery cannot be over emphasized.

Information Literacy is the process of knowing when and why information is required, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical way. It is the combination of all the skills that are required for the effective and maximum use of information. The term information literacy has been used as collective term covering all or several of literacies, viz., computer literacy, digital literacy, hyper-literacy, information technology literacy, interactive literacy, Internet literacy, library literacy, media literacy, multiple literacy, network literacy, oral literacy, and visual literacy etc. These literacies need to be developed and maintained throughout life, not only by information users, but also by librarians and other information workers.

Moreover, Information is the basic requirement for every human activity and it is important as food, air and water. Information in itself has no value, but its value lies in its communication and use. Dawes (2019) states that Information literacy is very necessary in making sure those services are effectively rendered to users in academic libraries as a result of the following reasons:

- (i) Rapid increase in the stream of information due to information explosion

- (ii) Advent of information and communication technologies
- (iii) Avalanche of information materials available
- (iv) Paradigm shift in library operations
- (v) Increase in number of users
- (vi) Research on complex and interdisciplinary areas

Additionally, Mugwisi, (2015) opined that information has become a major economic commodity and the advent of technology has changed the way librarians provide and disseminate this information to the numerous seekers. Also, the locating, acquisition, dissemination and tracking of information resources in various areas is the responsibility of the librarians. This job of librarians can come in various forms such as database searching, interlibrary loans, monitoring Internet newsgroups, or maintenance of a computerized library information system. Therefore, a librarian needs to be adequately equipped with all the necessary skills in relation to information literacy in order to effectively and efficiently carry out this role. These will help librarians to maximally make library users become aware and knowledgeable on how to productively and ethically use information for research, teaching and learning. Community services is another crucial area librarians plays a vital role when they are fully equipped with information literacy skills.

As a result of this current issues, the libraries and librarians play an important role in the education of people for effective and efficient information use by teaching them information skills at all levels of education to enable them become informed citizens of the country. Also, librarians are responsible for identifying very good, current, relevant and appropriate literature for library users in academic libraries. These literatures must include online resources which is capable of meeting the information needs of today's technology inclined users. Librarians are key personnel in the implementation of resource-

based programmes such as information literacy programmes that can match every reader's capability because they have the expertise and knowledge to teach these skills. Today, librarians are really in the most favorable position to be the leaders in developing an information literate community.

From the above discourse, it is important to note that library and information science professionals have a very significant role to play in the promotion of information literacy in the society. It is also noteworthy to mention that there is a gap between librarians and the users' information needs and to bridge this gap, Fajoyomi, Bukar and Ambali (2021) advised that librarians need to educate and re-educate themselves in order to acquire new skills and competencies that will help them keep abreast with the new role by constantly acquiring information literacy skills. It is important to mention that just like every other area of knowledge, information literacy skill acquisition is not without challenges.

Challenges Affecting Information Literacy and Service Delivery in Academic Libraries

The current situation of information explosion has led to the problem of overload and misuse of information. Information literacy seems to be the solution to this problem but there are so many challenges affecting its effectiveness. Some of these challenges are as follows; long hours of searching for information; lack of knowledge to use computer; lack of skills to navigate the OPAC features; inability to identify database/e-resources; difficulty in accessing and retrieving information from external database; lack of personal computer and others, (Aharony & Gazit, 2019).

Moreso, in the opinion of Nwafor, (2014) lack of fund is one of the problems affecting information literacy skills in carrying out effective service delivery. This is because effective acquisition of any skill is dependent on the fund available and

information literacy on its own is costly to acquire. Library services delivery in any academic library especially in the age of technology requires lot money for its effectiveness. Lwehabura and Stilwell (2008) also found similar inhibitions to information literacy implementation in Tanzanian universities. They reported that lack of adequate resources, policy, proactive solutions among librarians and collaboration between librarians and teaching staff in information literacy activities were challenges facing information literacy effectiveness in the universities. These problems exist because most institutions may not be fully aware of how information literacy can improve research and learning. Challenges may also come from faculty and ICT staff of institutions who may feel threatened by information literacy and that librarians want to take over their job.

Another problem as observed by Dang, Igboechesi and Diyong (2019) is lack of total autonomy of the Library in practice. Other challenges affecting information literacy and service delivery in academic libraries in Nigeria includes: inadequate power supply; poor national information policy; low bandwidth of internet; constant change in ICT facilities; lukewarm attitude of librarians; lack of technically skilled staff among others. Librarians should work to break these barriers through strategic marketing of information literacy programmes and benefits.

Strategies that can Enhance Information Literacy and Service Delivery in Academic Libraries

In order to acquire quality information literacy skills that can enhance effective service delivery, there is need to identify strategies that can bring solution to the existing problems. The problems listed above however have some strategies that can enhance information literacy and service delivery in academic libraries in Nigeria. Some of these strategies includes: training of library staff in the use of computers and

other related technologies. This will help librarians to develop necessary abilities and or skills on how to know when information is needed, how to locate them, how to evaluate them and how to use them in an ethical and legal way. Also, adequate power supply, adequate funding of libraries, adequate provision of computers and employment of competent library staff can help to enhance information literacy skills f can help to enhance information literacy skills for effective library service delivery.

Furthermore, adequate provision of internet facilities can also be regarded as a strategy that can enhance information literacy skill. The importance of high bandwidth of internet cannot be overemphasized, any library that has steady internet services will have effective service delivery in the age of technology and information explosion. Moreso, implementation of information literacy programmes for both teaching and administrative staff will enable effective service delivery to library clients. Dubicki (2013) advised that in order to remedy these inconsistencies in delivering IL instruction to students, librarians need to take a proactive approach in meeting with faculty and managers to determine collectively how to successfully infuse IL into the curriculum. This can only be achieved if librarians show

Conclusion/Recommendation

The role of academic libraries and librarians continues to evolve and so does expansion of information most of it is unfiltered and requires considerable skills to evaluate. An ideal university library is as Moyo & Okebnwa (2022) suggest, a learning centre combing learning, writing, research and technology. To achieve IL requires not just a chance in the facilities of the library but an even bigger in librarians' mind, concept, and relationships with library users. To accomplish an information literacy programme successfully, librarians should take the lead while collaborating with faculty, IT specialist and with the aim of improving information literacy skills. Lwoga

and Sukums (2018) comment that librarians need to actively collaborate with academic staff to develop, plan, implement, and evaluate information literacy programme through curriculum designs. As Aharony, and Gazit (2019) say when our students have mastery over information literacy, librarians and faculty have done their job as educators.

References

- ACRL (2022). Information Literacy in the Core Workshop for Faculty. Retrieved from <https://libguides.lmu.edu/infolitworkshop/definition> (Accessed on 27 March, 2024)
- Aharony, N., & Gazit, T. (2019). Factors affecting students' information literacy self-efficacy. *Library Hi Tech*, 37(2), 183- 196.
- Moore, N. (2009). *Measuring the Performance of Public Libraries*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Dang, T. L., Igboechesi, G. P. & Diyong, U. J. (2019). Information Literacy and Academic Libraries: A Motivation. Retrieved from <https://www.ijaar.org/articles/v8n12/ijaar81128.pdf>. (Accessed March 22, 2024)
- Dolinger, E. (2019). Defining and teaching information literacy: engaging faculty and the framework. *College & Research Libraries News*, 80 (10), 10 - 21. <https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/24536/32363> (Accessed: 30 February, 2024).
- Dubicki E (2013). Faculty perceptions of students' information literacy skills competencies. *J. Inform. Lit.* 7(2):97-125.
- Fister B (2013). The Library's Role in Learning: Information Literacy Revisited. *Library Issues: Briefings for Faculty and Administrators*. 33, (4) Retrieved from <http://www.libraryissues.com/pub/PDF3304Mar2013.pdf> (Accessed March 10th, 2024)
- Hannah, M.N. et al. (2024). A Mindfulness-based Information Literacy Framework for the Current Information Environment. *Journal of Information Literacy*. 18 (2), 37-55 (Accessed: 25 December, 2024)
- Khanna, J. K. (2018). *Fundamentals of library organization*. New Delhi: Ess Publication
- Lwoga, E. T., & Sukums, F. (2018). Health Sciences Faculty Usage Behaviour of Electronic Resources and their Information Literacy Practices. *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication* 67(1/2), 2- 18. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GKMC-06-2017-0054> (Accessed 07 March, 2024).
- Maina, S. (2014). *Implementation of Information Literacy Programmes in Public Libraries: a Case Study of Kenya National Library Service (Master of Library and Information Science)*
- Moyo, M., & Okemwa, E. O. P. (2022). Students' perceptions of information literacy at two South African universities. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 0_1,1-21, Retrieved from. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/students-perceptionsinformation-literacy-at-two/docview/2640588758/se-2> (Accessed 24 March, 2024).
- Murison, W. J. (2005). *Information in the Public Library*. London: George Harrap

- Mugwisi, T. (2015). Role of librarians in teaching information literacy in Zimbabwean and South African universities: a comparative study. *Mousaion* 33 (1), 23-42. Received from. <https://journals.co.za/content/mousaion/33/1/EJC173003> (Accessed 11 February 2024).
- Nwafor, M. C. (2014). *Information Literacy Skills of Librarians for Effective Services Delivery in Federal, State and Private Universities in Enugu State, Nigeria*. [MLS Thesis], department of Library and Information Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Thanuskodi, S. (2019). *Information Literacy Skills among Library and Information Science Professionals in India*. *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal). retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/2126>. (Accessed 11 February 2024).
- Young, C. (2008). Incorporating undergraduate advising in teaching information literacy: case study for academic librarians as advisors. *The journal of academic librarianship*. 34(2): 139 – 144.