
The Role of the Faculty in Information Literacy Instruction



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ABSTRACT: This paper presents an extract from the cross sectional study conducted at the University of Lusaka to assess the information literacy of skills of students. Information literacy has been found to be the necessary skill for students at the tertiary level of education. This has been necessitated by the advancement in technology coupled with the exponential growth of information, both physical and in digital format, which demands that students should have necessary competencies for them to effectively, and efficiently access, use and share the information to solve problems and create new knowledge.

The study adopted a mixed method research approach. The survey design was used for data collection. The survey followed a cross-sectional approach and employed questionnaires as instruments of data collection. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 16, was used for data analysis. The study population was made up of full-time university students from all the five faculties of the university. These were the faculties of Law, Business, Education, Social Sciences & Technology (ESST), Health Sciences and Graduate Studies. The sample size of One hundred students were sampled using the proportional stratified random sampling. The findings from the study revealed that the students faced challenges to find the required information in the library. The challenges included their inability to access the needed information, synthesise their work and provide references. The findings were attributed to many factors which included the lack of a systematic approach information literacy skills.

KEYWORDS: Information literacy, user education, communication skills, librarian and faculty collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Since the genesis of university education, academic libraries have played critically-important roles as focal points for teaching, learning, and research and as providers of standard information resources within their host universities (Meulemans and Carr, 2012; Anunobi, 2008). For centuries, academic libraries have existed primarily for curation of library collections and to serve the students and faculty members, by making available the collection of scholarly resources, necessary for the promotion of academic activities in parent institutions (Fallin, 2015). Kargbo (2001) outlines the objectives of academic libraries to include:

- Provision of facilities for study and research geared closely to the academic setting of the parent institution
- To secure, organise and service information sources required for the institutional programme
- Providing reading materials for academic staff and keeping them abreast with the latest information in their fields of study for teaching and doing individual research
- Instructing students, specifically first-year students, in the effective use of the library and its holdings
- Encouraging students to develop the habit of reading and self-directed learning, thereby contributing to their intellectual development.

Libraries have however realised that the storage and making available reading materials to clients in itself is not sufficient. The library users need to gain access to the needed information, in a manner, that would enable the appropriate use of information by them (Kuan-nien and Pie-chun, 2011:400). Kargbo (2001), citing Gelford (1968), asserts that the library should not be operated as a mere store house of books attached to a reading room, but as a dynamic instrument of education. It should provide the book and non-book materials needed by the teaching staff and students of its parent institution; it should process these materials, organise and arrange them in a systematic manner and create amenities for their use.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

For many years, libraries have been conducting library orientation or user education, essentially designed to acquaint new students with the available library resources and to enable them to explore effectively the existing knowledge base and ameliorate

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their information search skills (Anunobi and Ukwoma, 2016). In many universities, this has been the mere introduction of students to collections and services, with the primary aim of transferring the skills that would enable the library users to identify, select, locate and retrieve the relevant information resources and make the users appreciate the library as the top source of inquiry, by using the collection effectively (Idiodi, 2005).

With the advent of the 21st Century however, the libraries in academic institutions across the world have been experiencing a paradigm shift in procuring, storing and retrieving information resources, under the impact of the application of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) (Stordy, 2015; Tripathi and Kumar, 2014). Digital technology has pervaded every aspect of civilization because of its speed, accuracy and cost effectiveness. It has revolutionized, not only the way recorded knowledge, historical records, and a host of other kinds of communication are packaged and processed, but also the way scholars create, disseminate and preserve the new knowledge, and how users seek and gain access to these materials (Anunobi and Ukwoma, 2016: 344; Adzobu, 2014:38).

The internet in particular, has affected information provision in a number of ways - internet databases, electronic journals and e-books have become the mainstream. activities, providing access to an immense volume of information through the networked electronic and increasingly complex environment, in a variety of disciplines and languages across the globe (Ukachi, 2015b; Kuan-Nien, Pie-Chun and Sung-Shan, 2011). Students now, unlike in the past, are able to access information with a degree of variability in approaches, aided by the use of integrated social networking tools, with increasing sense of speed and urgency (Stowe, 2011).

The profusion of these information sources has made it difficult for students to use information appropriately and effectively, not because students are overwhelmed by this flood of data, but because unlike print resources, useful and reliable information on the internet is not readily available, because much of this information is not organised (Choy and Goh, 2016; Fjallbrant 2000). This situation has brought about considerable challenges for libraries and their instruction programmes with resultant glitches for students to evaluate, understand and use information in an ethical and lawful manner (Baro and Fyneman, 2009). This has intensified the need for students to be equipped with the appropriate capabilities of information literacy skills, for them to efficiently utilise and handle these print and electronic materials (Critz, Axford, Baer, Doty, Lowe and Renfro, 2012; Isfandyari, Moghaddam and Kashi-Nahanji, 2011). This presupposes the reality of competent users, who have learnt and developed a set of skills that transcend the basic acquaintance with the computer, but possess the skills needed to explore the available information resource base, that lead to the acquisition of other literacy capabilities (Malliari and Nitsos, 2008; Anunobi and Ukwoma, 2016).

These sets of skills can be summed up as information literacy. Spiranec, Zorica and Kos (2015: 247) and Nicholson and Eva (2011), define information literacy as a functionalistic term that describes a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use the needed information. Broadly, the definition encompasses a wide range of initiatives in higher education, which seek to meet broad demands of the information society. This includes the adoption of appropriate information behaviour and being aware of the importance of wise and ethical use of information.

Andersen (2006:214) and Anunobi and Ukwoma (2016: 345) amplify information literacy to cover the skills, ability or competence in finding, evaluating, using and sorting out relevant information, which extends beyond the mere knowledge of the location and availability of the materials, to a deeper understanding and application of such information in the learner's daily life. This includes the provision of content that helps students to recognise the need for information, the accuracy and completeness of information, the ability to identify the potential sources of information and develop successful search strategies to access, evaluate and integrate the findings in their knowledge base. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2000:4) has identified the key areas of desirable behaviour that the information literate student should possess. This set of attributes embraces the abilities to:

- recognise and understand an information need or problem
- discern the appropriate sources to satisfy the information need or problem
- evaluate, synthesise, and apply the information as it applies to the need or problem
- discern when enough information has been gathered to satisfy the need or problem
- Use the information and information technology appropriately.

The key issues here are that being information literate is a process that translates into gaining the tools that assist the development of information literacy, necessary not only in education practices, but also in occupational practices, in the same way that study skills aid the learning process of a student (Idiodi, 2005). It implies the acquisition of a higher level understanding of the fact that

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information exists in its own right as intellectual content, regardless of the vehicle which carries it (paper or electronic). This also relates to the ability to work in a selective and intelligent way across these media (Joint, 2005).

IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION LITERACY TO UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

University education demands that students acquire the study of established knowledge and learn the process of producing new knowledge and receive exposure to ways and means of lifelong learning (Anunobi and Ukwoma, 2016). It is intended to prepare students for demands of society beyond the confines of the lecture rooms and the literature embedded in books, placing particular emphasis on learning strategies, necessary for survival in an increasingly competitive work environment. To this end, students are expected to acquire information searching, handling and use, behaviour and skills, necessary for problem solving and self-directed learning. The way students organise their learning and search for academic information to complete their various tasks, is therefore crucial to their overall performance at the end of the day (Ajiboye and Tella, 2007).

Across the world, libraries have been developing strategies and policies aimed at imparting sound information practices in students and presenting them with opportunities that will enable them to take advantage of available information resources. The justification for conducting user instruction has been to introduce users to the various library and information services at their disposal; to empower them to recognise their need for information and make them independent users in finding information for academic purpose (Anunobi and Ukwoma, 2016; Moyo and Mavodza, 2016).

A number of studies have however shown that the traditional methods of instruction, though practiced in many universities, were only capable of creating poor patterns of information use, because the information skills training the students were exposed to, was too mechanistic and complex for the naive user to master (Joint, 2005; Sinikara and Jarvelainen, 2003). It has also been observed that the methods of instruction limit information literacy to the acquisition of decontextualised skills, which have been perceived to be a means to achieving a specific and instrumentally defined purpose, which may not be applicable in real life situations, such as addressing the challenges students' faced in accessing information, vis-à-vis the growth of electronic information and the advancement in information technology (Spiranec et.al, 2015).

In Zambia, like other developing countries, university students come from the diverse background, many of which are from backgrounds which have had limited facilities, with regard to availability of libraries and designated platforms for reading facilities. Even where such facilities exist, many of them can be assumed to lack in many areas such as library materials and qualified personnel to teach library patrons how to use the libraries (Nabuyanda, 2011). It can therefore be argued that many students who go through this system of education enter the university with little or no information searching skills. As a consequence, such students have challenges to access and use the required materials in the library for their assignments and end of term papers.

THE ROLE OF THE FACULTY IN INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Academic faculty members play a significant and authoritative role in the academic life of students. According to Jumonville (2014) and Pinto (2016), academic faculty exerts a great deal of influence in relation to their teaching, research and other academic activities. As vital agents and facilitators of students' learning experience, academic staff are potentially well positioned to influence on the information literacy efforts.

It was however noted from this study, on the faculty perspective that, although information literacy instruction was seen as an important component of the student learning process, many of faculty simultaneously perceived that the students' information literacy proficiency to be lacking and below the expected standards. The difference in opinions expressed was characteristic of the information literacy practices not only at the University of Lusaka, but other universities as well. Literature has presented that the user education programme which was being practiced in many universities did not have much impact on the students' information seeking activities as it was characteristic of old instructional approaches which were mainly offered outside the curriculum framework, and had a deliberate focus on completion of course assignments and other academic tasks the students were engaged in (Birch, 2012; Moore, 1996). In this scenario, a librarian was only viewed as someone who should help students to find information whereas the lecturer was regarded as someone who should make them use it.

This view established that the information skill training conducted in many universities did not pitch at the individual student's point of need. It was presented with the view that students were already conversant with the use of the library resources. On the centrally, proponents of information literacy instruction, Davis, Lundstrom and Martin (2011:687) have contended that the most used and probably most effective way to transfer the skills into the students, should be the integration of library instruction into the curriculum and giving students assignments and other academic work, that would make them connect the information literacy

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instruction, to the real situation obtaining in their academic learning environment. This is because students would not see any value in the instruction programs that were offered on a voluntary basis and removed from classroom instruction. Kuan-Nien and Pei-Chun (2011:404) similarly, observed that implementation of information literacy programs should include the establishment of an all-inclusive information literacy programme and should be viewed as a responsibility of all parties involved in the students' learning cycle. This includes all staff, faculty, librarians and administrators and should be learner centered and discipline specific, based on the students' individual learning needs.

These findings are typical of the view of Kanguha (2016) and Brendle-Moczuk (2006). They note that the effectiveness of the techniques used to establish the information literacy learning experiences, lied in the way courses were structured. This observation brings out the understanding that giving students a research or term paper to work on and that involved the faculty taking them through the process of research and citations procedures, was a positive initiative to make students acquire the basic information literacy skills. This engagement supported by self-initiated activities, such as classroom assignments and other information seeking activities, was a sure way to help students to navigate the library, access materials, evaluate them and also be able to realise their own learning needs. This stirred the students' desire to acquire knowledge and skills and also to be able to apply them with confidence.

The explanations herein are supported by Meulemans and Carr (2012:80), who in their submission have noted that students were more likely to become information literate if the value was placed on the skills instructional process, which could only be done if information was presented within disciplinary contexts. It was noted that a discipline specific library instruction that teaches students how to locate, evaluate and use information is an effective approach, essential for creating learning opportunities for students. This is because it makes them to identify and think more critically about the credible sources of information and overcome the challenges they face to use the databases, bibliographies and also to reference their work.

It is therefore being observed that the value of which the faculty places on the information literacy instructional practice has a life-long impact on the students' appreciation of the role of information literacy in their learning process. It is also believed that faculty, as course designers, should have an understanding that they, have a bigger role to play in the process, as facilitators of student learning, who should see the link of what they are teaching in class and the acquisition of information literacy skills by their students. To this end, faculty should be expected to possess some basic information literacy competencies, which allow them to support classroom instruction, without which, it would not be easy to produce information literate students. This awakening should discourage the general perception that has existed, which gives the misnomer that the students' information literacy development as being a responsibility of the library, the understanding hereof, has a consequence of making many students leave the university, unable to demonstrate the skills required of them, to exploit the library's research potential.

CONCLUSION

In summing up the paper it can be noted that, to be effective and of relevance, information literacy skills instruction should have a wider objective, beyond the traditional pedagogy and method of instruction that have been offered to students the overtime. It has to be noted that to have an impact, information literacy should be conducted as a course that attracts academic grading, as structure and content of the current method was too abstract and lacked detail to make students information literate. This therefore indicates that there is a need to address the system and mode of information literacy instruction, if the students have to master the needed skills. This can be achieved by developing extensive and integrated instructional programmes, through lectures, seminars, workshops, handouts, and possibly, web-based tutorials, either as course related or course-specific information literacy instructional approaches, which have undoubtedly proved to be an effective way to improve library instruction and stimulate the students' learning.

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