Full Length Research Paper

Information literacy practices of librarians in universities in South East Nigeria

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Academic librarians in many countries have expanded their roles to be advocates and teachers of information literacy. The study examined information literacy practices, skills, level of involvement of librarians and inhibitors to information literacy programmes in universities in the South-east Nigeria. Sample was 76 librarians working in Federal and State University Libraries in South-east Nigerian. Questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Interview was also done to ascertain institutional practices of information literacy education. Results showed that majority of the libraries teach library use skills under the General Studies programme. Results also showed that librarians possess skills on traditional information literacy methods such as locating information physically to tackle users' queries but are least skilled in some information technology skills such as creating web pages, use of reference managers and Boolean search techniques. There is also low use of ICT tools for teaching of information literacy. Challenges faced include lack of institutional information literacy policy and support to drive information literacy, among others. The study concludes that academic librarians in Nigeria should plan and lobby for effective implementation of information literacy standalone credit bearing course in Nigerian Universities.

Key words: Information literacy education, information literacy skills, computer skills, academic librarians, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The Application of information and communication technology (ICT) to information storage and access has resulted in enormous increase in the arrays of information available for intellectual consumption. This has led to the problem of information overload where the flow of information associated with work tasks is greater than can be managed effectively (Wilson, 2001). Williams and

Wavell (2007) have also highlighted the significance of information quality, relevance and reliability, as well as the need to deal effectively with the quantity of information and sources available. These developments have increased the need for users to have necessary information retrieval skills that will empower them to identify and retrieve quality information to satisfy their

information needs. These skills and values are encompassed in the concept of information literacy (IL).

The concept of information literacy

There have been numerous attempts to define information literacy by librarians and library organizations worldwide. According to UNESCO (2003), Information Literacy encompasses knowledge of one's information concerns and needs, and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand; it is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the Information Society, and is part of the basic human right of lifelong learning. Bruce (2003), defined information literacy as "the ability to access, evaluate, organize, and use information in order to learn, problem-solve, make decisions – in formal and informal learning contexts, at work, at home and in educational settings."Lupton et al. (2004) however presented a more detailed explanation of information literacy to include library research skills and IT literacy. They explained that the definition goes beyond finding and presenting information, but it is about higher order analysis, synthesis, critical thinking and problem solving. It involves seeking and using information for independent and lifelong learning, participative citizenship and social responsibility. For students of institution of higher learning, this is important because they will eventually leave formalized academic institutions and will need to sustain their professional development and careers through lifelong learning. In this period of over abundant information, information literacy is that essential skill that will empower students to identify, retrieve and effectively use information to sustain and extend their learning after graduation. Information literacy is therefore an essential prerequisite for survival in the information age and for lifelong learning.

Academic librarians and information literacy

Academic librarians in many countries have accentuated and expanded their roles to be advocates and teachers of information literacy. Training on the use of library resources has been an integral part of library services for ages. This was done through orientation programmes and various user education initiatives involving one-on-one and classroom based instruction. Information literacy education is an extension of these processes, but reflects a much broader dimension of user education and more encompassing than the traditional user education. By empowering students to develop information literacy skills, librarians can contribute to their academic successes and help ensure graduates become independent and successful lifelong learners after graduation. As noted by Dubicki, (2013), the primary goalis for librarians to work in concert with the faculty in order to graduate information literate students who can effectively utilise information literacy skills in the workplace, as well as make informed decisions in their personal lives. To achieve this Fister (2013) remarked that the trick is not teaching students how to use the library and other information sources Rather, they need to focus on how the use of these things today can contribute to critical thinking, analysis, and making meaningful decisions – processes that will continue to be valuable tomorrow. To achieve this aim, librarians need institutional support as well as collaborate effectively with faculty members to integrate information literacy education into the curriculum (Øvern, 2014). Bury (2011) observed that there is a strong consensus on the centrality of faculty-librarian collaboration in fostering the information literacy (IL) agenda in higher education.

The foundation for an effective and formalized information literacy programme has been laid in Nigeria through the National Universities Commission (NUC) Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards for Under-graduate Programmes (National University Commission, 2007). In this policy document a two credit unit was assigned to Use of Library, Study Skills and Information Communication Technology (ICT) under the General Studies programme. Outlined to be taught under the credit unit include ' Brief history of libraries, Library and education, University libraries and other types of Libraries, Study skills (reference services), Types of library materials, using library resources including e-learning, e-materials, etc, Understanding library catalogues (Card, OPAC, etc) and classification, Copyright and its implications, Database resources, Bibliographic citations and referencing. Development of modern ICT, Hardware technology, Software technology, Input devices, Storage devices, Output devices, Communication and Internet services, Word processing skills (typing, etc)'

As information literacy education is gaining paramount importance in institutions of learning worldwide, librarians in Nigeria need to develop their own programmes, and map out strategies that will enable them fully integrate the programme into the curriculum of their various Universities. However, to work effectively as information literacy instructors, they need to have the requisite skills to pass on. These skills include both traditional biblio-graphic information retrieval skills and information technology skills. The objectives of the research were therefore to survey the skills and the nature of practice of information literacy programmes in University libraries in South East Nigeria.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the institutional practices of information literacy programs in South East Nigeria?
2. What is the level of information literacy skills possessed by academic librarians in South East Nigeria?

Table 1. Information Literacy Programmes in the institution.

No of institutions studied	No of Libraries involved in IL Education	Course content		Nature of Programme		Duration of training	
7	5	Use of Library Information	5	Part of General Studies	5	One semester	4
		Technology skills	2	Stand alone course	0	Two semesters	1

3. What is the level of involvement of librarians in information literacy education?
4. What are the methods of instruction used by librarians in formalized information literacy training?
5. What are the challenges militating against effective information literacy education in these institutions?

METHOD

The survey research method was used for this study. Questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire (α =.760) was designed to elicit librarians' perception of their level of information literacy skills. Response option was structured on a four point rating scale: of highly skilled to no skills. The questionnaire also contained sections on the level of involvement of librarians in information literacy education in their institutions, methods of instruction used by librarians in formalized information literacy training, and challenges militating against effective information literacy education in these institutions. In addition contact persons were interviewed to ascertain institutional practices of information literacy as requested in research question one.

   The research focused on Government owned Universities in South East Nigeria comprising four Federal and four State Universities. Questionnaires were hand distributed to librarians in Universities. Responses were received from three Federal Universities and four State Universities. The Federal Universities included: Nnamdi Azikiwe, Awka; University, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Federal University of Technology, Owerri. The State Universities were: Imo State University, Owerri; Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu; Anambra State University, Uli; and Abia State University, Uturu. There was no response from one Federal Government University. A total of 76 usable copies of the questionnaire were returned.

RESULTS

Respondents' demography

A higher percentage of the surveyed respondents were females 49 (64.5%), as compared to males 27 (35.5%). Majority of the respondents 39 (51.3%) were in the 41 – 60 years age group. 26 (34.2%) were aged 31-40; 7(9.2%) were aged 20-30, and 1(1.3%) over 60years. 42 (55.3%) had Masters' degree (MLS); 17(22.4%) had Bachelor of Library studies (BLS); 5(6.6%) had PhD; and 1(1.3%) had PGD Majority of respondents 24 (31.6%) had 11-19 years of working experience in the library; 20 years and above 19(25%); 17(22.4%) respondents had worked for 6-10years; 15(19.7%) for 1-5years.

Institutional practices of information literacy (IL) programme

Contact persons were interviewed to ascertain nature of information literacy programmes in the Universities. The summary is presented in Table 1. Five of the university libraries out of the seven are involved in formalized information literacy programme which is embedded in a General study (GS) course in their universities. However, the major literacy taught, is use of libraries or bibliographic instructions. In addition two libraries teach information technology skills. The course is a one semester course in four of the universities and a two semester course in one.

Level of Information Literacy Skills Possessed by Librarians

Librarians were requested to rate their level of information literacy skills. The result is shown in Table 2. Mean scores of responses shows that respondents rated their skills highest on locating information to answer users query (3.75) and identifying various sources of information (3.66). They were also highly skilled in Internet information search and retrieval (3.36). Their skills were least on creating web pages (2.00), use of reference managers (2.15) and Boolean search techniques (2.22).

Level of Involvement in information literacy training by librarians

Librarians were asked to indicate their personal involvement in individual and group aspects of the various components of information literacy training. The responses are given in Table 3. Results show that majority were involved in one –on-one instruction during library visits than formalized classroom instructions. There is no high involvement of the librarians on group instructions. The highest percentages of the librarians were involved in one –on-one library bibliographic instruction 49(64.5%) and library orientation tours 44(57.9%) on individual bases. These two activities also received the highest scores on involvement in group

Table 2. Level of information literacy skills of the respondents.

	Highly skilled	Moderate skills	Little skills	No skills	Mean	Std. D
Locating information in the library to answer library users query	59(77.6 %)	15(19.7 %)	2(2.6 %)	0 %	3.75	.49
Identification of various sources of information	52(68.4 %)	22(28.9 %)	2(2.6%)	0%	3.66	.53
Internet search and information retrieval	41(53.9%)	25(32.9 %)	6(7.9 %)	4(5.3 %)	3.36	.85
Awareness of online subject database search engines	27(35.5 %)	29(38.2 %)	10(13.2 %)	10(13.2 %)	2.96	1.01
Use of Online Catalogues(OPAC)	25(32.9 %)	28(36.8 %)	13(17.1%)	10(13.2%)	2.90	1.01
Evaluating information on the Internet	18(23.7 %)	36(47.4 %)	12(15.8 %)	10(13.2 %)	2.82	.95
Searching subject specialized online databases	24(31.6 %)	26(34.2 %)	12(15.8 %)	14(18.4 %)	2.79	1.09
Use of PowerPoint	17(22.4 %)	27(35.5 %)	17(22.4 %)	14(18.4 %)	2.63	1.04
Boolean search techniques	9(11.8 %)	21(27.6 %)	24(31.6 %)	22(28.9 %)	2.22	1.00
Use of reference Managers	11(14.5 %)	19(25.0 %)	16(21.1 %)	30(30.5%)	2.15	1.10
Creating web pages	5(6.6 %)	16(21.1 %)	19(25.0 %)	35(46.1 %)	2.00	1.43

N=76.

Table 3. Level of involvement of librarians in information literacy training.

Information literacy training activities	On individual bases (During library visits)		On group bases i.e. in Classroom setting	
	Yes	%	Yes	%
Bibliographic instruction (use catalogue, indexes and abstracts)	49	64.5	21	27.6
Library orientation tours	44	57.9	29	38.2
Training users in electronic or digital access to information	27	35.5	17	22.4
Training users in writing skills	27	35.5	14	18.4
Training users in Internet search skills	26	34.2	13	17.1
Training users in evaluating information quality	26	34.2	12	15.8
Training users in use of library websites	23	30.3	12	15.8
Training users in computer skills	22	28.9	12	15.8
Training users in use of online catalogues (OPAC)	21	27.6	14	18.4
Training users in Use of specialized online databases	18	23.7	14	18.4
Training users in Boolean search techniques	14	18.4	8	10.5
Training users in use of reference managers	13	17.1	8	10.5

N=76.

Table 4. Instructional materials use by librarians involved in information literacy programme?

	Frequency	%
Oral Presentation only	28	36.8
Blackboard	23	30.3
Computers	18	23.7
Internet	13	17.1
PowerPoint	12	15.8

basis. Individually training users in the use of Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC) received 21 (27.6%); training users in the use of specialized online databases 18 (23.7%); training users in Boolean search techniques 14 (18.4%); and training users in the use of reference managers13 (17.1%) received very low scores.

Method of instruction in formalized information literacy training,

Respondents were asked to indicate the tools used if they are involved in a formalized information literacy training. The summary of the result is shown in Table 4. Majority 28 (36.8%) give only oral presentations. The blackboard is the major tool used by 23 (30.3%). Other tools used include the computers 18 (23.7%); the Internet 13 (17.1%); and PowerPoint presentation software 12

Table 5. Training location used in a formalized IL training.

	Frequency	%
Classroom	24	31.6
Library	21	27.6
Computer lab	9	11.8
e-library	8	10.5
Office	5	6.6

Table 6. Problems against effective information literacy education.

	Frequency	%
Lack of IL policy or standard	49	64.5
Lack of University commitment to the project	46	60.5
Lack of computers and other teaching resources	41	53.9
Lack of proactivity in spearheading or pushing IL initiatives by librarians	38	50.0
Poor awareness among librarians on their roles as IL teachers in the University system	38	50.0
Faculty unwillingness to incorporate information literacy into the curriculum	35	46.1
Student apathy to the programme	26	34.2

(15.8%).

Table 5 shows the setting of the formalized information literacy programmes as indicated by the respondents. Majority of the training activities were in the classroom 24 (31.6%) and the library 21 (27.6%). computer laboratory 9 (11.8%) e-library 8 (10.5%); and office 5 (6.6%) were also used by a small percentage of the respondents.

Problems militating against effective information literacy education

Table 6 shows problems inhibiting effective information literacy education in the institutions studied. Lack of information literacy policy or standard 49 (64.5%), lack of university commitment to the project 46 (60.5%) and lack of computers and other teaching resources 41 (53.9%) received the highest responses. They are therefore adjudged the highest inhibitors or challenges to information literacy implementation in these Universities.

DISCUSSION

The result of the study showed that information literacy education is subsumed into a broad based General studies (GS) course in the universities that are currently implementing it. The course is not developed to be a standalone course as indicated in NUC benchmark which assigned it a two credit load as part of the general studies programme of the universities. This GS programme is fully coordinated by other academic staff members of the

universities. The implication is that librarians may not be at liberty to develop their information literacy course content as is necessary. Information literacy should be made a mandatory examinable stand alone course for every department in the institution just like General Studies which is administered to every department. Bill and Webber (2003) corroborated this view when they opined that it appears there is sufficient content, method and value in information literacy to justify a course of study in its own right.

The study sought to determine the level of possession of relevant information literacy skills. These skills are essential if the librarian can pass it down to others. Results showed that librarians possess high skills on the traditional information literacy methods of instruction such as bibliographic instruction; locating information to answer library users' queries, identifying various sources of information and Internet information search and retrieval. However, skills were least on creating web pages, use of reference managers and Boolean search techniques. Similarly, Ojedokun (2014) who studied information literacy skills of librarians in South West Nigeria, found librarians have difficulty in identifying significant words and the role of Boolean operators, were unable to distinguish between library catalogues and bibliographic databases and have limited understanding of web search tools. Most students are very ICT-savvy and are regarded as 'digital natives' and will not tolerate any level of mediocrity. Therefore, librarians need to improve their information literacy skills in the area of computer use and internet search skills through training and retraining. This is very imperative for effective

teaching.

The level of involvement in information literacy training by librarians showed that again, librarians were adept at the older instruction. They were more involved in bibliographic instruction on the use of catalogues, indexes, and abstracts for accessing information, and also in library orientation tours. These two information literacy activities received the highest scores at the individual and group levels possibly because they are some of the oldest information literacy activities by librarians. ICT related information literacy activities such as training users in the use of Open Access Catalogue (OPAC), online database search skills; and Boolean search techniques scored very low both at the individual and group levels. This implies that these librarians may not have fully integrated ICT literacy into their information literacy programmes.

In formalized information literacy instruction, oral presentation is the major method used by the res-pondents. Formalized training is done mainly in the classroom. However, some information literacy activities are situated in the e-libraries and computer laboratories. Equally, there is low use of ICT tools such as computers, Internet and PowerPoint presentation software by these respondents. Since the components of information literacy education have expanded to include both computer and digital literacy, the low use of these tools implies this content may be missing in the information literacy training scheme of these librarians. It is important to note that these tools are necessary in preparing and enriching information literacy education in the web based environment.

Challenges militating against information literacy as gleaned from this study include lack of information literacy policy in these institutions; lack of university commitment to information literacy, and lack of adequate computers and teaching aids. 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 inhibitions exist because most institutions may not be fully aware of how information literacy can improve research and learning. Inhibitions 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. Librarians should work to break these barriers through strategic marketing of information literacy programmes and benefits. 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

enough passion to create the awareness of the central role of information literacy in students' knowledge acquisition and lifelong learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations as evidenced from the findings of this study will improve the use of information literacy in institutions in the South East zone of Nigeria.

Librarians should reach out to partner with other stake holders in information literacy such as ICT staff and the faculty for a more enhanced approach in the teaching of information literacy.
Impact assessment of information literacy should be constantly measured for institutions to appreciate it and want to key into it.
Librarians should lobby and advocate for more institutional involvement and for stakeholders to buy-in to the importance of information literacy. This will help improve the implementation of information literacy programmes and the acquisition of adequate ICT infrastructure to drive it.
Practical ways to improve the teaching of information literacy should be engaged for instance, offline posters may be culled out form online pages and used in the event of power outages which are fairly common in these institutions. CD ROM version of online materials can also be used when there are issues with Internet connections.

Conclusion

Clearly information literacy is central to the mission of any institution engaged in teaching, learning and research and librarians have a pivotal role in this regard. Lack of requisite skills, formalized and standardized information literacy programmes in our institutions will be detrimental to librarians contributing to building a knowledge society which will ensure equal participation in the developmental process. With well organized and adequately taught information literacy in Nigerian universities, librarians will contribute in producing global citizens and lifelong learners who will make meaningful contributions to the world's developmental processes. Academic Librarians in Nigeria must therefore plan and lobby for effective implementation of information literacy standalone course content in Nigerian universities.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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