

ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS' INVOLVEMENT IN PROMOTING INFORMATION LITERACY IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Advances in information communication technologies have made information literacy a required skill for the 21st-century community. The reason is that members of the 21st-century society are often inundated and overwhelmed by the quantities and forms of information available and accessible to them. Consequently, they need to acquire lifelong learning skills that could help them to possess proficiencies for identifying, accessing, evaluating, and using information effectively and efficiently. Librarians, having acknowledged the academic and socioeconomic values of information literacy, adopt various approaches to impart their skills to various categories of information users. Particularly, in academic institutions, librarians adopt different methods to teach information literacy to make students lifelong learners. Some approaches to imparting information literacy skills involved designing information literacy programs, conducting workshops, collaborating with faculty to integrate information literacy into the curriculum, and so on. This paper aims to look into the many strategies academic librarians employ to help students become information literate and how these programs affect their academic achievement.

Keywords: Information literacy, Academic libraries, Academic librarians, Higher institutions, Students.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Information literacy is the capacity to recognize, assess, and apply information efficiently. Academic librarians have a crucial role in helping students develop information literacy in the digital age, as information is readily available and abundant. Academic librarians serve as both information stewards and educators, helping students develop their abilities to locate, assess, and use information efficiently. It is now critical to be able to access, assess, and apply information efficiently in today's fast-changing digital world. Information is easily available than ever, yet it can be difficult to separate trustworthy sources from false information and base decisions on factual facts (Gaha, U., Hinnefeld, S. & Pellegrino, C., (2018). Information literacy is vital in this situation. A person's ability to find, assess, evaluate, and ethically use information to solve issues, make decisions, and broaden their perspective on the world is referred to as information literacy. It includes critical thinking, digital literacy, and the capacity to assess the reliability and applicability of information, in addition to fundamental reading and writing abilities.

With so much information available through the internet, social media, and online databases, the digital age has presented both opportunities and challenges. While there is a wealth of knowledge, viewpoints, and resources at our disposal, the spread of false information, biased content, and fake news has made it more and more difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. To become information literate, people must acquire a variety of abilities. They must be competent in conducting efficient searches for information, utilizing the right tools and search techniques to locate trustworthy sources. They have to assess the material they come across critically, taking into account things like the author's reputation, the standing of the publication, and the supporting documentation. They should also be aware of the moral applications of knowledge, such as respecting intellectual property rights, copyright laws, and plagiarism.

Information literacy is an essential ability for people in all spheres of life, not only those in academic contexts. The capacity to get, assess, and use information responsibly is crucial for anyone working with data, whether a professional making informed decision, a student doing research for a project, or a citizen participating in public debate. Information literacy is also a continuous process. To stay up with the changing information landscape, people need to constantly adapt and improve their skills as new types of media and technological advancements arise. This calls for a dedication to critical thinking, lifelong learning, and keeping up with the most recent methods and technologies for information retrieval and analysis. In the digital age, acquiring information literacy is essential. It allows people to sift through the deluge of information, critically assess its veracity and applicability, and base judgments on solid facts. We may become astute information producers and consumers and contribute to a better-educated and enlightened society by developing our information literacy abilities.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Information literacy encompasses the ability to effectively locate, evaluate, and use information. In the digital age, where information overload is prevalent, developing information literacy skills is crucial for students to navigate and make sense of the vast amount of information available to them. In academic settings, academic librarians are essential in helping students develop their information literacy. Academic librarians are still gathering evidence linking information literacy instruction to student research and learning. Cheng and Hoffman (2020) observed that a large body of research points to a connection between student performance metrics, including GPA, retention, campus course grade and library instruction. Librarians work closely with the academic community to successfully integrate digital literacy and information into the curriculum. Academic librarians increasingly advise faculty and students on incorporating digital content into the classroom. One of their main responsibilities is to provide training and access to information resources. They carefully monitor the efficient use of information resources and implement and assess resources to ensure that curricula, faculty, and student needs are satisfied (Godfree & Oddone, 2023).

2.1 Academic Librarians as Information Literacy Educators

Academic librarians are uniquely positioned to support students in developing information literacy skills. They possess expertise in information retrieval, evaluation, and citation, making them invaluable resources for students seeking guidance in conducting research and accessing

scholarly resources. As students manage an abundance of information from varied sources, academic librarians' role as information literacy educators has become increasingly important in the digital age. According to ACRL (2017), information literacy is the capacity to find, assess, and apply information efficiently. It is a necessary skill for students to succeed in postsecondary education. The beneficial effects of information literacy teaching on student learning outcomes have been repeatedly shown by research (Brian et.al., 2011). Research has demonstrated that students who get instruction in information literacy demonstrate enhanced research abilities, critical thinking, and academic achievement. There is a strong correlation between information literacy and retention rates among students

Having specific knowledge and expertise in information organization, retrieval, and evaluation, academic librarians are in a unique position to offer crucial education. Effective collaboration in the development and execution of information literacy curricula is also made possible by librarians' good working relationships with faculty. However, academic librarians in their capacity as information literacy instructors face some challenges. Librarians encounter challenges in their attempts to incorporate information literacy into the curriculum, including time constraints, resource shortages, and a lack of institutional support. Furthermore, some faculty feel reluctant to work with librarians or think that information literacy is not part of their job description (Beisler & Medaille, 2016). Academic librarians are valuable in helping students develop their information literacy (Mullins & Boyd-Byrnes, 2024; Soltani & Nikou, 2020). They help students achieve success academically and in lifelong learning (ACRL, 2016).

2.2 Collaborative Efforts with Faculty

Successful information literacy initiatives involve a collaboration between academic librarians and faculty members (Thomas & Trudi, 2005). Librarians and faculty collaborate to integrate information literacy instruction into the curriculum, ensuring that students receive consistent guidance on how to effectively search for and critically evaluate information. To enhance students' learning and performance in higher education, collaboration between academic librarians and faculty has become more and more important. Strong collaborations between the two parties can result in the creation of successful information literacy initiatives, the incorporation of library materials into course curricula, and the improvement of instructional strategies (Saunders, 2019). Studies have indicated the advantages of faculty-librarian cooperation (Weng & Murray, 2020; Savannah, 2019; Junisbai et al., 2016). Literature has indicated that students' research skills, critical thinking abilities, and general academic performance are improved when librarians collaborate with faculty (Ziegenfuss & Borrelli, 2016). Through collaboration, librarians understand the teaching and research needs of faculty members, which will enable them to provide specialized and pertinent library services.

Effective collaborations frequently entail librarians actively engaging with faculty, recognizing their needs for teaching and research, and showcasing the value that librarians can provide to the educational process. Institutional support helps to promote collaboration between faculty and librarians. The sustainability of these partnerships is dependent on specific funding, chances for professional growth, and clear acknowledgement of joint efforts during promotion processes. Efforts must be made not to allow conflicting priorities to hamper such collaboration (Beisler & Medaille, 2016).

2.3 Information Literacy Programs and Workshops

Academic libraries offer information literacy programs and workshops to help students enhance their research skills. These programs cover topics such as database searching, source evaluation, citation practices, and plagiarism awareness. By participating in these initiatives, students improve their information literacy competencies and become more discerning consumers of information. Students who possess information literacy (IL), which allows them to locate, assess, and apply information efficiently, are more likely to succeed academically. To enhance student learning and research, academic libraries are essential in creating and implementing IL programs and workshops (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017). A well-planned academic library (IL) program and seminars are crucial. Students who take part in these programs perform better academically, enhance research skills, and are capable of critical thought. Again, training in information literacy (IL) has the potential to enhance students' self-direction and confidence in their information-seeking skills (Beisler & Medaille, 2016). There is a positive significance of collaborations between faculty and librarians. Librarians provide IL programs and workshops that are specifically targeted to the needs and learning objectives of various courses and disciplines (Savannah, 2019). Integrating instruction into tasks and assignments for courses improves students' learning. Librarians can find areas for improvement and ensure that IL initiatives are significantly affecting student performance by conducting a systematic evaluation of program efficiency and student learning outcomes (Beisler & Medaille, 2016).

2.4 Assessment of Information Literacy Skills

Assessing students' information literacy skills is an essential component of promoting information literacy. Academic librarians use various assessment tools, such as quizzes, assignments, and examinations, to test students' information literacy proficiency and tailor instruction to meet their needs effectively. As academic libraries work to show the value of their programs and make sure that students are gaining the skills they need to succeed in their studies and future careers, the evaluation of information literacy (IL) skills has grown in significance in higher education. There are several methods for evaluating IL abilities in educational settings. Standardized assessments, such as Project SAILS and the ACRL's Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS), are frequently utilized in a variety of educational settings to assess students' proficiency in IL (Beisler & Medaille, 2016). These standardized tests offer useful information for comparing and pinpointing areas where IL programs need to be improved.

Librarians and faculty collaborate to develop assessment procedures that ensure the effectiveness of Information Literacy (IL) programs by clearly defining required IL abilities and competencies for students. Implementing and sustaining efficient assessment processes can be challenging due to factors like limited resources, faculty engagement, and the complex nature of IL competencies (O'Neill & Padden, 2021). By aligning assessment techniques with course objectives and working together to design and implement IL assessment strategies, librarians and faculty can enhance IL programs continuously.

A comprehensive approach to IL assessment, incorporating both direct and indirect measures, is essential for gaining a detailed understanding of students' IL skills and the impact of IL initiatives (European University Association (EUA), 2020). This collaborative effort between

librarians and faculty aims to improve IL programs and workshops, ensuring that they meet the needs of students and contribute to their overall academic success.

2.5 Impact of IL on Student Success

Studies have shown a positive correlation between information literacy skills and academic success (Adeniran & Onuoha, 2018; Ajayi, Haliso, & Unegbu, 2023; Kotoroi & Magaya, 2024). Students who are information literate are better equipped to conduct thorough research, critically analyze information, and produce high-quality academic work. By promoting information literacy, academic librarians contribute to students' overall academic achievement and critical thinking abilities. It is generally acknowledged that the acquisition of information literacy (IL) abilities is necessary for students to succeed in higher education. Students who receive tailored instruction in IL show better academic outcomes, including higher marks and greater performance on research projects (Allison, 2015). These results imply that including IL teaching in the curriculum can help students become more adept at locating, analyzing, and applying information, which will improve their academic performance. Students who participate in IL training or programs have a higher chance of sticking with their studies and getting their degrees (Contrino, 2019). This could be ascribed to the growth of analytical and problem-solving abilities as well as the elevated self-assurance and self-efficacy that frequently accompany IL training.

Information literacy teaching can raise students' motivation and engagement levels (Collie & Martin, 2019). Students who get IL instruction are more engaged with their courses, feel more confident about their capacity to conduct research, and have a stronger respect for the importance of information literacy abilities. Intelligent learning (IL) instruction has the potential to enhance students' academic self-efficacy and encourage more profound engagement with learning by enabling them to traverse the information landscape proficiently. However, the effectiveness of IL education may differ according to the precise interventions, learning objectives, and evaluation techniques applied.

3.0 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While academic librarians have made significant strides in promoting information literacy, much must be done. Future research could explore innovative approaches to information literacy instruction, the integration of technology in information literacy programs, and the assessment of long-term outcomes of information literacy initiatives on students' academic and professional development. Academic librarians are in a prime position to advance information literacy (IL) education and assessment in higher education as the significance of IL for student performance becomes increasingly apparent (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017). Wholistic integration of IL instruction into the academic curriculum is a crucial area for future participation. Faculty and librarians must collaborate to create and execute IL-infused assignments, course materials, and learning objectives. Librarians should ensure that students acquire the skills they need to succeed in their academics and future career ambitions by organizing training in IL with particular academic contexts and learning objectives. Academic librarians can support curriculum integration in addition to the creation of IL assessment methods.

Librarians play a vital role in developing and implementing assessment frameworks to measure the impact of instructional language on student learning. By collaborating with administrators and tutors, librarians can improve instructional language programs over time, allocate resources effectively, and make informed decisions. They also promote an information literacy culture within institutions by engaging faculty and students in outreach, advocacy, and professional development activities. In the future, librarians will explore innovative teaching methods for information literacy, such as virtual reality, gamification, and online tutorials, to cater to diverse student learning needs and preferences. By researching the effectiveness of instructional language instruction, librarians can identify best practices, enhance existing strategies, and contribute to continuous improvement in information literacy initiatives.

Collaborative research projects involving librarians, faculty, and administrators will further integrate information literacy into higher education. Their proactive involvement in promoting information literacy is crucial for ensuring student success and lifelong learning in a constantly evolving academic landscape. Librarians facilitate students in navigating complex information environments and achieving academic and professional goals through their expertise, collaboration with campus partners, and adoption of innovative techniques.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Academic librarians are increasingly vital in advancing information literacy (IL) among higher education students, meeting the rising demand for information-savvy graduates. They ensure students acquire essential digital-age skills through strategic partnerships, innovative training, and evidence-based methods. By integrating IL into the curriculum and collaborating with faculty, librarians enhance students' ability to apply knowledge across disciplines. Establishing comprehensive IL assessment frameworks enables librarians to monitor outcomes and enhance IL programs continually. Moreover, fostering an IL culture university-wide is a key responsibility of librarians, achieved through outreach, advocacy, and professional development initiatives to instill the value of IL and equip the academic community with lifelong learning skills.

This paper urges librarians to embrace advanced teaching methods for information literacy (IL) to adapt to evolving information landscapes. They should leverage new pedagogical techniques to accommodate diverse learning styles among students. By staying current with these changes, librarians can ensure the continued effectiveness and relevance of IL education. Academic librarians' contributions to IL research are pivotal for the subject's advancement and the establishment of best practices. Collaborative projects integrating IL in higher education, guided by academics and administrators, can deepen understanding of IL's impact on students' performance. In the digital era, librarians' role in advancing information literacy is becoming increasingly crucial, contributing to student success and enhancing institutional performance.

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