

INFORMATION LITERACY EDUCATION: A PATHWAY FOR ENHANCING STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Developing lifelong learners is one of the central missions of university education. These need to be increasingly reflected in the description of graduate qualities, attributes or capabilities within and outside the academic environment. Information literacy education is an approach of teaching students to learn and acquire knowledge and skills to search relevant, reputable and the most needed information for academic, research or decision making. This study is a review of the concepts, importance and implication of information literacy education on university students. Practical experience of contemporaries over non productive nature of postgraduate students in research and the roles of university towards promoting teaching, learning and research was discussed. The study revealed that information literacy plays a crucial role improving students achievements as it bridges the gap between the traditional ways of instruction in which students are passive learners and the contemporary ways of instruction delivery. Finally, it recommended among other things that libraries and faculties should engage in active participation in exhibition and frequent information literacy awareness campaign with emphasis on the use of e-resources as well as introducing them to other related paper-based resources.

INTRODUCTION

Broader discussions can cover the expanding role of information literacy education, libraries and societal values in the digital age. Computers and related technologies are major pathways to information literacy education. Students can use computers to go beyond locating library resources; they can learn to use CD-ROM and on-line databases, word processors, graphing software, presentation software, electronic bulletin boards, and e-mail. Students can become competent, independent users and evaluators of information. The key is for educators to help them develop the skills to evaluate information and to separate superfluous data from essential details.

Mere exposure to information does not mean that students are informed (Kehoe 1993). To that effect developing lifelong learners is central to the mission of university education, this need to be increasingly reflected in descriptions of graduate qualities, attributes or capabilities. By leading individuals to think critically, and by helping them construct a framework for learning how to learn. Educational institutions provide the foundation for continued growth throughout the careers of graduates, as well as in their roles as informed citizens and members of communities from the power of information. Okebukola (1998) affirmed that Universities have traditionally

been regarded as both the generators and the repositories of knowledge... colleges and universities have been the fountain head of what can be referred to as a "debt due from the present to future generation". This inheritance is passed along from one generation to another, not only through curriculum but also through university libraries, lecture series, seminars, conferences, scholarly journals and books as well as in many other ways. Thus, Albert (2010) contends that philosophically, university education is meant to provide general education that prepares the individual for entry into the government, professions, business and the industry, or provide the individual with opportunity for postgraduate study. The general education given within the university provides opportunity for individuals to continue to pursue knowledge within and outside the university. It provides for lifelong learning through critical intelligence to make effective in whatever life requires of us.

Similarly, Ezinne (2010) observes that the realities of university education attest significantly to the fact that the university library plays a critical role in the ideals of educational reform and attainment of the educational goals. The intent of university education is to inculcate in student the skills for learning independently in the absence of the teacher. In complement, Msheliza (2002) stresses that teaching is more than mere talking on the part of the teacher and listening on the part of the students/pupils. It is rather the provision of opportunities from which learners can gain such experiences that will enable them to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and appreciation that will serve as a tool in life. Therefore, scientific approach to teaching should be more concern with contents and evaluation of results. Nacino et al (1982) quoted in Msheliza (2002) affirm that teaching is an attempt to help someone acquire or change some skills, attitude, knowledge, idea, or appreciation. Adedayo (1998) posits that:

education can be regarded as an edifice constructed specifically for meeting the needs of the society. In building construction theory, the foundation of a house determines the quality, strength and durability of that house. If the foundation is good, the house will be very solid. The reverse is the case if the foundation is very poor.

In an effort to build a solid foundation for academic excellence of students, Ezinne (2010) suggests that it is necessary for the first year undergraduate students to acquire the necessary skills for locating information in the library as well as the information literacy skills and use of the library instruction should be more of project work, demonstration and assignment to enable students acquaint themselves with the use of the library search tools. The use of library came about in consideration of the fact that classroom teaching alone cannot fully satisfy the information needs of students. Okebukola (1998) opines that universities have traditionally been regarded as both the generators and the repositories of knowledge. No doubt, Obonya (2010) has categorized knowledge into three, considering the roles of tertiary institutions saying that, ideally, tertiary institutions have knowledge as their major *raison d'etre*. This is why their triple mandate is usually classified as:

Knowledge generation (or Research),
Knowledge transmission (or Teaching) and
Knowledge transmission (or Responsive Social Engagement).

Need for Information Literacy Education in the Nigerian Universities

Apparently, education systems are continuously and rapidly changing with the dynamic proliferation of information and change in impacting not only on the universities but also the students. Researchers have discovered that for an individual or organisation to meet with the dynamic nature and characteristics of information in this digital age, teaching information literacy skills has become inevitably necessary. In such a situation, Fields (2005) cited in Aziagba and Akpan (2010) calls for the designing of information literacy assignment and curricula development with emphasis on prior-knowledge of the information users as it will help them increase their self-efficacy in the information search. Nevertheless, information literacy skill is a phenomenon afflicting the performance of university postgraduate students. Albert (2010) reveals from his practical experience that:

Laziness contributes to some of the problem faced by students. The case of a student of mine is a good example to illustrate this .Owing to the sloppy nature of the work submitted to me years ago, I instructed Master's student working under me to go to the library and consult some publications. He came back the following day, saying that he could not find any of the books I recommended. I gave him directions as to where to find a particular one. He came back late to say he had found it and would read it. I got a phone call from him many days late right from the library asking me for a particular page to read.

What a decaying nature of student performance in learning and research in the contemporary society. Hence, the world view on the skills and productivity of graduate students and extent to which the institution develops and improves the information skills is one of the indicator of the institutions' commitment to effective education (MSACSCHE, 2003). Therefore, the benefits of teaching information literacy extend far beyond constructing knowledge and developing for information seeking and use. Rather, students should develop personally and socially on a wide range of fronts that affect ability to benefit from responsive learning environments (Moore, 2002). Faculty members and librarians should strive hard in teaching students to learn and acquire the research skills and knowledge in the Nigerian Universities more aptly to meet the global status because digital resources can attest to us that our time is no longer an age of information availability but that of accessibility. Oghuvwu and Elekwa (2008) in a paper entitled “Importance of information literacy in the Information age” affirmed that education need a new model of learning - learning that is based on the information resources of the real world and learning that is active and integrated, not passive and fragmented. In such a situation, therefore, emphasis on information literacy resource-based learning was dreamed to manifest itself in a variety of ways. To plan for remedy, Gillespie (1999) cited in Unchenna

(2010) emphasises that the centuries old policy of didactic discourse, once the standard pedagogy employed, is now only one of many learning methods and strategies to be use in overcoming problem of information overload that would likely hinder the performance of students in the digital age. Indeed a faculty may choose to incorporate collaborative learning, guided discovery and experiential learning to design a course experience that will not only convey the vital information of the discipline, but also develop critical thinking, communication and research skills to meet the objectives of university education. Okebukola (1998) contends that the central and most evident purpose of university education has been the intellectual, aesthetic, social, vocational and moral development of able youths. Many authorities believe that the university's primary responsibility to its students is to help them attain higher levels of personal development, vocational achievement, and public service. This goal of individual development includes deeper insight into human experience through general education, as well as preparation for the learned professions through specialised study.

Teaching Information literacy for lifelong-learning

Developing lifelong learners is central to the mission of educational institutions, and it should be increasingly reflected in the description of graduate qualities, attributes or capabilities within and outside the academic environment. Hence, the potential for learning knowledge and skills in the university is virtually a premise on the quality of its curriculum and competency of its recipients. Learning is an activity of concern in all educational institutions particularly universities which demands for high order and skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, the ability to think critically, to construct meaning and reconstruct understanding in the light of new learning experiences. Information literacy education is central and will inevitably help students develop themselves into independent learners to construe and construct from the experience and much more readily than others whose focus is on the acquisition of a large body of knowledge.

Therefore, information literacy education in the universities should create opportunities for self-directed and independent learning where students become engaged in using a wide variety of information sources to expand their knowledge, construct knowledge, ask informed questions, and sharpen their critical thinking. This approach is evident in the increasingly widespread introduction of student centred constructivist pedagogy such as inquiry based, problem based and resource based learning. Characteristics of inquiry based and problem based curriculum design include an emphasis on experimental learning. In these models, a learning environment should be provided to enable students construct learning through asking questions and framing problems. Investigating and problem-solving, this activity should be created in an active and students' driven learning situations with a strong implicit and explicit emphasis on effective use of information. Arokoyu (2007) asserts that the basic assumption is that for a student to solve problems he must be given plenty opportunities to undertake problem-solving exercise.

In essence, information literacy builds a bridge between the traditional ways of instruction in which students are passive learners. Instructors focus on providing students with a common core of concepts, knowledge and skills, and determine the learning outcomes, to a new learning environment that helps faculty members promote active learning through teaching critical thinking. For instance, through their collaboration in teaching skills, librarians and teaching faculty provide students with intellectual abilities of reasoning and critical thinking by helping them to construct a framework for learning how to learn, and by helping them to nourish these skills throughout their careers and their roles as informed citizens (ACRL, 2000 as cited in Deip, 2011). Uchenna (2010) confirms that how people think and learn is changing. Therefore students are exposed to a much more sensory environment than ever before. To him the spoken words are not enough but visual and audible elements are necessary to add depth and understanding of concepts.

It may be said that learners are no longer expected to expose themselves or being exposed to contents solely by memorising or regurgitating of facts at all cost. In an instance where such situation may exist in Nigerian universities, therefore, faculty members and librarians should see the need for reviewing, evaluating and revamping the teaching and learning attitudes and the methods explored. Teaching the students how to find and evaluate sources of information should begin with assessing the students' skills and understanding of how to navigate the library and identify other sources. In addition, it is important for the faculty members to provide some structures and criteria for identifying resources. Thus, teaching the students how to evaluate and find information in print or electronic sources is a key aspect of information skills teaching as asserted by Herring (2004).

CHALLENGES FOR TEACHING INFORMATION LITERACY

Deip (2011) in one of his study, acclaims that research and professional practice show that information literacy (IL) plays a crucial role in improving students achievement, and therefore necessary to teach IL in all disciplines. However, in teaching, IL skills has not been recognized as important factor in Vietnam universities and has not received sufficient attention on campus. For example, Pham (2008) emailed a survey to five librarians and two lecturers in seven educational institutions in Vietnam, and identified the major challenges to delivering IL to student population to include: poor quality of IL curriculum, outdated library and information science (LIS) curriculum, and predominantly passive teaching and learning styles. In such a devastating situation, university administrators, curriculum planners and librarians can use the strategy as proposed by Herring (2004) as a starting point in addressing the problems of teaching information literacy in schools. According to him, as information literacy is now regarded as a key element in students' education, it is important that all school staff are encouraged to think about the following:

- (i) What are information skills and why are they important?
- (ii) Who teaches information skills in the school?
- (iii) What information skills do students need when using the world wide web?

- (iv) To what extent have the school's teachers and school librarian thought about their own information skills?
- (v) How can students be provided with guidance on information skills on the school website?

It is clear that the global transitional challenge in information sources, refining and use requires adequate skills among instructors. It is pertinent to say that faculty members and librarians should examine their own information literacy skills and acquaint themselves with knowledge and skills of using at least two different types of model developed by prolific scholars in this field, now available on the Internet.

Herring (2004) recommends that the use of PLUS model can provide a suitable way for the teachers and librarian to impart knowledge and skills of information with the support and structure they need when using print and electronic resources in their assignments. Meanwhile, for active participation in information literacy education, teachers and students have complimentary responsibilities as identified by Oghuvwu and Elekwa (2008), that teachers are responsible for developing appropriate instructional strategies. As such, they need to address the differences of student needs and bring enthusiasm and variety of teaching approaches to the classroom to ensure sound learning for every student. In this line, teaching and learning how to solve problems call for the giver and the taker to be at alert that problem-solving strategy is a complex mental process as it requires novel, original, unique and varied responses, background knowledge of concepts, facts and structures, analysis and sequential steps. According to Brindley (N.d) in Vilks (2008), librarians should also play a key role in helping to teach information literacy skills. That the younger generation is technologically more literate but not more information literate is a challenge that must be tackled by libraries and education more widely. Supporting this position, Lupton, Edwards and Bruce (2006) submit that Students should be actively engaged in discussion and reflection about finding and using information in order to uncover variation in conception within the group.

Therefore, when students are provided with metacognitive support during information problem-solving activities, they may be able to manage complex tasks and subject matter content (Wolf, Brush and Saye, 2003 cited in Herring, 2004). Similarly, Diep (2011) cited in Snaveley (2008) submits that the technological changes of today challenge librarians and place information literacy (IL) at the center of higher education whose goals are to bring new knowledge and learning to students. Indeed, the challenges that libraries have to face are to teach skills that allow students to keep up with these developments in advanced technologies and exponential information growth throughout their lifetime. This situation appears to be even more critical in emerging economies (Diep, 2011)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenges that university lectures and librarians have to face, is how to teach skills that allow students to keep abreast with the exponential information proliferation

in the ICT global world which would aid their career and life style in the emerging economy. Even though, the fundamental issue that seems not to have been properly addressed in the efforts to improve the standard of teaching, research and supervision is the fact that, under the best facilities, the most competent teacher or staff will under achieve if he is not properly supported and valued (Enemali, 1998). Based on the aforesated evidences, the Nigerian universities lecturers and librarian should be organising literacy programme aimed at building knowledge and capacity of both undergraduate and postgraduate students on regular basis. Doing this will allow them to exhibit their intellectual ability in sourcing accurate and reliable information with ability to use them for social, academic and research endeavours in a problem-solving approach. Once students become conscious of their information literacy gap, they can do everything possible to apply the knowledge and training imparted to them to fill the existing gap.

Libraries and faculties should engage in active participation in exhibition and frequent information literacy awareness campaign with emphasis on use and availability of e-resources as well as introducing them to other related paper-based resources. These will encourage creativity, quality research and participation of the postgraduate and undergraduate students in the global digital world. Above all, appropriate authorities in the university system should take into serious consideration vital recommendations put forward by various authorities in relation to literacy education and work out sophisticated modalities of implementing them. This will go a long way in strengthening and encouraging research and researchers of all categories.

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