



Information Literacy and Life Long Learning

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Abstract: According to American Library Association (ALA) report, information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information”. Information literacy also is increasingly important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources. According to Henderson and Scheffler, individuals with information literacy are people who know the ways to reach information and use it appropriately by interpreting the information. The need for information and the increase in the quantity and variety of information made information literacy a necessity. Information literacy is the set of skills needed to discover, retrieve, analyze, and use information. The twenty-first century has been named the information era, due to the explosion of information and the information sources. Due to information explosion it has become increasingly clear that students cannot learn everything they need to know in their field of study, within a few years, at school. Information literacy competencies empower the people with the critical skills that will help them to become independent lifelong learners. These competencies will enable people to apply their knowledge from the familiar environment to the unfamiliar. Life long learning is as old as humankind, indeed curiosity and the capacity to learn are among the defining characteristics of what it means to be human. For many hundreds of generations, people learned only through their own experience, and to a lesser extent, through the observation of others. Gradually, however, as language became more complex and sophisticated, it was possible to codify what had been learned by previous generations, and in distant locations, and to pass on information about unseen phenomena. In most early cultures which relied on oral transmission of knowledge, people had highly evolved capacities for listening and for remembering; however, compared with most people living today in advanced western countries, the amount and complexity of information to be dealt with by an average human being was clearly bounded and relatively slowly changing. Information plays a vital role in all spheres of life in this technological era.

Key words: Information Literacy, Lifelong Learning, Literacy Skills, Transmission, Knowledge.

Introduction

Information literacy is concerned with teaching and learning of the complete range of information sources and formats. It allows the users of information to express, to explore, to understand and to evaluate the flow of ideas in array of individuals and groups in this changing technological environment. Information Literacy and lifelong learning have a strategic, mutually reinforcing relationship with each other [1]. It is critical to the success of every individual, organization, and nation-state in the global information society. There are several definitions brought out by the Association and the authors. Information Literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information.

Paul Zurkowski, (1974) defined Information Literacy as “people trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literate” [2].

According to Ruess (1994), “Information Literacy is a process of lifelong self-education that can be fostered by preparing students to handle information effectively in any situation” [3].

In 1989, the American Library Association Committee on Information Literacy defined Information Literacy as “the ability to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information” [4].

Under the component of information literacy, IFLA states that: “Information Literacy accesses information efficiently and effectively evaluates information critically and competently, and uses information accurately and creatively” [5].

UNESCO sponsored meeting of Experts on Information Literacy in Prague defined, “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”.



Thus, Information Literacy is the ability to find, learn and use the information through the implementation of different skills like communication skills, use of IT skills, learning how to learn etc [6]. Information Literacy empowers the ability to access, evaluate and use information effectively and efficiently. To be information literate, one need to know why, when and how to use all of these tools and think critically about the information they provide.

Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning:

Information literacy and lifelong learning have a strategic, mutually reinforcing relationship with each other that is critical to the success of every individual, organization, institution and nation-state in the global information society. Lifelong is the use of formal and informal learning opportunities throughout the life of the people for their career development and improvement of knowledge and skills needed for the employment and professional growth. It is related to other educational concepts like distance education courses, adult education, continuing education, trainings, short term courses and other related learning beyond the formal educational system [7]. Information is expanding day by day and also developments and changes in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which provides access too much of that information and apply the abilities effectively for using information resources that are fundamental to lifelong learning. It helps students to learn independently and enhance the performance in mastering the task/finding the information. Information literate individual is able to:

1. Determine the extent of information needed.
2. Access needed information effectively and efficiently
3. Evaluate information and its sources critically
4. Incorporate selected information into one's own knowledge base
5. Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
6. Understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and access and use information ethically and legally.

Aims of Information Literacy:

Information Literacy aims to teach students how to find information and prepare them for lifelong learning [8]. The students can find information needed for any assignment/project or decision at hand. Information literacy has a great significance for economic growth, educational achievement and social, cultural and personal well-being. Some of the aims of information literacy are as follows:

- i. Give awareness to the users how to find information from various sources and evaluate them to fulfill their needs.
- ii. It helps the students form self-learning and motivate them to become lifelong learners.
- iii. To ensure that the users understand why and how they need to learn about different sources of information.
- iv. The ability to locate, select and use proper information retrieval tools in order to get the useful information related to, studies or completing the projects, assignments, etc. by the end users.
- v. Develop database searching techniques for accessing internet based and CD-ROM databases.

Scope of Information Literacy:

Information Literacy may be presented in a number of formats. It includes a wide range of literacy beyond the basic ones of reading and writing [9]. To negotiate from simple to complex information formats, we must be skilled in other literacy's. The following are other literacy's which implicit in information literacy.

- i. Traditional Literacy: The ability to read, write and do simple arithmetic.
- ii. Visual Literacy: It is the ability to understand evaluates and express the ideas by using the images, including the ability to think, learn and express oneself in terms of images.
- iii. Computer Literacy/Information Technology: The ability to handle and operate the system including software to retrieve information.
- iv. Media Literacy: The ability of a citizen to access, analyze and produce information by using both print and non-print resources, including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, internet, etc.
- v. Network Literacy: The ability to locate access and use information in a networked environment like the World Wide Web (WWW).
- vi. Digital Literacy: Considers the broad range of resources that are accessible online.
- vii. Library Literacy: Gives an understanding of the different kinds of information resources housed in a library- books, magazines, encyclopedias, reference materials, visual resources, use of OPAC, etc. It is the ability to search, locate



texts and evaluate the relevance of information. It is not in the presence or absence of skills, but as progressive stage [10].

Patterns of Lifelong Learning:

The evidence suggests that those people who fail to keep up with developments are likely to fall progressively further and further behind, and to become less employable and less competitive. As a result, there is a relentless pressure for increased learning across the lifespan, which may be met in a variety of ways [11]. How then do people manage to cope with the manifold and diverse learning challenges with which they are confronted? Clearly the answer is different for each category of person, and indeed for each individual, and likewise the skills that are required of the successful learner in each context are not exactly the same. Nevertheless, a useful typology distinguishes the following classes or categories of learning:

(a). **Formal Learning:** For most people, the learning that springs to mind readily is that which occurs in formal educational settings such as schools, colleges and universities. It is distinguished by the presence of formal curricula, a teacher trainer tutor or other facilitator, and usually by such devices as timetables, lectures or classes, reading lists and examinations. There are distinct rules that guide the learner in such circumstances, especially those that indicate how he or she should behave and what constitutes valued learning [12]. Formal learning also extends into the upper reaches of postgraduate study, which commonly involves high levels of self-directedness and of independent learning.

(b). **Nonformal learning:** This kind of learning is organised and planned by someone, but does not lead to any qualification or recognition. It includes most short courses whether undertaken for personal enrichment or professional/vocational advancement [13]. A large component of such learning is that which is planned and undertaken by the learner him- or herself. Since the advent of the Internet, and more recently the World Wide Web, a great deal of such learning is occurring in technologically mediated forms. Accordingly, it is increasingly necessary for people to have connectivity and to be technologically 'literate' so that they are able to access and to use the technology fluently.

(c). **Informal and incidental learning:** As important as formal and nonformal learning are, they represent only a minute fraction of the learning that occurs within any one person's lifespan. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that, in terms both of duration and impact, informal learning far outstrips the other two types. It occurs more or less continuously and is coterminous with life. It requires no particular preparation, although those who are more attentive and or have a wider circle of experiences are likely to have both more extensive and more diverse incidental learning. Informal learning is, by its nature, beyond the reach of formal education and training providers, however the capacity for and predisposition towards learning is largely determined during the early years of a person's life [14]. Accordingly attention must be paid to creating and encouraging those circumstances that are linked to the orientation towards learning and this, along with appropriate connectivity, is likely to form a vital precondition to full and active participation in many aspects of the twenty-first knowledge economy – work, leisure, health and government.

Skills of Information Literacy:

Information literacy is a "set of skills" that can be learned. That set of skills includes a certain attitude towards learning itself, the use of tools, like online tutorials, the use of techniques, such as working with groups and the use of methods, such as mentors and coaches [15]. The students need to be trained as information competent. Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL), UK defined some of the major information skills required for the students are:

1. The ability to recognize a need for information
2. The ability to distinguish ways in which the information gap may be addressed
3. Ability to construct strategies for locating information
4. Ability to locate at accessing information
5. Ability to compare and evaluate information
6. Ability to organize, apply and communicate information to others in ways appropriate to the situation
7. Ability to synthesize and build upon existing information
8. Contribute to the creation of new knowledge. (ILA 2005)
9. A course in information literacy integrated in to the core curriculum is the apt way to provide information literacy skills to the students from school levels.

Need of Information Literacy:

The technological developments and new approaches in information handling have added a new dimension to the information resources and the retrieval tools. A need can be a problem that must be solved, a question that must be answered, or a task that must be performed. People depend on information for their personal and professional developments. Governments and policy makers have realized the importance of dissemination of information to the general masses. "Information Literacy is



important, particularly in this age, because it allows us to cope by giving us the skills to know when we need information and where to locate it effectively and efficiently [16]. It includes the technological skills needed to use the modern library as a gateway to information. It enables us to analyze and evaluate the information we find, thus giving us confidence in using that information to make a decision or create a product". Information literacy facilitators should be aware that needs differ from one person to another. Individuals and groups of individuals have very different competencies, differing motivations, regarding fulfilling needs and extending competencies [17]. For e.g. students may appear to be a homogenous group with similar needs, skills and motivation. The writers suggest that it is imperative that short term courses, workshops, demonstrations, lecturers, library visits and training sessions are taken into account.

Benefits of Information Literacy:

Information literacy is also referred to as "critical thinking" or "learning to learn", and has been traditionally taught to students in school libraries and media centers. It is being taught to adults in the workforce, in both formal and educational as well as commercial and continuing education training contexts and settings [18]. Following are some of the benefits of information literacy for lifelong learning.

- i) Expansion of knowledge and creation of new knowledge.
- ii) Synthesis of data and information into knowledge.
- iii) Access needed information effectively and efficiently.
- iv) Become aware of wide sources of information in this technological era.
- v) Get problem-solving ability through IL.
- vi) Confidence in self-directed learning [19].
- vii) Understand the economic, social and legal issues related to the use of information, and to access the information ethically [20].

Inter-Relations of Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning: Both Information Literacy and Lifelong learning are:

1. Largely self-motivated and self-directed: They do not require the mediation of an outside individual, an organization or a system beyond the individual himself.
2. Self-empowering: They are aimed at helping individuals of all age groups to help themselves, regardless of their social or economic status, role in society, gender, race and religion or ethnic background [21].
3. Self-actuating: The more information literate an individual sustains good information literacy learning and practices those habits, especially if practiced over an entire lifetime [22].

Theoretically, one could pursue the goal of becoming more information literate, but not continuously over one's lifetime. On the other side, one could pursue the goal of lifelong learning but without having first become information literate [23]. In short, lifelong learning is a good habit that must be acquired and accompanied by the adoption of a positive frame of mind. The willingness to change and a curiosity or thirst for knowledge is very helpful pre-conditions for lifelong learning.

Development of Information Literacy:

Since information literacy is itself an evolving and developmental phenomenon, in effect a lifelong pursuit, although it has special and distinctive attributes in different contexts, the development of information literacy is a shared responsibility [24]. This responsibility is jointly the prerogative of the formal education system (from elementary or even pre-school education through to postgraduate study), cultural institutions including libraries and archives, organisations which publish and disseminate information (such as the print and non-print media, and Internet Service Providers), and those groups and individuals which provide information, including companies and corporations, national and international government Departments and agencies and professional associations and societies [25].

Implications For Information Literacy:

Given the diverse contexts within which learning occurs, and the range of skills that are required to successfully pursue a learning endeavour, how does this relate to Information Literacy? In fact, information literacy and lifelong learning are inextricably intertwined [26]. Arguably the first mainstream use of the term was in 1974, at almost exactly the same time as the term 'lifelong learning' entered common parlance although, like lifelong learning, the concept – if not the term itself – can be traced back even further. In that year, Paul Zurkowski, then President of the Information Industry Association, presented a report entitled *The Information service environment, relationships and priorities*, in which he advocated the establishment of a national program aimed at achieving information literacy within a ten-year time frame. In the report he wrote;



People trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literates. They have learned techniques and skills for using the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information solutions to their problems.

According to the Final Report of the American Library Association's 1989 Presidential Commission on Information Literacy, "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information" [27]. Like 'lifelong learning,' the concept of information literacy has spawned a huge literature with many slightly different definitions. However, as Webber and Johnson state in their paper entitled 'Conceptions of Information Literacy: New Perspectives and Implications,' most such definitions have the following elements:

- Effective information seeking.
- Informed choice of information sources.
- Information evaluation and selection.
- Comfort in using a range of media to best advantage.
- Awareness of issues to do with bias and reliability of information; and
- Effectiveness in transmitting information to others.

Conclusion:

It is widely accepted that Information Literacy Skills are necessary and play a vital role in helping students to prepare the rapidly changing information environment. Students need information for various purposes. Information Literacy forms the basis of lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments and all levels of education. It enables the learner to master the contents and extend their investigation. Both information literacy and lifelong learning have interrelationship and are largely self-motivated and self-directed, self-empowering and self-actuating. Theoretically, one could pursue the aim of becoming more information literate, but not continuously over one's life time. But on the other hand, one could pursue the aim of lifelong learning but without having first become information literate. Information Literacy is a "set of skills", that can be learned. That set of skills includes certain attitudes towards learning, use of resources, use of techniques, methods and online tutorials. The role of information literacy is vital for lifelong learning as it enhances the quality of education both in learning environments and in educational settings. It is in evidence that various models should be used, a number of activities should be enacted, and the efficiency of these should be investigated for the purpose of providing these skills in all the educational levels. Teachers' role is important in bringing up individuals who are life-long learners and who improve themselves constantly. In order for teachers to undertake this role, they must be individuals who learn by themselves in their educational and professional lives and thus they must be leaders on providing their students with studying opportunities, accessing information and using it. In this context, it is regarded as an important step in the development of lifelong learning that individuals are provided with the information literacy skills because it is only possible for the teaching candidates to be successful in their teaching careers depends on a learning process that will continue throughout their life. For this reason the pre-service training for teachers must also be suitable for gaining the mentioned qualities.

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