

Delivering information literacy in the 21st century: Reflection for librarians and information specialists

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Abstract

The replication to the myriad forms of information creation and delivery has been the catalyst for the development of the new literacies that are researched and implemented into teaching around the world. This paper examined the delivering of information literacy in the 21st century: Reflection for Librarians and Information Specialist being taught and how the programme implemented 21st century literacies into the curriculum, specifically trans-literacy and meta-literacy. It discuss how information literacy was redesigned to include the concepts behind the value of information literacy and delivery in the 21st century, and why information literacy promotion and national development is a way forward. The role of librarians and information specialist may be a valuable one in this regard. One challenging but exciting new area is how e-books contributed to curriculum design in the 21st century as well as focusing on general library challenges of information literacy in Nigeria. Finally, the question of repositioning information literacy to the development of library and information profession is appropriate and more advance conceptualization is needed in Nigeria.

Keywords: Information literacy, 21st century, librarians, information specialist/practitioners

Introduction

Literacy is the ability to acquire knowledge through learning, usually in educational setting. This confirms Chikelu (2017) declaration that “literacy is not an inborn human characteristic, but rather an ability that is learned, most often in schools.” Although schooling is very critical for literacy to flourish, it is not enough. It is unthinkable to achieve a modern and literate society without libraries, which according to IFLA (2015) “are uniquely situated to promote literacy”. Library is therefore a veritable instrument for the promotion and delivering of inclusive literacy. According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (2006), information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extent their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning. Nazorova (2011) attested that library develops in people good reading skills and

encourages long-term learning habits through listening, reading and viewing a wide variety of learning resources.

Latest technological advancements have brought about a new kind of learning, one that is not dependent on just books and writing. The 21st Century is distinguished for its new innovations and dependency on technology, in all parts of life. According to the American Library Association (2017), “digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.” In this day and age, it is important to understand that technology is everywhere around us. Therefore, digital literacy has become increasingly necessary to possess, or almost required for people to stay up to date with the technological advancements surrounding them.

Value of Literacy in the 21st Century

According to Bakare (2015) stated that “people who are illiterate are far more likely to live in poverty, facing a lifetime marred by poor health and social

vulnerability.” Concerned about functional illiteracy, UNESCO (1993) lamented that it is a serious problem that needs urgent attention, otherwise it could adversely affect living conditions in the developed countries. Popovic (2016) declared that “Literacy is an entrance to the world”. According to Chisita (2011) in Musingafi and Chiwanza (2012), human development is unimaginable, and cannot be achieved in the absence of literacy. In addition to its educational and socio-economic benefits, literacy has other critical importance among which is peace building. On this, Popovic (2016) contends that “we cannot say that literacy brings peace but we can say that literacy allows critical thinking which can lead to different choices, choices other than extremism.” In line with a study undertaken by Mohd (2011), to find out the effect of ICT skills on the undergraduate academic performance in higher education discovered that student’s ability to evaluate, interpret, locate, use and disseminate information has increase as a result of their competence in ICT skills acquired.

Information literacy and delivery in the 21st century

Traditional literacy is about print on a page, or decoding and making sense of words, images and other content that a reader can string together and then begin to comprehend. They are the words and pictures students read and pore over that are contained in textbooks, in novels, on standardized tests, and even in comic books. The new literacies encompass much more. Their utility lies in online reading comprehension and learning skills, or 21st century skills, required by the internet and other information and communication technologies (ICTs), including content found on wikis, blogs, video sites, audio sites, and in e-mail. They require the ability not just to “read” but also to navigate the World Wide Web, locate information, evaluate it critically,

synthesize it and communicate it-all skills that are becoming vital to success in this century's economy and workforce. What complicates the situation is that there is a growing gap between what today's students do in school and what they do at home. According to Canadian Library Association Information Literacy Group study (2020), “The Digital Disconnect: The widening gap between internet savvy students and their schools,” the study reveals that students are spending 27 hours a week online at home, compared to an average of 15 minutes per week at school. “It's hard to develop online skills in traditional classrooms when so little instructional time is online,” (Wilson, 2019). “Online learning is not this separate silo that we might need to use as a tool.” Administrators should have such learning weaved into classrooms, she adds.

Today's students, the “digital natives” as they are sometimes called, are practically inseparable from their computers, video games and the Internet. Moreover, a recent study by the National School Boards Association (2020) found that 96% of students who have online access use the technologies for social networking such as blogging, sharing music, instant messaging, and posting their own movies. Not exactly the first thing you think of when you imagine a classroom. And although digital natives may be tech savvy, they don't use a lot of information, or at least they don't know how to think critically about the information they use. They need library and librarian’s guidance on how to find the best information most efficiently and determine fact from fiction as technology and knowledge in general are growing at an exponential rate. “Where do you find it? How do you gather it? How should you use it?”, as Web 2.0 is still an emerging set of technologies and standards. This refers to interactive and communicative Internet-based services where online collaboration is emphasized.

Although a degree might have been able to guarantee a job twenty years ago, in the 21st century employers require a vast many skills that may not be taught in classes. For example, someone who receives a degree in Veterinary Medicine may not be able to find a job out of school because they may lack conversational skills or the ability to empathize with customers. To be literate in these areas, one must have prior experience. Experience is necessary for people to grow and become literate in a great many areas, making them desirable to employers. It is important for teachers to educate their students on the new definition of the word literate and “to try new things, and work with students to find where learning is most comfortable for them to succeed” (Lynch, 2018). Literacy is an ever-changing concept which people must dedicate themselves to understanding in order to become literate in the 21st century. However, digital literacy is just one of the many types of literacy that is being acknowledged today. Literacy is not just the ability to read and write, or even the ability to thrive in today’s technological world. To be literate in the 21st century, a person must be willing to constantly learn about and adapt to too many different areas of life, subjects, and environments.

Information literacy and national development

Libraries have an essential and close bearing upon the advancement of education and learning at all levels for all the times to come. The Libraries create literacy among the people, give public lectures, and create awareness towards civilization. Library services improve knowledge and skills for positive productivity as a tool for national development. This reiterates Ali’s (2006, p.153) argument that “poverty is simply a living condition in which an entity is faced with economic, social, political, cultural,

educational and environmental deprivation”. Empowerment is the eradication of deprivation, and a significant tool in the empowerment process is library and information.

According to Irunegbo, (2013), library services are needed to enable the individual develop full potentials and widening the horizons of perception, interests and skills. Other needs for library services include; public enlightenment or rights in the society, understanding social values and expected conduct in public life; assisting to adjust to existing social, political, spiritual and economic activities of the society, to cultivate and maintain reading culture, promotion of good literatures and many more. Nigerian libraries need to be in strong collaboration with the existing literacy-promoting organizations like the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education, Agency for Mass Literacy, and others to provide comprehensive and all-inclusive library and information services to the needy population vis-à-vis curbing insecurity in the country. Furthermore, attention should be focused on the youths, disadvantaged groups and communities where literacy rate is reportedly low. Library is at the centre of delivering information literacy which allows people to engage in effective decision-making, problem solving and research. Through its gamut of information literacy activities therefore, libraries foster and sustain national development in the 21st century.

Libraries and information literacy promotion

As Ogunsola observed (2011) Librarianship has undergone a radical change in recent years, which will be continued in the future. As libraries have changed, so too, has the role of the librarian. Librarians have expanded their roles by providing students information through publicly assessable computing

systems. Although schooling is very critical for literacy to flourish, it is not enough. It is unthinkable to achieve a modern and literate society without libraries, which according to IFLA (2015) “are uniquely situated to promote literacy”. Library is therefore a veritable instrument for the promotion of inclusive literacy. According to Breivik (2017) echoing the themes that were explored in information literacy around the world, future teaching roles for academic librarians considered:

- that the new paradigm for higher education reflects a need to focus on learning not teaching
- that the new learning-centred focus of higher education prizes the importance of learning and
- that in this new environment, librarians have new opportunities to play a forceful, dynamic role in collaboratively designing and developing the contexts of learning strategies.

Raspa (2016) noted that “we have reached a point at which neither librarians nor instructional faculty can adequately teach the research process in isolation from each other as it takes both classroom instructors and librarians to teach students to develop adequate research skills”. This suggested more important role for library which has been the impact of using electronic information today in libraries. Rasper and Ward (2016) observed that, globalization, information and computer technology have inexorably altered the ways we read, write, learn and research. As documented by Whitehead & Quinlan (2002) and Julien & Boon (2004) information literacy in Canada, particularly in higher education, remains largely rooted in the bibliographic instruction tradition. However, several Universities, such as the University of Alberta and Winnipeg are moving to newer IL-based models, but these efforts represent the work of individual institutions and often individuals’

librarians. An analysis of the literature points to certain key issues that characterize the change from traditional Bibliographic Instruction (BI) to an effective Information Literacy (IL) programme. An IL programme should:

- follow an inquiry-based, student centred learning mode
- have the immediate goal of students achieving academic success, with the long term objective of providing lifelong learning
- address needs of varying learner backgrounds as well as learning capacities
- include learning objectives that recognize the learners varying experience with electronic environment

The teaching librarian should:

- be active collaborator and participant, and work as a partner with the faculty at the curriculum design level
- take a proactive and dynamic role in the teaching process by seeking collaborative opportunities with faculty for designing and developing the contexts for learning strategies, resulting in a stronger and more formal teaching role

The IL Coordinator should:

- work with library colleagues in a coaching role
- seek administrative support for the teaching role of the librarians by building coalitions within the library and marketing library’s instructional role to the campus
- collaborate with stakeholders in the academy to achieve success in implementing IL across the campus

Success of any integrated IL programme depends on the readiness with which the librarians are prepared to work with their changing role “from passively supporting their teaching functions to

actively collaborating and participating in them” through professional development programme. Library users are instructed on how information is obtained interpreted and used for academic and productive activities. Information literacy enables students develop skills that help them become effective and efficient learners. Bruce (2017) asserted that information literacy function of libraries imbues in user the ability to locate, manage and use information effectively for a range of purposes. It is thus, an important skill which allows people to engage in effective decision-making, problem solving and research. It also enables them to take responsibility for their own continued learning in areas of personal or professional interest. User education has grown visibly during recent years and information literacy has become an issue in many academic libraries. Different approaches have been used to develop information literacy among students. For example:

- Developing a guide for students to use or for resource evaluation,
- Presenting class sessions,
- Developing stand-alone courses,
- Creating a course Web site giving students a guided tour for searching the Web,
- Developing an assignment where students work on a search strategy appropriate to a problem statement,
- Assisting students in preparation of their literature reviews,
- Developing online tutorials or integrating information literacy into curricular.

Bruce and Lampson (2012) note, that despite some progress over the past decade, library and information professionals still report that universal information literacy is a distant, if not a receding, goal while Johnston and Webber (2016) argue that even in the United States: “Whilst much attention has been

paid to information literacy by American policy makers, librarians and academics, the results are still relatively narrow, giving a potentially superficial guide to the nature of a curriculum for information literacy in Higher Education”(Virkus, 2004).

Role of librarians and information specialist in promoting IL

The ability to use information and its associated tools is a source of power for any nation which the library and librarians are best equipped to do. Bailey (2017) who assessed the impact of four information literacy workshops conducted among pre-registration nursing diploma students at Northumbria University and discovered that all students improved their academic grades in their next assignment besides increasing their confidence levels and information literacy. ACRL (2006) attests that information literacy enables learners to master content and extent their investigations, become more self-directed and assume greater control over their own learning. In the same view, Daines (2014) affirmed that research shows that the reading scores for students in schools that focus on improving their library programs are on average of 8-21% higher than similar schools with no such development. In another view, Mohammed (2014) noted that, some of the activities libraries and information centres may engage in for the promotion of literacy, sustenance of peace, prevention of conflict and enhancement of development in the society should include:

- Awareness raising project
- Provision of conducive environment for round table discussion, dialogue, mediation, negotiation and training
- Mounting of exhibitions on topical conflict and crisis issues and management
- Collaboration with other related print and electronic information resources and services to educate,

and enhance the stakeholder's understanding of the implications of conflicts, crisis, peace and development

- Establishment of social media network for meaningful comments and exchange of ideas, opinions, on contemporary topical issues among the stakeholders
- Application of the state-of-the-art Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for library and information services delivery
- Establishment of viable internet connectivity
- Creation and hosting of internet website/page/linkages for easy information transfer, access and utilization by the relevant customers
- Promotion and support for information and digital literacy
- Promotion and sustenance of collaborative initiatives and programmes on peace, conflict and crisis prevention and national development etc.
- Information literacy classes.

Challenges of information literacy in the 21st century

Echezona and Ogwu (2010) posited that because of information age and which information is being driven by globalization; many students enumerated some users of ICTs encountered problems to be ignorance, unavailability of internet access, low bandwidth, subscription problem and lack of skills in information retrieval. According to Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2011), Digital literacy education is, therefore, one of "the most pressing education and learning issues facing Canadians today". Magoi (2014) noted that there are some problems that confront the need and use of student's information retrieval tools which includes lack of knowledge to use

electronic resources and inadequacy of power supply, absence of internet facilities and lack of sufficient time to use information resources and services. The major challenges according to him includes the following:

1. *Absence of relevant government policies:* An analysis of the existing policy content (National ICT Policy draft 2012) shows that there is no provision for the development of libraries and their services, thereby neglecting the unique contributions of libraries to development. There is also lack of national policy for public libraries, as the information gateway for all in the society as well as lack of standards and total neglect of school libraries, which are the rallying point for nurturing and developing the intellectual ability and reading habits.
2. *Financial misappropriation:* It is a common knowledge that Nigeria is seriously infested with corruption. At the time academic and public libraries lament on poor funding, finances earmarked for equipping libraries are in most cases misappropriated by those at the helms of government and library management. This unhealthy practice starves the library with materials and services needed for successful library-based literacy programmes.
3. *Fiscal constraints:* Nigeria is yet to recover from a serious economic difficulty. While in recession, governments are unable to meet their financial obligations to the ministries or agencies which depend on them for funding. This invariably leads to budget cuts for libraries. This grossly affects

inclusive library services for literacy promotion. In view of this, “libraries have been able to continue to provide services, including literacy services to adult learners and their families for free. Due to extensive budget cuts, these programme gains are being threatened”.

4. *Dearth of trained and committed staff*: The library personnel who should participate in library-based literacy promotion crusade are required to possess necessary trainings. IFLA (2015) noted that such trainings could be obtained through “paraprofessional education, in-service training or as continuing education”. Moreover, IFLA suggested three types of training for effective execution of literacy programme. These include: “training for staff working with the public, training for library staff who are managers of literacy projects, and training for literacy tutors and persons providing services” (IFLA, 2015:201). Unfortunately, these trainings seem to be lacked in the curricular Nigerian library schools.
5. *Absence of relevant information materials or resources*: Materials used for library-based literacy programme must be tailored to the needs of the selected populace. In most cases however, the appropriate materials are either lacking or insufficient, resulting in providing the populace with irrelevant materials. Use of materials haphazardly selected might discourage the inhabitants of a selected locality from participating in literacy programmes, especially when materials do not meet their needs.

6. *Problem of partnership*: For a successful library-based literacy programme, libraries are expected to be in close partnership with educational, cultural, religious, and community-based organizations and institutions that are engaged with education and literacy promotion. However, such partnership, if at all exist in Nigeria, seems to be rather weak.
7. *Poor state of Nigerian public libraries*: Public library in Nigeria is one of the institutions that suffer serious neglect from the governments. Most public libraries in Nigeria are currently in deplorable conditions due to government’s inattentiveness on issues relating to library development.
8. *Poor state or absence of school libraries across the country*: Absence of school libraries has been the genesis of negative reading culture and moral decadence which ought to have caught them young at tender age especially in changing their perception towards societal vices.

Repositioning IL to the development of library and information profession

As libraries have changed, so too, has the role of the librarian. Public librarians have expanded their roles by providing local community information through publicly assessable computing systems. The work of librarians has moved outside library walls. Librarians have begun to work in the information industry as salespeople, designers of new information systems, researchers, and information analysts. They are also found in such fields as marketing and public relations and in such organizations as law firms, where staffs

need rapid access to information. As Ogunsola observed (2011) Librarianship has undergone a radical change in recent years, which will be continued in the future. In providing information services, librarians may need to adopt campaigning or mobile libraries to bring library services to the doorsteps of citizens to educate them. Murphy (2006) observed that the compilations made by mobile libraries reflect perceived needs of local communities. This will help to provide services to communities and help citizens and patrons of the library attain maximum information services.

In Nigeria's current security challenge, citizens and government must recognize this need for information use and literacy as a means of educational and national security. Information remains the only product which the library handles and this includes all medium in which the information is shaped or packaged. The only means through which the real integration of people living in political, economic, religious and ideological poles could be brought together is through the actual cooperation and exchange of vital information.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, Information literacy skills and competencies are the facilitators of information accessibility and usage, thereby advancing information literacy in the 21st century. To this end,

1. Libraries should be in the forefront of national discourses through sponsorship, guiding principle and act to further the country's literacy project;
2. Libraries should open public reading centres where people can have ease of access to right information;
3. The society should encourage the development of knowledge house (libraries and information centres) and also encourage the use of

libraries in society to reduce the rate of illiteracy and deviant in the society.

4. Adequate information, education and enlightenment through libraries will lay a solid foundation in people for conflict prevention and resolution as well as make for a more literacy society.
5. Mobile libraries should be employed by state governments to rural areas as literacy drive advocacy in combating illiteracy and fighting local crime as well as distributing literacy materials that will help people to be better functional information managers;
6. Librarians and information specialist should collaborate with relevant agencies to sensitise general public toward delivering information literacy programs.

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