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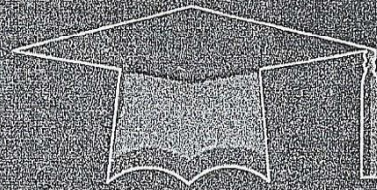
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## **Teaching of Information Literacy Skills in Nigerian Universities: A Theoretical and Practical Perspectives from Federal University Minna, Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study is a theoretical and practical examination of the role of information literacy in teaching and learning process. The study appreciates the tremendous challenges facing both staff and students in the face of declining academic productivity. A questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. Interviews and focus group discussion (FGO) were also used to complement the information collected with questionnaire. Frequency, count and simple percentage were used to analyse the data collected. The results showed that most of the staff and students had no clear understanding of information literacy. Factors identified to enhance information use included availability of information resource which ranked highest (75.5%), qualified instructors (60.5%), adequate training (57.3%), infrastructure (57.5%) and appropriate lecture method (40%). We suggest that early training of both staff and students be emphasized; also, government should make more funds available for the acquisition of resources necessary for information literacy training and learning.

**Key Words:** Teaching, information, literacy, skills, University.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Information literacy is a new concept in information profession. Once called user education or library skills, now the terms information literacy (IL) or information skills are more usual, according to Debbi and Holloway (2005). The term information literacy has assumed a controversial position, and until recently, there has not been a consensus about its definition. Some information experts have used literacy skill for information literacy. Conceptually, information literacy has assumed a complex feature and moved to a higher level. In the view of Debbi and Holloway (2005) some

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professionals appear reticent about breaking with tradition and having to teach critical evaluation and analysis.

Some organizations have however, tackled the confusion about the precise meaning of the concept of information literacy. According to Armstrong (2005) from the Information Literacy Group of Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), information literacy is defined as the acquired skills to know when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner. The concept affords the researcher the ability to search appropriate resources effectively and identify relevant information. According to the American Library Association (2008), 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. Because of the escalating complexity of this environment, individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices in their academic studies, in the workplace, and in their personal lives. Information is available through libraries, community resources, special interest organizations, media, and the internet and increasingly, information comes to individuals in unfiltered formats, raising questions about its authenticity, validity, and reliability. In addition information is available through multiple media, including graphical, and textual, and these pose new challenges for individuals in evaluating and understanding it. The uncertain quality and expanding quantity of information pose large challenges for society. The sheer abundance of information will not in itself create a more informed citizenry without a complementary cluster of abilities necessary to use information effectively.

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, learning environments, and levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning. According to the American Library Association (2008), an information literate individual is able to:

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

The above skills of information literacy are in line with the position of library and information professionals who have long recognised the need to help users develop good information competencies which have become all the more crucial now that these users are turning increasingly to the internet to support their information seeking, Poulter, Debra and Menemy (2005).

These skills have also been used to develop curriculum for students at the secondary school level. For instance, Irving and Crawford (2006) developed a new curriculum for students at secondary school level. They argued that there was the need to demonstrate a link between information literacy and cohesion and progression for information literacy to be considered as a part of the new curriculum. This curriculum developed by Irving and Crawford clarified the confusion about study skills, library skills, information skills, information handling skills and information literacy. In all, information literacy is more deeprooted as according to Doyle (1992), it is the ability to access, evaluate and use information from a variety of sources. This is best thought of as a verb, a way of using information. Holloway, Doyle and Linda (1997) translated the notion of verb into the areas of telecommunication. This notion of telecommunication is achieved when learners know when to use on-line resources, how to access information competently and how to evaluation information for accuracy.

The mission of information literacy therefore is to enhance the pursuit of knowledge by preparing students to think critically and use information for academic, professional and personal lives, Brenson (2000). The above mission is achieved when there is a mastery of certain skills, development of specific knowledge and adoption of certain attitude, Laverty (1997).

### **Statement of the problem**

Universities in Nigeria have faced a lot of challenges, ranging from tremendous growth in the number of both universities and students intake to decline in the academic productivity of both students and staff (Omolewa, 2002). From 1999 to 2009 for instance, the number of universities in Nigeria increased from 46 to 107. This increase was not matched with availability of infrastructure, especially in the libraries. This situation affects academic productivity. Most of the students and even some academic staff encounter difficulties in the use of the available libraries that are in most cases, ill-equipped. The library community hardly appreciates the opportunities an understanding of how to use information holds out for them. Studies by Mabawonku (2005) and Aina (2005) have shown that the contribution of Nigerian academic to international scholarly community is low. According to Mabawonku (2005), using the National Universities Commission criteria for standard to asses academic productivity in Nigeria, argued that many of the publications from the academics would not meet the NUC standard. A study by Aina (2005) also revealed that Nigerian publications make very little impact at the international scholarly scene. This according to him could be tied to the lack of visibility which decreases input.

This situation of low productivity and visibility has worsened as some universities now insist that certain percentage of staff publications must be in international journals. The situation is so bad at the University of Ibadan that



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about 50% of the academic staff could not be promoted in the last two annual promotion exercises.

This low level of academic productivity has also affected Nigerian Universities in the rankings by web popularity ([www.4icu.org](http://www.4icu.org)); for instance, in the ranking of the first 100 top Universities and colleges in Africa, only two Nigerian Universities, Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Ibadan out of more than one hundred Universities in the country came distant 47 and 58 respectively representing about 2% of the Universities in Nigeria. Sixteen South African Universities were ranked, representing about 41% of the universities and colleges in south Africa. Nineteen Egyptian universities were ranked representing about 50% of the universities in Egypt. A small country like Benin was indicated five times in the ranking representing more than 70% of the Universities in Benin.

In view of the above realities, there is need to integrate information literacy skills in the curriculum to enable students and staff to seek and use library resources effectively for teaching and learning. This study focused mainly on the students the staff and some of the librarians that are involved in the teaching of information literacy competencies to the students as a requirement for their graduation. The methods used in Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria varies from what obtains in other universities in Nigeria. The number of staff available and infrastructure and time determine the teaching methods to be used. This study sought to identify:

- a. Students and staff understanding and perception of information literacy and skills.
- b. Barriers to their engagement with the process and
- c. Factors that might motivate them to engage with the process.

## METHODOLOGY

A survey technique was used for this study. The studied population was students and staff of the Federal University of Technology, Minna Nigeria. The students sample for this study was composed through a multi-stage sample technique using proportional stratified random sampling. First the University was grouped into strata based on schools in the University. Secondly, random sampling was used to select two departments across from each of the strata. Thirdly, a proportionate random sampling of 10% was used to draw the sample from each of the departments. This gave a total of 164 from the students. The sample of 36 for the staff was purposively selected, this is because, the number is not large. This gave a total of 200 used for this study. Data for the study was generated from the use of questionnaire administered to the respondents in the study area.

Interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) were used to complement data collected from questionnaire earlier completed by this students and staff. Count and simple percentage were used to analyzed the data collected.

Information literacy skills/competencies involves an understanding of (CILIP, 2005 P.24): 1) the need for information, availability of information, how to use information, the need to evaluate results, how to work with results, ethics and responsibility of use, how to communicate or share your finding and how to manage your finding.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed that many of the students did not have a clear understanding of the component of information literacy (Table 1). While the students were familiar with various information skills, majority of the students considered that their skills were not as well developed as they should be. Many students also lacked confidence in their ability to use resources effectively. They thought that they were inadequately trained to find information using the sources available.

The study also revealed some of the challenges felt by teachers when invited to interpret learning activities in relation to information handling. The study raised questions about the ability of librarians and teachers to diagnose information problems faced by learners and to intervene appropriately at the point of need (Table 2). According to them, despite the fact that teachers were required to help their students to develop strategies to access evaluate, synthesize and interpret information from a variety of sources and in different formats, the teachers were not necessarily confident users of information and tended to restrict themselves to relatively few sources.

On the factors that would enhance students staff information use, 150 or (75.5%) indicated availability of information resources (Table 3). This ranked highest among other factors which include sufficient qualified instructor/librarian indicated by 125 (60.5%) which ranked second. This was closely followed by an adequate training indicated by 111 (57.5%). The fourth ranked was improved infrastructure which was indicated by 111 (57.5%) respondents. The fifth factor was appropriate lecture methods; this was indicated by 80 respondents representing 40%. Other factors included early training 60 (30%) and practical session 35 (15.5%).

**Table 1:** Understanding of information literacy skills.

Skills	Frequency	Percentage
Need for information	96	48.0
Availability of resource	30	15.0
Finding information	26	13.0
Need to evaluate results	26	13.0
Ethic and responsibility of use	22	11.0
Total	200	100%

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**Table 2:** Barriers to learners' engagement with the process.

Barriers	Frequency	Percentage
Inexperience in information search	111	55.5
Lack of qualified instructors	41	20.5
Different background of student	26	13.0
Lack of infrastructure	22	11.0
Total	200	100%

**Table 3:** Factors that enhance students/staff information use.

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Availability of resources	150	75%
Early training	60	30%
Sufficient qualified instructors	125	60.5%
Appropriate lecture methods	80	40
Practical session	35	15.5
Improved infrastructure	115	57.5
Adequate training	121	60%
Total	200	

### CONCLUSION

Information literacy is increasingly becoming important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources. Possession of good information literacy skills no doubt helps in coping with the escalating complexity of information environment faced in workplace in their studies and in personal lives. However, the study showed that students and even the librarian/instructors did not have clear understanding of the components of information literacy. To enhance students information use skills there is the need for early training, provision of necessary resources, appropriate lecture methods and qualified instructors among others. Finally, government intervention in this regard is recommended.

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