

Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning

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ABSTRACT

Information plays a vital role in all spheres of life in this technological era. Information is available in different formats and from various sources. To get the right information at the right time from the abundance of unclassified data/information, the users of the libraries must be information literates. Information literacy is the basis for lifelong learning and to develop sense-making ability among the users. The ability to procure and use information effectively is a vital skill of the people. The information literates have an ability to take decisions, solve their problems and know how to learn. Therefore, students need to be trained to the information competent. The information literacy skills help the students to become lifelong learners. The paper discusses the concept, meaning, aims, need, skills, benefits, IL education and the relationship between Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning.

Kew words: Information literacy, lifelong learning, literacy skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Information is a vital resource and valuable input for social development and is certainly the basic component of education. The importance and need for information is increasing day by day. Information is available through libraries, community centers, internet, websites, blogs, social media, mobiles and many other resources. Information comes to the users in unfiltered formats, and raising questions about its authority, accuracy and reliability. The vast amount of information available in different sources, pose many challenges to the users in understanding and evaluating it. 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. It is critical to the success of every individual, organization, and nation-state in the global information society.

2. Definition, Concept and Meaning

Information is defined as the meaning that a human assigns to data by means of conventions used in their presentation. In other words, information is data that has given shape. It may be considered as processed data. Thus, information is data plus the meaning, which has to be a result of human action. IFLA Guidelines on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning states that the Information is certainly:

- A vital element of creativity and innovation
- A basic resource for learning and human thought
- A key resource in creating more knowledgeable citizens
- A factor that enables citizens to achieve better results in their academic lives, with regard to health, and at work
- An important resource for national socio-economic development.

Literacy: Chambers English Dictionary (2003) defines; literacy is “the condition of being literate”. The Govt. of India measured literacy as the ability to read 40 words per minute, write 20 words per minute and do 2 digits arithmetic (India, 2008). It comprises other skills needed for an individual’s full autonomy and capacity to function effectively in a given society.

Information Literacy Concept: 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”. 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”. 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”.

The American association of School Librarians (AASL) stated that “Information Literacy is the ability to find and use information in the keystone of lifelong learning” (Byerly, Brodia, 1999). Under the component of information literacy, AASL states that: “Information Literacy accesses information efficiently and effectively evaluates information critically and competently, and uses information accurately and creatively”.

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. 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.

The Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework (2004) sets out in detail the standards suggested for information literacy in higher education. According to that taxonomy, literacy includes, inter alia, recognizing the need for information, finding information effectively, evaluating information, managing information, constructing new concepts, and legal, cultural, social and ethical use of information.

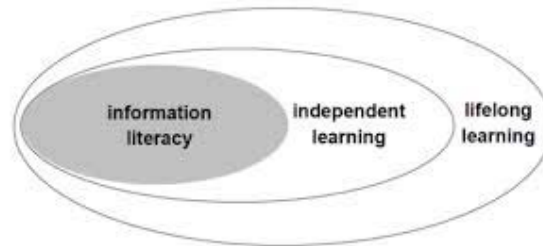


Figure 1 Relationship of information literacy to lifelong learning

Information Literacy comprises many different concepts that have evolved beyond library instructions and information skills. While library instruction emphasizes the location of library materials, another information literacy concept focuses on information strategies, the process of information seeking and information use competencies. Some of the Information Literacy related terms are:

- Information fluency
- User education
- Library instruction
- Bibliographic instruction
- Information competencies
- Information skills
- Development of Information skills, etc.

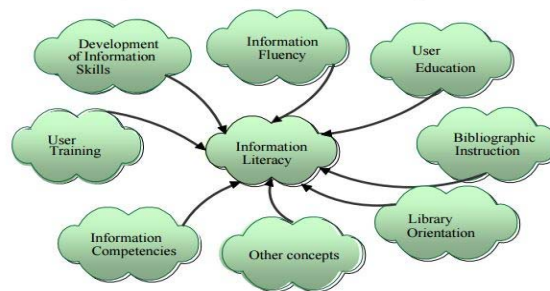


Figure 2. The concept of Information Literacy
Source: IFLA Guidelines on IL for Lifelong learning

Information Literacy aims to develop both reading interest and critical thinking. It helps the students to find the information they need for both academic and co-curricular activities. It also helps the students for problem-solving activities and develops creative abilities. The digital media, especially the internet has significantly increased the potential for active participation in all the activities, which leads to the overall development of students' achievements. The information literate people understand how to find information, the need to examine how to manage and communicate information. Using information in a variety of formats requires literacy's traditional ones like reading, writing and arithmetic skills. Other literacy's such as media, computer, visual, digital, network, etc. implicit to information literacy.

3. 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. 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.

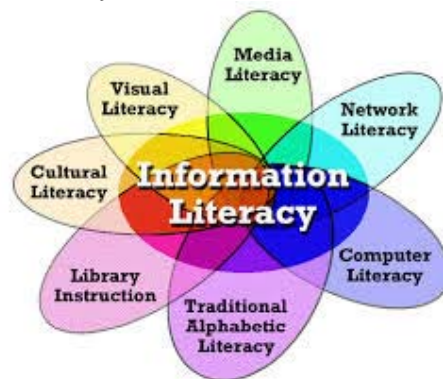


Figure 3. Types of Information Literacy's

Traditional Literacy: The ability to read, write and do simple arithmetic.

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.

Computer Literacy/Information Technology: The ability to handle and operate the system including software to retrieve information.

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.

Network Literacy: The ability to locate access and use information in a networked environment like the World Wide Web (WWW).

Digital Literacy: Considers the broad range of resources that are accessible online.

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.

4. AIMS OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Information Literacy aims to teach students how to find information and prepare them for lifelong learning. 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. Following are some of the aims of information literacy.

1. Give awareness to the users how to find information from various sources and evaluate them to fulfill their needs.
2. It helps the students form self-learning and motivate them to become lifelong learners.

3. To ensure that the users understand why and how they need to learn about different sources of information.
4. 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.
5. Develop database searching techniques for accessing internet based and CD-ROM databases.

5. 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. 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 (ACRL, 2005)".

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. 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.

6. 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. 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.

1. 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. 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
- vii) Understand the economic, social and legal issues related to the use of information, and to access the information ethically.

8. 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. 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.

9. 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 on ethnic background.

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.

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.

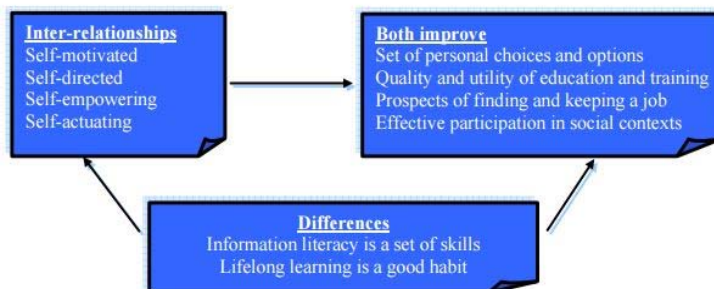


Figure 4. Inter-relationship of Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning

Source: IFLA Guidelines on IL for Lifelong learning

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.

10. INFORMATION LITERACY EDUCATION (ILE)

The present day information centered work environment challenges every one with the three needs, viz. need for new skills, need for lifelong learning and need for updating the existing knowledge. It is clear that ILE contributes significantly to the fulfillment of these needs by improving the information seeking behavior.

Library and Information Science Professional bodies in the USA (The Association of College and Research Libraries, ACRL) and Australia have produced Standards for Information Literacy, and a UK body (Society of College, National and University Libraries, SCONUL) has produced a model for Information Literacy. The IFLA Information Literacy Section has worked on a framework for Information Literacy for those professionals who need or are interested in starting an information literacy programme, i.e., basic and higher education, in their efforts to meet their current information needs. Information Literacy education is vital to the success of lifelong learning, employment and daily interpersonal communication to any citizen. For e.g. when a person needs information about agriculture or health services or a student requires specific information to complete his assignments. The pedagogies allied with information literacy are active learning, project based learning, internships, inquiry learning and service learning.

12. 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.

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