Opportunities and Challenges of Academic Librarians in Teaching Information Literacy in Institutions of Higher Learning in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to analyse the opportunities and challenges that are faced in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe when offering information literacy. Institutions of higher learning were purposively selected. Open ended questions were sent to 20 librarians and 13 responded. It was discovered that all the institutions of higher learning which participated in the study teach IL to the students and the librarians are responsible. Librarians teach IL to ensure that the students know how to search, evaluate and use information ethically and legally. This was necessitated by the information explosion leading to the availability of various information sources. The role of the librarian is to design the curriculum, teach IL and monitor and evaluate the course as a way of improving it. It was discovered that librarians face some challenges because of the negative attitudes by students and academic staff. The author recommends that librarians should continuously upgrade themselves and library administrators should provide resources needed to offer IL.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

Bhimani (2015) states that many students entering college do not know how to locate information due to the endless amount of information that is available mainly on the internet. There have been instances of low usage statistics of electronic resources in academic libraries although the number of enrolled students is increasing. This may have been caused by the rapidly changing information landscape and various ways of searching for information. Learners as a result, face challenges in locating and accessing relevant and appropriate information for academic purposes if they are not taught how to do it. Leong (2015) observed that skills and experience needed to navigate the virtual and physical space appear to be diminishing among novice and advanced researchers. The research was aimed at understanding how academic librarians are utilising the opportunities provided when offering information literacy and how they are dealing with the challenges that they are facing in Zimbabwe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of definitions were given for information literacy from various sources including the one given by the Association of College and Research Libraries (2017) which points out the characteristics of an information literate individual. ACRL describes information literacy as abilities 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; and understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally. For this study, the Information literacy (IL) definition by the Alexandria Proclamation (UNESCO-IFLA, 2005) was used. IL was defined as the core of lifelong learning which empowers people in all walks of life to "see, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations". Husauni (2010) adds that information literacy is more than computer literacy and more than library instruction since an information literate person is able to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. According to the ACRL (2017), the teaching librarian works with students as coach, guide and mentor in helping students to navigate through the complex information ecosystem. The librarian plays different roles ranging from advocate, coordinator, instructional designer, leader, lifelong learner, teacher and teaching partner.

WHY TEACH IL?

Leong (2005) and Debowski (2001) state that IL involves not only the development of digital skills but also higher level of analytical and evaluative skills that are needed to engage effectively with the formulations of complex ideas. Lampert (2006) adds that learners are taught IL so that they are able to identify, locate, retrieve, evaluate, and ethically use and document information. Learners would then improve their research skills that are needed in knowing the different types of information sources and understanding the appropriate ways of critically evaluating and managing information. Bhimani (2015) supports the idea by pointing out that IL and digital literacy allow users to utilise technology and learners are able to survive at college, at the work place and throughout life.

Roles of Librarians in Teaching IL

The academic librarian plays an important role in teaching information literacy. The roles involve teaching students how to search for materials when they are writing their assignments. Maitaouthong, Tuamsuk, and Tachamanee; (2012), Brasley (2008); Mounce 2010; Klebansky and Fraser (2013). Vassilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstantinou (2015) state that librarians assist by arranging IL activities for students such as orientation, short training programmes, teaching one on one at the reference desk, online self-learning programmes, and co-teaching in class. Maitaouthong, Tuamsuk, and Tachamanee; (2012) and Kolstad (2015) add that librarians have four major roles which include preparation of resources and learning sources; supporting the teaching of IL of educators and librarians; organising learning and teaching activities that develop student's IL; and organising activities to develop educator's IL. ACRL (2017) summarises the roles of the librarian as advocate, coordinator, instructional designer, leader, lifelong learner, teacher, and teaching partner.

Approaches in Teaching IL

There are various approaches that can be applied when teaching IL in institutions of higher learning. Some institutions embed IL in the curriculum and make it a compulsory module covering areas such as traditional and digital literacies, how to use technology, and how to disseminate research in the digital era according to Kolstad (2015). Areas to be covered would include how to look for information by

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