

Chapter 3

Empowering Transformation: The Intersection of Information Literacy and Social Change in Academic Libraries

Pitshou Moleka Basikabio

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0668-0919>

Managing Research African Network, DRC

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the relationship between information literacy and social change in the context of academic libraries. In the rapidly evolving information landscape, information literacy plays a crucial role in empowering individuals to navigate the abundance of information, critically evaluate sources, and make informed decisions. Academic libraries, as key providers of information resources and services on college and university campuses, have a unique opportunity to foster information literacy skills among students and contribute to social change.

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, where information is readily available at our fingertips, the ability to navigate, evaluate, and effectively use this information has become increasingly important (Ahmad, Sidek, Zainudin, Hamzar & Affandi, 2023 ; Nicholas & Herman, 2010). This set of skills, commonly known as information literacy, plays a fundamental role in enabling individuals to make informed decisions, critically analyze information sources, and actively participate in democratic processes (De Paor & Heravi, 2020 ; Batchelor, 2017 ; Landøy, Popa & Repanovici, 2020). As information literacy becomes a necessity for success in both academic and professional settings, academic libraries have a unique opportunity to foster these skills among students and promote social change (Alexander, Becker, Cummins & Giesinger, 2017 ; Moleka, 2023 ; Chizwina, Rabatseta, Bangani & Moyo, 2017).

According to Sharma and Upadhyay (2021), information literacy is the capacity to recognize information needs, find and assess pertinent sources, and use the knowledge gained in an efficient and moral manner to achieve particular goals. In a society overwhelmed by an abundance of information,

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individuals who possess strong information literacy skills are better equipped to filter through the noise, differentiate between credible and unreliable sources, and engage in critical thinking (Mrah, 2022). This ability to critically evaluate information is crucial for informed decision-making, allowing individuals to form their own opinions based on reliable evidence rather than being influenced by biased or inaccurate information (Mhaskar, Emmanuel, Mishra, Patel, Naik & Kumar, 2009).

With the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation (Akhtar, Ghouri, Khan et al. (2023), as well as the challenges posed by the fast-paced digital landscape, information literacy has become a critical tool for social change (Aïmeur, Amri & Brassard, 2023). It is possible to challenge injustices, question dominant narratives, and push for constructive societal changes when one possesses the critical thinking and truth-telling skills. According to Henkel (2019), academic libraries are vital centers of knowledge and information on college and university campuses. They also have a big impact on societal change by promoting information literacy.

Academic libraries have traditionally been recognized as places where students and researchers access scholarly literature, textbooks, and reference materials. However, in today's digital era, their role extends far beyond the physical collection of books (Kim & Yang, 2022 ; Uzezi Otolu, 2021). They have transformed into dynamic information centers that provide access to a wide range of electronic resources, databases, e-journals, and other digital tools to support teaching, learning, and research (Raju, 2014). With their extensive expertise in information organization, retrieval, and evaluation, academic librarians are uniquely positioned to collaborate with faculty, students, and other stakeholders to promote information literacy (Cox, 2018 ; Yevelson-Shorsher & Bronstein, 2018).

Academic libraries facilitate the development of critical thinking abilities in students by actively participating in information literacy programs. Critical thinking is a crucial aspect of information literacy, as noted by Johnson, Sproles, Detmering, and English (2012). Librarians can advise students on how to conduct efficient information searches, critically assess sources, and use and cite material in an ethical manner through workshops, instructional programs, and one-on-one consultations (Yevelson-Shorsher, & Bronstein, 2018 ; Kooli, 2023). Libraries can make sure students not only gain the subject-specific knowledge but also the skills essential to engage with information in an ethical and informed way by incorporating information literacy into the curriculum (Khailova, 2021).

The relationship between information literacy and social change is multifaceted (Chen, Wang, Chen, Yu & Tai, 2012). Information literacy can empower individuals to challenge inequalities, advocate for human rights, and address pressing social and environmental issues. In the realm of environmental activism, for example, information literacy skills enable individuals to access scientific data, evaluate the impact of human activities on the environment, and participate in informed decision-making processes (Fang, Hassan & LePage, 2022). Similarly, in the field of human rights advocacy, information literacy equips individuals with the tools to critically evaluate social narratives, seek evidence-based arguments, and question prevailing systems of power (De Paor & Heravi, 2020).

This chapter aims to explore the intersection of information literacy and social change within academic libraries. It will provide an overview of the concept of information literacy, highlighting its evolving nature in response to changes in technology and information consumption patterns. The chapter will delve into the significance of information literacy for individuals and society, emphasizing its role in fostering critical thinking, promoting informed decision-making, and empowering individuals to create positive social transformations.

Moreover, the chapter will examine the specific role that academic libraries play in promoting information literacy. By providing access to diverse collections, offering instruction and support, and

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