

Chapter 25

Information Literacy: A Tool of Empowerment for the People of India, Nepal, and Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The chapter defines Information Literacy with its scope, such as Visual Literacy, Media Literacy, Computer Literacy, Network Literacy, Health Literacy, Business Literacy, and Library Literacy. It establishes the relation between Literacy and Information Literacy as a modified definition of literacy. Further, it states that the root cause of digital divide in countries like India, Nepal, and Bangladesh is information illiteracy. The data collected on various e-initiatives in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh have been discussed. Information Literacy depends on various factors, and it should start from the National level so, after taking due consideration of socio-economic, geographic, and political condition, Information Literacy Plans have been formulated for these countries. First, at a national level, then at the educational level, and then community level. Further, the curriculum for IL courses at various levels have been formulated. It is suggested that the government should set up a national level apex body such as Indian Information Literacy Forum, Nepal Information Literacy Programme, Bangladesh Information Literacy Programme, or an Autonomous Information Literacy Council under the Ministry of Information Technology and in collaboration with Ministry of Human Resource Development and Ministry of Telecommunication in India, Ministry of Information and Communication in Nepal, and Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology in Bangladesh. It also suggests various other measures to make IL programmes to transform these countries into developed nations.

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INTRODUCTION

With the digital configurations, the perceptions of literacy are becoming increasingly numerous. It is almost as if each new technology has to overturn the existing frameworks. Following initial acceptance based around documentary usage therefore (“library literacy” or “library instruction” or “user education”), the terms “computer literacy,” “technology literacy,” “visual literacy,” “media literacy,” or even “digital literacy” are also used in reference to a variety of skills (some more specific than others), either in the form of a synonym, as a form of complementarity, or to represent the different facets of a group of skills encompassed by the generic term “information literacy.” It is not insignificant, moreover, to note that the plural form is becoming more widespread with terms such as “new literacies” or “multi-literacies” or “multiple literacies”—and the French equivalent “littératies multiples” (Canada)—or even “21st century literacies” in the United States. Similarly, the all-encompassing concept of “media literacy,” now enjoys a certain degree of usage in the scientific community (most notably in the United Kingdom). Some, however, prefer a hybrid concept such as “media and information literacy” or even “information and digital literacies.” The more transversal concepts of “multicultural literacy,” “critical literacy,” “knowledge management,” and “lifelong learning” are all linked to IL. Curiosity and creativity and self-efficacy are also considered as essential attributes of IL. The importance of the contextual aspect is reinforced by the acknowledged necessity to formulate specific problem-solving strategies. With these new approaches, IL is perceived as a prerequisite for academic success, professional success, and even for life as a citizen. Although it can hardly be considered as providing a clear representation, this profusion of concepts is extending the debate beyond the frontiers of the library world, and is refocusing on the cultural capital essential for constructing a pupil’s autonomy. In spite of the

semantic diversity, one has to acknowledge the convergence trend with regard to all the issues related to IL. It is now the issue of implementing these concepts in the academic system that is crucial.

The Prague Declaration in 2003 (UNESCO, 2005) included a definition of information literacy, positioning information literacy within lifelong learning, namely:

Information Literacy, which encompasses knowledge of one’s information needs and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively use information to address issues or problems at hand, is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the information society, and is part of the basic human right of lifelong learning.

Scope

The scope of information literacy is diverse. Using information in a variety of formats requires literacy beyond basic literacy. To negotiate complex information formats we must also be skilled in other literacy such as:

Library Literacy

Library Literacy is knowing about types of libraries and their function, making use of catalogues, collection development, and any special collections, understanding the use of reference tools for different purposes, use of secondary information sources, such as indexes, abstracts, reviews, bibliographies, and biographies, familiarization with library rules, dos and don’ts to maintain library environment, familiarization with the library services and facilities, familiarization with the floor plan and organizational structure, familiarization with information sources, such as documentary sources, audio-visual resources, electronic resources and multimedia maps and photographs; an expert in a subject is also an information source, knowledge of the online public access catalogue

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