

Chapter 8

Information Literacy, Libraries, and the Nigerian Public Sphere

Taofeek Oladokun

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7015-9496>

Lead City University, Nigeria

Adelani R. Ibitoye

Igbajo Polytechnic, Nigeria

Toyosi Rachael Afolabi

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4777-1430>

Lead City University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

In a world shaped by technological advancements, information literacy (IL) has emerged as a critical skill for navigating the influx of information. This chapter examines the significance of IL in enhancing public engagement, informed decision-making, and national development. It delves into the role of libraries as hubs for cultivating information literacy skills and promoting access to diverse information sources. However, while IL skills are needed by all individuals, IL is mainly championed by academic libraries, meaning that the majority of individuals exposed to IL training are students. This chapter explores the implication of equating IL to a tool for achieving better educational outcomes instead of solving real-life problems. The chapter also highlight the barriers to effective IL training in Nigerian academic libraries and various strategies that could be adopted to improve the current situation. The chapter concluded libraries should make an effort to expand IL to the general populace.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of literacy has evolved from simply being able to read and write. Literacy has taken many forms to include computer literacy and now, information literacy. Today, information literacy skills have become essential, not only for those involved in formal education but for all members of the society. How-

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ever, not everyone has the opportunity to acquire information literacy skills. In Nigeria, for instance, lack of information literacy skills has led to people falling victim of scam artists, being abused and exploited as well as being denied their rights (Fraillon et al, 2020). In the context of education, many students often experience difficulties in producing quality academic works due to poor information literacy skills (Onuoha, 2017; Banik & Kumar, 2019; Hamisu, 2019; Avcı & Ergün, 2022).

This has led to the question of what is being done by various types libraries, particularly in Nigeria to enhance information literacy, not only among the students, but also among the general public. This chapter therefore explores the availability, scope, and reach of information literacy programmes in Nigerian libraries. The chapter also focus on existing frameworks and barriers to the provision of information literacy skills across various types of libraries in Nigeria and how this has impacted on the level of information literacy among various categories of people in the country.

Information Literacy: A Critical Evaluation

Information literacy was initially conceptualized as the “ability to find and use information”. According to Lau (2006), all the definitions of information literacy have something in common; information literacy aims to equip individuals with the ability to use existing information to solve real live problem. In order to achieve this, individuals must be able to skillfully navigate through the avalanche of information resources, selecting the relevant while avoiding or discarding the irrelevant and the use the information gathered creatively and accurately (Lau, 2006). The implication is that information literacy is a set of skills and competencies needed to survive in the information age where each individual is inundated with information from multiple sources, format and media.

According to Sample (2020), the most comprehensive definition of information literacy is the one given by the American Library Association. The definition, which also reads as a form of specification, state that “to be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. The information literate individuals are those who have learned how to learn” (Withorn et al., 2021). This means that information literacy is the ability to recognize when and which information is needed, to find the needed information, evaluate the found information and use any information found relevant effectively to achieve a particular objective. In order to help individuals achieve this specification, scholars and professional bodies have developed frameworks for evaluating information literacy skills. These frameworks also serve as training guide for information professionals in teaching information literacy skills. One of the most popular frameworks is the Society of College, National and University Libraries’ (SCONUL)

The seven pillars of information outlined by SCONUL indicates that information literacy is made up of seven pillars (or abilities). One, the information users should be able to identify their information needs (identify). Two, they should be aware of sources of the needed information (scope). Three, they must be able to develop effective strategies to search for the needed information (plan). The fourth pillar represents the ability to retrieve relevant information from identified sources (gather). The fifth pillar emphasize the ability to evaluate information based on certain criteria (evaluate) and the sixth pillar focuses on managing the information retrieved for effective use (manage) (Shukla, 2021). The seventh pillar focus on the ability to share the synthesized information or knowledge obtained from the information gathered (present).

The seventh pillar suggest that information literacy was meant for academic purposes only as its the apparent aim was to ‘present’ the knowledge; either in oral or written format.

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