

Information Literacy from Credit Based to Integrated Information Literacy: A Case of the University of Botswana

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Abstract: Information literacy has been defined as the ability to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American Library Association, 2005:1). These spells out a set of abilities or skills expected of an individual as a learner or researcher (SCONUL Working Group on Information Literacy (2011). The University of Botswana, in an effort to provide students with these essential skills carried a number of information literacy initiatives, starting with library tours for all first year students to a formal credit based information literacy instructions, under the University-wide General Education Courses. In 2006 the institution constituted a Task Force to evaluate all GEC programs offered by the University among them the information literacy program (University of Botswana, 2007). The taskforce used document analysis; literature reviews; internet searches and administered questionnaires to academic staff and students as stakeholders. One of the recommendations made was to the effect that there is need to integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum. In 2011 to date the University Library worked together with Communication and Study Skills Unit to infuse information literacy into the Communication and Study Skills curriculum.

Keywords: Information Literacy, User Education, Literacy Instructions; Lifelong Learning.

1. Introduction

Information literacy as a topic has become of great interest to many information professionals worldwide, specifically in institution of higher learning. There has been a lot of research done in the area discussing different information literacy programs and their assessment. It has been defined as the ability to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American Library Association, 2000). Therefore information literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning and it

empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals.

In Botswana, the University of Botswana as the only national university in the country is tasked with providing the country with graduates who will participate in the social and economic development of the country. To achieve this, the institution has come up with a policy document, the University of Botswana Learning and Teaching Policy (2008), stipulating that a University of Botswana student upon graduating should have the needed information literacy skills that empowers them for lifelong learning. The institution therefore in an effort to provide students with these essential skills, has developed and implemented a formal information literacy instruction as part of the University-wide General Education Courses (GECs) and further effort has been made to integrate this into the curriculum.

2. The Development of Information Literacy Program at University of Botswana

The University of Botswana library (UBL) has embarked on a number of information literacy (IL) initiatives over the years. The initiatives started with library tours that constituted part of the user education program for all first year students. This was carried out at the beginning of each academic year. It covered areas such as the card catalogue and later when the library was automated, the Online Public Access catalogue (OPAC), circulation desk for familiarization with circulation processes, e.g. issues and returns activities, reference desk, subject librarians' offices, late night study area and the relevant collections. It was a pre-requisite for library registration. The objective of the library tour as stated by Qobose (2000) was to provide first year students with survival skills in carrying out their assignments and to give them an overview of the resources available in the library. Library tours exist even today under library orientation during the University wide orientation program.

However Asafu-Adjaye (1993) and Lamusse (1994) carried out a survey to evaluate the usefulness of library tours as an effective way of inducting students to the library as well as into being lifelong learners. The results of the two studies showed a number of limitations such as lack of mechanism in ensuring that all students fully participated in the library tour; the timing (as students were still new and unfamiliar with the university environment) and content of the tours was found not fulfilling the objective of the program. This view was also shared by Ojedokun and Lumande (2005) in their paper where they shared the experience of the University of Botswana in integrating the information literacy program into the curriculum. In 1992 Lamusse did a research study on the impact of library orientation. The results of the study indicated that feedback from academic departments on the ability of students to use the library resources, as well as students' own evaluations showed that there was need for a more direct intervention by the library as there were gaps in what the library and

the academic departments were able to impart to students in terms of skills for self-reliance in information seeking. The research showed that students, for instance, continued to rely on the reserve section in the Library, prescribed text books and on class notes for their assignments. According to the author (Lamuse, 1992) as a result of these findings informal bibliographic instructions (BI) was introduced.

Informal bibliographic instruction (BI) sessions were introduced in the early 1990s, and subject teams later offered BI to students in different faculties and departments through partnership with the Communication and Study Skills Unit. One of the topics covered under the program according to Fidzani and Molebatsi (2003) was on how to use the library. That was an attempt to improve the library tours. It was done with the interest of the respective faculty or department in liaison with the subject librarian for the faculty or department. The Department of Biological Sciences followed by the Department of Nursing and School of Accounting and Management were the first to integrate bibliographic instruction into their Communication and Study Skills and research courses respectively (Yeboa, 1999) Fidzani and Molebatsi, 2003). However that was not fully structured and had a number of implications, for example, the difficulty of timetabling. Consequently librarians had to make arrangements with the relevant lecturers for students to come to the library for instructional sessions.

3. The Credit Based Information Literacy Instructions

The University of Botswana in 2000 introduced a semester-system program and following it the University adopted the concept of General Education Courses (GEC), under which the IL module fell. The GEC program was approved by the University in 2002 and targeted undergraduate students. There were seven GEC areas namely; Communication and study skills; Computer and information Skills; Modes of enquiry and critical thinking; Physical education and wellness; Science and technology; World civilisation and World economy and business skills (University of Botswana, 2002). The Computer and Information Skills was a two-credit course consisting of two modules. Due to inadequate resources, only level one of the modules (GEC 121 in the first semester and GEC 122 in the second semester) was being offered to students. At this level the modules were a compulsory undergraduate requirement. The modules were under the Department of Computer Science. The teaching arrangement was that librarians handled the information skills module while computer science lecturers focused on the computer skills module. Each module covered four units. These units or content areas were as follows: concept of information (its characteristics; formats and sources of information); information organization; information access tools; reference sources; periodical literature; searching electronic databases; legal issues of information use and evaluation of information resources. Modules were offered over a semester of 14 weeks, and the Information Skills module was allocated only three weeks of teaching per semester, and this translated to about 21 per cent of the semester.

The modules were delivered through face-to-face lectures and laboratory (lab) sessions that provide opportunities for hands-on practical activities by lab demonstrators. Each student went through a one-hour lecture and a two-hour lab session in a week. However this was also supplemented by an online version of the course via WebCT, which is a course management system. This allowed students to interact with the course content outside the scheduled, formal classes. Due to the large numbers of students taking the information literacy (IL) skills course instruction, librarians had to contend with large classes, especially during the lectures.

Assessing the University of Botswana Library (UBL) information literacy programs as discussed in the background and looking at the content module, one would argue that it was well balanced in equipping students with the needed skills for academic performance as well as provision of lifelong learning skills. The program addressed the stipulated standards agreed upon by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the Council of Australian University Librarians, and the Standing Council of National and University libraries (SCONUL) (De Jager and Nassebeni, 2002).

However, there has not been much empirical research to assess the success of the program in imparting the needed skills across students. In literature, there is growing concern about assessment outcomes of information literacy instruction, and recommended effective information literacy approaches. Kasowitz-Scheer and Pasqualoni (2002) believe that for IL programs to be effective they should be integrated into the subject courses and be offered in collaboration with faculty to allow the transfer of skills across disciplines. A similar recommendation was made by the University of Botswana GEC Task Force established by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs) University of Botswana in October 2006 lead by Mooko. The Task Force emphasized the need to infuse/integrate some GEC skills such as critical thinking; intellectual growth general skills for lifelong learning including information skills across the curriculum.

The Mooko Task Force of 2006 was set up to evaluate all GEC programs offered by the University of Botswana among them the information literacy program. In their research the taskforce used document analysis; literature reviews; internet searches and administered questionnaires to academic staff and students as stakeholders. The review considered the GEC rationale, the concept of GEC, components of the GEC, Electives; Management of the GEC, quality of GECs, students' choice of GECs, Course overlaps, Professional training, etc. However one of the elements that came out of the report was that students take some of these courses to gain credit or to fulfil an academic requirement than to gain lifelong learning skill that can be applied across academic activities.

Mologanyi, Seanego and Rakgamanyane (2006) carried out an impact

assessment study on the instructional strategy of the program from the instructional librarian's perspective. The study objective was to assess the effectiveness of the IL program delivery strategy, from the instructional librarians' point of view and focused on the program structure, curriculum content, and the delivery mode. One of the recommendations from the study was that the library needs to rethink its IL strategy with the view to benchmarking its practice with other university libraries and adapting best practices around the world. The researchers called for an overall assessment of the program to identify program gaps and recommend possible solutions.

4. Integration of Information Literacy Into The Curriculum

Information literacy is a keystone of lifelong learning and effectively integrating information literacy skills into curriculum requires the development of partnerships between teaching staff and librarians. According to Luck and Thomson, (2006) it is no longer just an issue for libraries. Today many institutions of higher learning providing information literacy instructions have gone beyond the stand-alone information literacy course into integrating information literacy Instruction into the overall curriculum. This is favoured because it ties information literacy into all students' experiences (Orr, Appleton, & Wallin, 2001) and has come as a result of the change in educational thinking and the rapid technological developments. The authors (Luck and Thomson 2006) indicate that incorporating librarians into learning programs to teach students' generic information literacy skills has become critical in a learning environment.

Integration of information literacy at University of Botswana can be discussed at two levels, informal and formal integration

4.1 Informal Integration

The University of Botswana Library is based on subject librarian approach where each librarian is assigned a faculty/departments to liaise with regarding support to learning, teaching and research to both students and staff. The concept of faculty /department liaison adopted by the University of Botswana play a major role in integrating information literacy into the curriculum. Subject librarians are required to advocate for integration of information literacy for upper levels i.e. 2nd to final years. Each librarian is required to work hand in hand with faculty staff to facilitate information literacy skills at the point of need commonly referred to as Bibliographic Instructions. Literature has demonstrated that collaborative effort between librarians and academics leads to better results in terms of students acquiring information literacy skills (Boff & Johnson, 2002). This is true and has worked a lot at the University of Botswana. There is more collaboration between librarians and academic staff in teaching of information literacy specifically to upper classes. Librarians are increasingly becoming more involved with faculty as they promote information literacy and other library resources and services. Experience as a subject librarian for Faculty of Education has demonstrated that to achieve full integration of

information literacy into the curriculum one has to start negotiating at the plenary stage. The librarian involvement is essential throughout all the teaching processes. This is not always smooth as it comes out of negotiations and commitment from both partners. Cunningham and Lanning (2002) pointed out that establishing collaboration between librarians and academics is not always easy given challenges such as merging agendas, time and resources between the two parties. These are some of the challenges experienced by many librarians when advocating for the promotion of information literacy at the University of Botswana.

However it should be noted that the objective is to empower students not only to learn the different content disciplines through the use of information but to come up with a rounded graduate with all the necessary skills to survive in today's economic and social environment. Therefore it is important that there should be willingness to partner from both sides for the benefit of the learner. One has also learnt that sometimes informal visits to academics do help in winning them to one's side. In the Faculty of Education where I was assigned we even formed a Education Library Committee to assist in advocating for library resources and services including information literacy in the faculty. This worked very well as the faculty got more involved on library issues.

4.2 Formal Integration of Information Literacy into the Curriculum

The second form of integration referred to is the information literacy taught under the General Education courses to all first year students. This is said to be more formal as it is compulsory to all first year students and originally the modules were delivered under the Department of Computer Science as a credit course.

In 2011 the University Library in an effort to integrate information literacy into the curriculum started negotiations with the Communication and Study Skills Unit (CSSU) to partner and integrate information literacy into their course programs. The two departments had to workshop on how this was to be implemented. In planning they both acknowledged that they have traditionally approached students differently in terms of content, and a breakdown of Library and CSSU content was done to check for overlaps. The two contents were merged into one. They agreed to build both Library and Communication and Study Skills mandate into the course outline for example course content; assignments; tests and projects. A number of workshops were held to incorporate all these together to ensure full integration. In terms of delivering of the course the challenge was who is to deliver what but the agreement was that librarians should come at the point of need to link the course content with the information literacy skills. E-Learning methods of teaching in addition to face to face were also employed.

The program was run for a year and on the 31st July 2012 the two departments came together to evaluate the partnership. They were number of success and

challenges on the initiative and among the success were that

- Good relationship/ collaborative teaching
- Agreement in terms of IL Content
- Infusion of ILS into information gathering for research project
- Developing the information literacy levels of the students
- Making students independent learners
- Positive attitude on student-equipping students with skills on utilizing information in the library
- Exposing students to library as resource supporting teaching and learning
- Good turn up during first semester
- Crucial Skills learned by students
- Collaborated on discipline specific courses
- Students knew who to consult
- Student, Lecturer, Librarian interaction
- Scheduling of lessons

However as this was a first experience they seemed to be more challenges than successes and among these were that

- Lack of proper coordination and reliable communication in other areas
- Lack of coordination in terms of assessments
- No follow up on what students did
- Class Clashes
- Lack of Resources
- Low turn up in second semester
- Given Friday slots only in first semester
- Teaching ILS in isolation
- Manpower Shortage of library staff-some classes ended up not taught due to staff shortage
- Students work did not reflect having acquired library skills
- No comprehensive program linked to objectives
- Librarians given one period to cover all that needed to be accomplished – not adequate
- Course outlines did not reflect a marriage between the two depts.
- Topic which could have been best taught by CSSU was grabbed by the library this caused confusion among students.

These were views raised from the evaluation meeting by both by the librarians and the academic staff. Analyzing the above from the positives it reiterates the point from literature that integration of information literacy across the curriculum ties information literacy into all students' experiences (Orr, Appleton, & Wallin, 2001). However it should also be noted that it requires collaboration among the library, other academic departments, and

administration to meet the common goal of teaching information literacy skills Millet and Wilson,(2009). Also reflected are challenges as stipulated above such as academic attitudes and behavior towards collaborative teaching. Establishing a true collaborative effort is the greatest challenge in promoting information literacy as there are issues of resources as well as working relationships. Despite the challenges experienced by the two departments they both agreed to be more innovative in their teaching and also collaborate more as is the key to success.

5. Conclusion

Information literacy has been referred to by Farmer and Henri (2008) as a basic human right in a digital world and that it promotes social inclusion of all nations. Therefore one believes that information literacy skills are key competencies for everyone; they provide individuals with key foundational learning competencies needed for lifelong learning. They are critical to institutions of higher learning given the development of information technology and the growing number of student enrolment. Traditionally librarians used to assist customers search for information or carry out the search themselves as intermediaries. Today it is difficult for academic librarians conduct information searches for students or library customers due to the growing student enrolments, and developments in new information technologies which have resulted in an abundance of information. The answer has been to train customers to seek information on their own; evaluate the information that they get from the internet or from other sources and on ethical use of the retrieved information, hence the introduction of information literacy programs worldwide.

University of Botswana is not an exception to this hence the number of initiatives taken which started with library tours that constituted part of the user education program for all first year students to informal bibliographic instruction (BI) sessions introduced in the early 1990s. In 2000 with the introduction of General Education courses it introduced credit based information literacy to all first year students which has been now integrated into the Communication and study skills program to enhance students learning and impart to students the needed lifelong learning skills as per University of Botswana Learning and Teaching Policy (2008). However there is still a lot to be done to iron out some of the challenges to truly have a fully integrated program for example issues of resources both material and human resources.

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