

INFORMATION LITERACY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The concept of sustainable development within the global community is at present the focus of the United Nations and the global community. This is as highlighted by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, also called the Global Goals. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is a universal template for actions aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity, needs the input of multiple factors and stakeholders, to ensure it makes a successful impact on society. This paper posits that information literacy: the term generally describing the information skills and competencies required of people living in this information age, for lifelong learning, knowledge acquisition and personal capacity development, is integral to attaining the goals of sustainable development. This is given that it is now increasingly evident that the 21st century is governed by the creation and use of information in all careers, social life and diverse fields of human endeavour. The paper highlights the roles of libraries and librarians within this present framework, in various service settings. towards fostering and anchoring information literacy learning and practical use, for attaining sustainable development in the society.

Introduction

The global community is at present concerned with the concept of sustainable development in multiple facets of societal life. This is as couched in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations - the document guiding the subsisting focus of global developmental efforts. This paper focuses on the contributions of information literacy towards achieving the objectives of sustainable development. The range of roles played by libraries in fostering information literacy in the today's knowledge-driven society is discussed. The paper begins with an overview of the concept of information literacy in order to provide a clear focus for the entire discourse.

Information literacy: A Conceptual Overview

As a concept, information literacy gained popularity and prominent use within the last three decades. Lloyd (2010, p. 60) notes that the concept was first introduced by Paul Zurkowski in 1974 as he "first coined the term information literacy as a way of describing the information skills that would be required of service workers in the information age". Since Zurkowski's introduction of the concept, it has transcended the literature base of information behaviour, to become integral to all facets of life in the modern society, especially in relation to possessing lifelong learning capabilities.

Discourses on the meaning and applications of information literacy ever since has elicited numerous perspectives, with no universal concord on definition to date. This owes mainly to differences in the philosophical leanings of scholars interested in the subject. There is however, an increasing convergence around the perspectives held by the Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework (ANZIIL) (2004), the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) of the American Library Association (ALA) (2000) and SCONUL's (2011) Seven Pillars of Information Literacy. According to the ANZIL (2004, p. 11) for example, an information literate person:

- Recognises the need for information and determines the nature and extent of the information needed
- Finds needed information effectively and efficiently
- Critically evaluates information and the information seeking process
- Manages information collected or generated
- Applies prior and new information to construct new concepts or create new understandings
- Uses information with understanding and acknowledges cultural, ethical, economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information

Similarly, the Association of College and Research Libraries (2000) prescribed five core competency standards, with performance indicators and outcomes which were similar to ANZIIL.

In the view of IFLA/ALP, information literacy is a self-empowering attitude and a commitment by individuals to seek access, analyse, translate, transform information and create knowledge for problem solving and for achieving personal, social, learning and occupational goals (IFLA/ALP, 2007). According to Ojedokun (2007), it has become evident that the 21st century will be governed by the creation and use of information in all careers, in a process leaning on the information literacy of individuals. The author further characterises information literacy as a prerequisite of the modern information society that is based on intelligent identification, location, perception, appraisal and usage of information and for lifelong learning. Information literacy is perceived as a disposition to the value of information, which is expressed through purposeful access to appropriate information sources for acquiring knowledge.

Within the context of everyday life, it has been inferred that "the information literate person is not just a conduit of information, but is actively using it and enhancing it, for their own benefit" in real-life situations (Whitworth, 2009, p. 96). In essence, information literacy competencies are demonstrated by individuals only within real application contexts of using information correctly to solve problems.

Perspectives on Modes of Becoming Information Literate

There is a debate about the modes through which individuals acquire information literacy competencies. The two prominent perspectives in the debate are the library-centric and social-interactionist schools of thought.

Library-centric perspective

Within the debate on the best modes of learning information literacy, some scholars canvass the library-centric view which infers that the library is the primary agency through which people develop information literacy competencies. This school of thought avers that libraries and librarians are best placed to lead the process of imbibing information literacy skills. Some proponents of this perspective includes Andretta (2005), Burke (2010), Welsh and Wright (2010), who believe that developing information literacy competence, is anchored on bibliographic and other hands-on instructions provided by libraries to their users. This perspective projects the library's interventions as the primary enabler skills acquisition, in relation to appropriate information use for lifelong learning and personal development.

Also recognising the role of libraries towards peoples' information literacy competencies, Shih (2012, p. 285) suggests that "a successful information literacy education requires collaborative efforts from stakeholders which includes librarians, information technologists, faculty members, and media specialists". Under the library centred perspective of developing information literacy, librarians are deemed to have universally promoted skills instruction as the primary route to people becoming information literate. In line with this perspective, many institutions and organizations have developed librarian-led information literacy instructions tailored towards the specific learning contexts of their students and staff.

Hepworth and Walton (2009, p. 27) however, query the capacity of information literacy programmes centred comprehensively on skills acquisition tuition to adequately prepare learners for a "purposeful, successful, interaction with the world around them". Horton (2011, pp. 262 & 273) emphasised that information literacy tutors in all contexts, should concentrate on linking information literacy to specific long-standing goals. The trainers should make the body of knowledge and skills acquired through information literacy relevant for application to the modern Global Information/Knowledge Society in all problem-solving contexts.

Social interactionist perspective

Social interactionists canvass information literacy learning as common to, and situated in all disciplines and learning environments. They disagree with the notion that people become information literate primarily by participating in formal information skills training by libraries and librarians. Authors in this school of thought include Lloyd (2010), Lonka (2012), Hepworth and Walton (2013). Hepworth and Walton (2013) specifically argue that information literacy learning, no longer follows the traditional educational or library context, but is rather increasingly being taken into new landscapes like the workplace, where the individual's attitudes and capabilities in managing, organizing, sharing information and knowledge in the organization, are now the emphasis.

Lonka (2012, p. 15) canvasses this perspective by stating that "learning always takes place in a context which is situational, but relies on culturally and historically developed structures... a certain kind of cultural environment for its realization". This perspective shifts the focus away from skills instruction by librarians and highlights the social interactionist model of learning for the development of information literacy competency. This school of thought projects active participation of individuals within given social contexts as means for acquiring information

literacy competencies relevant for continuous learning, adaptation, and application to a broad range of problem-solving situations in life.

The information literacy learning notion under this mode entails an unstructured learning process which affords a person within a given community, the ability to effectively engage with, and utilise the information sources and resources of that community in satisfying personal and social role needs. As Lloyd (2010, p. 24) infers, information literacy is 'a socio-cultural practice that extends beyond mere ability to acquire a set of skills to a complex understanding of the social modalities that influence the learning and application of information in specific contexts.

Lloyd's (2010 p. 168) further assertion, underlines the argument of this school of thought. The author states that "information literacy is a practice that is construed through a constellation of affordances, information activities and skills, which together enable a way of knowing the modalities of information that, constitute an information environment". Similarly, Hoyer (2011, p. 12) avers that "an information literacy instruction model that emphasises the use of [only] specific tools and the acquisition of a set of skills will not be adequate in a setting where social relationships are important for finding and evaluating information".

Hoyer's further view that 'social relationships' were "important for finding and evaluating information" (p. 12), fine-tunes the views challenging the notion of a library-centric method in making people become information literate, by stressing the importance of social relationships in making people become information literate.

Mutch (1997, p. 380) canvasses information literacy as being sensitive to context and falls within a continuum of learning where individuals do not necessarily need the same set of skills. On the whole, the social interactionist perspective envisions the individual's participation in a social community, as affording opportunity for information sharing and for the generation and application of constant new knowledge, in everyday contexts. Information literacy, understood in this light, surpasses an individual's possession of mainly a set of transferable information search skills, particularly those that aid mainly classroom tasks; taught in librarian-led information literacy instructions. Social interactionists infer that people become information literate through multiple different engagements within their social environment. What they consider essential is not the means through which a person becomes information literate, but

the ability to both apply information literacy capabilities to problem solving, and quick adaptation to other contexts of information need.

Competencies needed for Effective Information Literacy Practice

Two major competencies have been identified as defining people's appropriate practice of information literacy.

Bibliographic Search Skills

One of the requirements for an information literate person is the ability to use basic skills for information search (bibliographic search competence) in the process of information discovery and use. Welsh and Wright (2010) believe that a person's possession of some basic information search skills is essential for an effective information literacy practice. Some of those required skills were identified by Bruce (2002) as: task definition; the development of information-seeking strategies; locating and accessing information; synthesizing and evaluating information; and, using information.

The NHS Education for Scotland (no date provided) aggregated the skills needed for effective practice of information literacy as: a) articulating appropriate questions for information need; b) awareness of the diverse formats in through which information is organised and distributed; and, c) ability to discover and access a variety of sources of information including people, print and digital. These skills enable individuals to use appropriate strategies to locate and use information accurately and gainfully in real life contexts.

Possessing these skills is imperative, owing to the perception that components of creativity such as decision making, strategic thinking, critical thinking, and problem solving should be the bedrock of information literacy for the individual (Lantz and Brage, 2006). Specifically, this is reflected in the application of information capability as a practical tool for problem-solving in personal, social and workplace contexts.

Information and Communications Technology use and Adaptation Skills

Information and communication technology (ICT) has been recognised as central to information use, and pivotal to information literacy practice. One of the most important of these skills is proficiency in the use of the Internet. As Rastgoo et al. (2011) reckons, internet information literacy skills, is a distinct skill-set of information literacy necessary for individuals

to possess to be effective learners. This perspective mirrors an existence of connections between online learning and the information literacy of people (Mackey and Jacobson, 2011, p. xvii). In recognition of the role of the internet in fostering information literacy Click and Petit (2010); Luo (2009) and Fernandez-Villavicencio (2010) advocate the integration of Web 2.0 and social networking tools in helping people become information literate in a digital and network-based society.

Expressing a similar view to the foregoing, Burke (2010, p. 248) states that "currently, the need for information literacy skills is the most pressing global issue everyone around the world is impacted by the challenges of technological age and must learn to adapt and cope by learning information literacy skills". Jacobs, et al. (2003, p. 321) outline the multi-dimensional aspects needed for applying ICT skills in information literacy practice as surpassing mere computer literacy and internet skills to encompass the need for the development of 'capacity to choose appropriate technologic tools to obtain information'. In general, the possession of ICT proficiency increases ability to manipulate technological information sources, whereas information literacy proficiency enables them to make good choices about their information sources and the means of identifying and accessing information.

What is Sustainable Development?

It is necessary to understand the concept of development before delving into the meaning of its sustainability. Development as a concept has been defined as "the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2006). The concept of development viewed from the prism of this definition implies a positive, progressive change; a growth in the existential status of an entity or an individual so that it becomes better or more advanced.

The concept of sustainable development is said to have first emerged in the 1960s through a debate by environmentalists focused on the environmental impact of economic growth on the fortunes of the global society. As argued in the Brundtland Report for the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) titled 'Our Common Future', "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (The International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2017). Similarly, the UNDP Nigeria (2017) avers that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also called the Global Goals, universally galvanises action

towards ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

In this paper therefore, sustainable development is construed as encompassing actions that put an end to all forms of poverty. It focuses specifically on the ills orchestrated by poverty of information and the poverty induced by lack of information literacy. This discourse is anchored on the notion that, for any concept or project to be adjudged sustainable, the trajectory of its progress should remain unaffected by negligence, poor planning, poor implementation, abandonment, or any other anti-progressive factor.

Role of Libraries in Information Literacy for Sustainable Development

Libraries play very important roles in imparting and fostering information literacy in any society, and in multiple service environments. Some of the specific ways libraries accomplish this role includes: serving as learning organizations for all in the society; anchoring information literacy tuition and capacity-building activities; offering information support services towards effective research and development; social transformation through grassroots/rural information service; and, providing a support base for civic literacies and e-governance.

Serving as Learning Organizations for all

The role of all libraries includes generating information through in-house production of texts or acquisition of information resources from external sources and additionally, where necessary, transforming the information for relevance within specific problem-solving contexts. Libraries also store diverse types of information media in easily retrievable organized formats and systems, from which users can access them for needed information.

Communicating/disseminating information a process that provides learning opportunity for users, similarly falls within the remit of library service obligations. Modern libraries in carrying out this obligation, emphasise and foster information utilization for knowledge generation as the catalyst for problem solving and capacity building for people in the society. In so doing, libraries serve as information literacy and learning organizations for all, and librarians as change agents behind the wheels of the human capital development machinery, operating in all segments of the modern society.

Providing Support Base for Civic Literacies and E-Governance

Providing information support for e-governance is a role of modern libraries which foster social harmony and community development. Libraries are at heart, part of a social institution thriving on serving the needs of people, helping to them live, learn, develop and to act as part of the social adhesive which holds communities together in perfect harmony (Brophy, 2006). This role is performed through: community orientation; information repackaging, for example (translation services, content presentation in graphical format; and, demonstrations); current awareness programmes; public relations activities; information consultancy; and, supporting specific civic literacy programmes, e.g. by public libraries.

Information provision by public libraries targeted at rural dwellers became necessary for reaching and transforming those populations in rural areas who have very little chances of using the services and resources of any type of library, due to reasons such as: their level of education and enlightenment, the remoteness of their residence, their vocation and trade, and their information seeking behaviour. Thus, grassroots information service was undertaken mostly by public libraries in execution of their specific mandate to serve all segments of the society without discrimination. This information service promoted enlightenment, civic awareness, knowledge generation and use, and information literacy among the rural populace.

Library activities towards promoting literacy in rural communities are at present indispensable for human capital and other forms of development at present. This is given that in sub-Saharan Africa illiteracy is still very high and rampant, and in conjunction with other negatives, has orchestrated a debilitating degree of underdevelopment in the constituent nations. Unagha and Ibenne (2011) assert that in the specific case of Nigeria, the persistent decimal of illiteracy in rural communities, poses difficulties in the provision and utilization of information for any meaningful development. This underscores the importance of the public library's rural information service as platform for engendering the much needed information literacy to anchor sustainable community development.

Supporting Sustainable Educational Development

The services of libraries operating within the educational environments such as primary, post-primary and tertiary institutions are geared towards promoting information literacy for lifelong learning, contributing to the development of human capital among teachers and students. The activities of libraries within this remit are:

- Resource provision at all levels of education in support of all teaching, learning and research activities.
- Professional assistance to learners in the location and effective utilization of information resources.
- Partnership with faculty in the development and implementation of curriculum.
- Engaging in research and research partnerships for the extension of knowledge.
- Anchoring information and media literacy tuition to impart life-long learning capability (e.g. teaching information seekers the use of Social Media tools).
- Inter-institutional linkages to enable exchanges and cooperative use of information resources.

On the whole, libraries serve the information needs of diversified range of information users in various educational settings, imparting the competence necessary for lifelong learning and continuous personal development. The attendant effects of these services and activities are seen manifesting in individual and social transformation. Libraries facilitate knowledge sharing, knowledge growth, knowledge management and knowledge retention in the society, leading to various forms of human capital development.

Conclusion

Information literacy is doubtless integral to any efforts aimed at promoting sustainable development in any society, since it is the means through which the individual gains competence for obtaining all forms of information, including developmental information and civic awareness. The professional information services provided by libraries towards fostering and anchoring information literacy are to this end, indispensable in the achievement of sustainable development goals within the society. Therefore, all types of libraries should be encouraged and supported to play the role of information literacy anchors, more effectively.

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