



INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS ACQUISITION AS A PANACEA TO POOR LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIAN RESEARCH LIBRARIES

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Abstract

Information literacy skills are essential for every human being because, information is vital to everyone in all works of life. To deliver quality, effective and efficient service delivery, the librarian must be skilled in information literacy. This entails the process of understanding the entire typology of information resources. This is necessary because it is what the research librarian offers to the clientele. To this end, this paper focuses on the acquisition of information literacy skills as to poor library service delivery in Nigerian research libraries. It critically looked at the concept of information literacy skills and ways through which research librarians can acquire these skills. Emphasis was also laid on the correlation of these skills with service delivery in Nigerian research libraries. It was however, concluded that for effective service delivery in Nigerian research libraries, research librarian needs to embrace information literacy skills. Based on this, the paper recommends the joint efforts of organizations, institutions, library authorities and librarians in ensuring the acquisition of information literacy skills, which in turn should be applied to service delivery.

Keywords: Information, Information Literacy, Information Literacy Skills, Library Services, Research

Introduction

As information continues to increase coupled with the availability of different sources and formats, there is a rise in the human desire to solve his or her information problem independently. This has led to much emphasis on the patterns and systems of information creation, organization, dissemination, preservation and conservation. There is a high demand on the librarian to actively provide the effective and efficient searching, locating, retrieval services and utilization of the right information at the right time and from the right source. This can only be possible through the possession of certain information skills. On the other hand, Thanuskodi (2019) strongly emphasize the challenge of research librarians in the digital or Internet age. This is because of the rise in competitors, as well as library users' demands and expectations. However, the ability of an

individual to obtain the right information at the right time and from the right place is tantamount to quality and healthy living, which invariably affects the way such individual functions in his/her chosen career.

This concept of Information Literacy (IL) was coined by Zurkowski in the year 1974. In his identification of the concept, the propounded believes so much that information literacy is that which forms the basis for lifelong learning and academic enhancement. It goes beyond merely understanding how to read and write, to involving other things of great emphasis. In his description, Thanuskodi (2019) describes information literacy as the ability to identify the exact information needed, understand how such information is organized, identify the best sources of information for a given need, locate those sources, evaluate the sources critically, and share the information to the appropriate recipient. Summarily, the author sees information literacy as that which forms the basis of understanding one's information concerns and needs and having the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand. Igbinlola, et. al. (2019) observed that information literacy is a self-empowering ability which enables all classes of individuals in society to seek, access, analyse, translate, transform information and create knowledge to address challenges, solve problems, as well as achieve personal, social, occupational, and learning goals for the improvement of quality of life.

According to Adeyemi (2017) information literacy skills include a set of abilities, competencies and knowledge requiring individuals to identify when information is needed and can locate, evaluate and use the needed information effectively. It further refers to the act of knowing when and why one needs information, where to find such information, how to evaluate it, and use/communicate information, ethically. In the view of Thanuskodi (2019), these skills are used for academic purposes, such as writing research papers and group presentations. They include library research skills and information technology (IT) literacy skill which goes beyond the ability to find and present information, but involves higher-order analysis, synthesis, critical thinking and problem-solving. Furthermore, information literacy skills involve seeking and using information for independent and lifelong learning. Nonetheless, in this era of information explosion, information literacy skill is an essential skill that empowers individuals (information seekers) to identify, retrieve and effectively use the information to sustain and extend learning and professional engagement (Kratochvil, 2013). To this end, this paper presents information literacy skills acquisition as a panacea to poor library service delivery in Nigerian research libraries.

Conceptual Clarification

Information

Case (2012) defines information as knowledge, a packaged human

experience, a source that provides a myriad of data, a resource that takes different formats, packaging, transfer media, and varied methods of delivery. Similarly, Hornby (2015) opines that information is a processed data. It represents facts or details about somebody or something. Chimah and Nwokocho (2013) asserts that information is the result of processing, manipulating and organizing data in a way that adds to the knowledge of the receiver. This information under description is what Magaji (2017) considers a very important resource to individuals and organizations. Furthermore, information is that which aids teaching, learning and research not only in theory but in practice. It is the increase in knowledge obtained by the recipient by matching proper data elements to the variables of a problem. With these, it is not far-fetched to conceptualize information as anything that informs or that, upon which a decision is taken. The proper acquisition of this information from the rightful place, and its proper application is what makes an individual information literate, hence, the concept of information literacy

Information Literacy Skills

Igbinlola, et. al. (2019) opined that information literacy skills include the ability to define and articulate the need for information, access the needed information, evaluate information and its sources, incorporate selected information into one's knowledge and value systems, understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and the ability to access and use the information ethically and legally. It is very clear that as a result of the escalating complexity of today's environment, several individuals are faced with diverse and abundant information choices. These information choices surface in their academic studies, workplaces, and personal lives. Secondly, the complexity of these choices is further aggravated as a result of many openings through which information could be acquired, disseminated and stored. Today, a large measure of information could be obtained from libraries, community resources/information centres, media, and the most popular, the Internet or the World Wide Web. Increasingly, information comes to individuals in unfiltered formats, raising questions about its authenticity, validity, and reliability (Dadzie, 2008). This is highly true of most of the Internet information and information resources. In addition, information is available through multiple media, including graphical, aural, and textual. All these openings pose new challenges for individuals, especially, the research librarian in accessing, evaluating and understanding it, hence, the need for these library staff to appreciate the issue of information literacy skills.

In this period of over-abundance of information and information sources, information literacy skills are those essential skills that will empower the library staff to identify, retrieve and effectively use the information to sustain and extend their profession and information-handling services. According to Bhandary (2004), information literacy skills enable an individual to use different tools

available such as libraries, information and media centres, computers, software applications, databases, and other technologies to achieve a wide variety of academic, work-related, and personal goals. Information literacy skill, in the words of Prabhavathi (2013), initiates, sustains, and extends information literacy abilities. It is that which empowers individuals to identify and retrieve quality information to satisfy their information needs (Adeyemi, 2017). They are a set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze and use information (Campbell, as cited in Durodolu, Adekanye&Loorunfemi, 2013).

Further amplifying the definition by Campbell (as cited in Durodolu, Adekanye&Loorunfemi, 2013), these skills require an understanding of amongst others, the resources available, how to find information, the need to evaluate results, how to work with or exploit results, ethical and responsible use of information, how to communicate or share your findings, and how to manage your findings. In another manner, information literacy skills include the following abilities as outlined by ALA (2020): the ability to recognize the need for information timely, the ability to formulate questions based on information needs, the ability to identify potential sources of information, ability to develop successful and effective search strategies, ability to access various sources of information independently and efficiently, ability to evaluate information obtained meaningfully, ability to organize information effectively, ability to integrate new information into an existing body of knowledge, ability to use information critically.

Research librarians could be seen as people who look after the storage and retrieval of information in research libraries. This category of the workforce is trained and educated to deal with information in a wide variety of formats and settings (Aina, 2013). They further help library users and other information seekers to navigate the voyage into the Internet and evaluate information efficiently. Research librarians are charged with the provision and delivery of library and information services to the staff of the organization or the institution and the entire library user community. They are among the individuals faced with difficulties in information search and service delivery. These difficulties could be overcome or surmounted by their professional training and information literacy skills. According to Igbinlola, e. al. (2019), research librarians can acquire different information skills such as; academic information literacy, health information literacy, agricultural information literacy, political information literacy, business information literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy, which will enable their service delivery.

Service Deliveries in Libraries

Service delivery may be seen as the various patterns adopted by libraries and librarians in the discharge of library services. Consequently, **library service** refers to the facilities which are provided by a library for the use of the books and

the dissemination of information. It is the service provided by the library staff to the users of the library in order to meet their information needs. The library service is a kind of invisible product in which readers participate (Nnadozie, 2007). This may be viewed as the activities that libraries and their personnel render to meet the information needs of their users. Such services as core and traditional library services include circulation of library information resources, interlibrary loan, reference and referral services, reprographic services, user education, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Current Awareness Services (CAS), indexing and abstracting, OPAC services, translation, bindery, Internet and e-mail services (Nnadozie, 2007). Owing to the nature of the open service system, the changing demands of readers and the continuing development of document information resources for the academic library service system, the library service cannot attain a status of "zero faults". When readers experience a difference between their own situation and their expectation of the library service, they are dissatisfied (Aina, 2004). Therefore, because reader satisfaction is the target, the academic library should learn how to understand the potential discontent of information as an important premise in achieving the target for the reader satisfaction. As information providers, research libraries of all types, and documentation and information centers should be the main recipients of the massive amount of Internet resources that can be used to noticeably enhance the quality of their services and at the same time to save time and money.

Some of the library services as given by Adegoke (2021) may include digital library services, virtual reference services, 'ask a librarian' services, adaptive learning services (ALS), referral services, current awareness services, knowledge creation and digital humanity services, inter-library lending services, data services, data consultation services, publishing support services, digital scholarship services, makerspace services, reservation services, selective dissemination of information services, information resources lending services, translation services, photocopying services, and library instruction services. Others include indexing and abstracting, OPAC services, cataloguing and classification, collection development, bindery, and Internet and e-mail services. Research libraries through the activities of the librarians adopt different patterns in their service delivery. Nonetheless, in any method adopted, efficiency and effectiveness must be ensured. To this end, Nnadozie, et. al. (2017) believe that the library staff and other information specialists are expected to possess learned techniques and skills for utilizing a wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in moulding information. This is based on the fact that no one can give what he/she does not have. And, this is the rationale upon which this study is set.

Information Literacy Skill Acquisition for Service Delivery

Developing or acquiring information literacy is an ongoing and a constant

holistic process with often synchronized activities or processes which can be encompassed within the seven pillars of SCONUL Information Literacy (Adeyemi, 2017). These pillars of information literacy includes: identifying (recognize information need), scope (distinguish ways of addressing information gap); planning (construct strategies for locating information), gathering (locate and access information), evaluating (compare and evaluate information), managing (organize, apply and communicate information), and presenting (synthesize and create information) of information (Bent & Stubbings, 2011). Within each "pillar", the research librarian can develop from "novice" to "expert" as they progress through the stages of information literacy. Although, as the information world itself is constantly changing and developing, SCONUL (2011) believe that it is possible to move down a pillar as well as progress upward. This is based on the fact that the expectations of levels reached on each pillar may be different in different contexts and for different ages, levels and area of specialization of the librarians, this is also dependent on the librarian's experience and information need (Adeyemi, 2017). Therefore, any means to be used to acquire information literacy skills by the librarian, the essence of information literacy development must be considered in the context of the broad information landscape in which an individual (now, library user) operates and the librarian's personal information literacy landscape.

Today, research librarians use different channels to acquire information literacy skills. However, most of these channels turn to be practical, while some others tend to be community analysis. It is expedient to understand that most of these channels result in creating awareness and promoting library services to its users. The most common channel used is Facebook, which is popular to library users (Rogers, 2009). According to Rogers (2009), most libraries prefer using social media to promote their services. In his study, social media tools like Twitter, Blogs, Flickr, Podcasts, Online videos are being used with Facebook recording the highest percentage (71.4%) thus granting it popularity. In another study at South Carolina State Library, Facebook (88.8%) is still the most popular channel used, while Twitter was rated at 46.8% (MacManus, 2012). According to American Library Association Report, social networking is used to create awareness in the library to inform users on the new arrivals and also allow them to give feedback about the resources available (Adeyemi, 2017). However, the adoption of these media sites helps the librarians to be acquainted with what is going and how best to provide suitable information to meet the users' needs.

In Pakistan, Khan and Bhatti (2012) investigated the librarians and reported that social media is the common channel used by the librarians to access information, to create awareness on library services and products among library users. Social media tools are used to create awareness by updating users on library news on materials availability, commentary and archival Information about the library (Khan & Bhatti, 2012). In Margaret Thatcher Library for instance,

YouTube and library website are commonly used to create awareness of the library services to users (Khan & Bhatti, 2012). In China, Luo, et al. (2013) carried out a study to check if awareness of library services can be done online and reported that Youku which is a common online video is visited by many people about 160,000 within less than 20 days (Luo, et al. 2013). Youku is a Chinese video-sharing website that enables users to search, view, and share high-quality video content across multiple devices. The application leverages huge Youku online video contents and Youku special technical advantages. From the client, users can easily surf on millions of Youku online video resources, which not only includes user generated videos, but more copyright videos (Luo, et al, 2013). Majority of those who use this application are students who conclude that it is the best method to be used in the library.

Research libraries can create awareness on its information services through display of new books, posters, exhibitions, user orientation programmes, and use of brochures to meet its users' requirements (Kaur & Rani, 2008). These entire channels are used to create awareness on the library information services to its users. Today, libraries have come up with many ways of creating awareness of information services such as, libraries deciding to use e-mail to inform their library users about their new collections (Vasileiou & Rowley, 2011). The most appropriate and cheap way of creating awareness is by word of mouth. Jose and Bhat (2007) agree that the best way to create awareness of information service is to be done orally.

This is in agreement with the findings of Vasileiou and Rowley (2011) that word-of-mouth is the cheapest awareness tool. Gupta and Jambhekar (2002) declare that library staff are the ones to ensure that the library is a welcoming place and not a place to shy away from. These staff should remember that library services are made available through them. Therefore, they should project a good image of the library so that the library goals and objectives are met (Jose & Bhat, 2007). They should be friendly and welcoming for the success of the library. According to Igbeka (2008), when offering library services, library staff should have rules to follow so that library mission and vision are achieved. For instance, they should provide the right information to the right users at the right time so as to save users time. Also, the library should be located in a place where all users can access information resources and not to bring challenges to users as a result of inaccessibility (Kaur & Rani, 2008). Research librarian should extend their services to remote areas where accessibility is a challenge. This can be done by providing mobile libraries to users in remote areas so that they receive services at the right time and in the right format. Dhiman and Sharma (2009) add that libraries should provide services that will assist them to run their operation. For instance, photocopying services should be provided to their users. Kaur and Rani (2008) posit that librarians are the deciding factors of the price they charge when providing services.

Information Literacy Skills and Service Deliver in Research Libraries

From the foregoing expert opinions, it can be concluded that information literacy skills empower people with critical skills, which will help them to become independent information seekers and users and further help them to apply their knowledge from the familiar environment to the unfamiliar. Although the concept of information literacy is relatively a new trend in librarianship that has been advocated to be very imperative to all fields of study. It includes but settingly not limited to the ability to use tools in accessing needed information; the role of this literacy in library service delivery cannot be overemphasized in any sector of the organization or institution, research libraries, inclusive. If information is key to a man's life, a state and a country, it will only be fair and normal to know when and how to use information for solving both personal, external, national, international and research disputes in the long run. Research librarians ought to be information literate for this to be feasible. The end product of it all is to deliver quality and qualitative service. Agreeably, in the information society, information literacy is not only the basis for self-survival, but also the basic qualities and conditions for starting businesses and lifelong learning under the background of the adoption in information society and rapid development of high-tech industry.

Nonetheless, it is not lost on us that in the library profession there has been a sustained great interest in information literacy services. The importance attached to information literacy by library and information professionals can be gouged by the large quantity of discussion on the theme. Many libraries are making information literacy training a core duty and an important role for librarians. Empirically, it has been proven beyond reasonable doubt by scholars in the field of information literacy, that students with information literacy capacity score higher on assessment criteria and in examinations (Udem 2013; Aghanu & Nwankwo, 2018). To this end, one sees why Bruce (as cited in Nwankwo, et al. 2019) quickly concluded that information literacy is central to the pursuit of lifelong learning. This is anchored on the revelation that most people do not possess the skills needed to locate the best resources for their studies and research. Be it as it may, information literacy as a concept, and as the critical competency for lifelong learning, engineered by librarians serve as a change agent (Bundy, 2013). However, there are different impediments to the acquisition of information literacy skills. Such include lack of knowledge of internet access, lack of access to computers, computer illiteracy, negative teaching approach, absence of collaboration between educators, librarians and administrators, and students' negative attitudes and backgrounds. Summarily, there are four categories of information literacy challenges mindset, absence of collaboration, a poor domain of teaching, and lack of knowledge. From the foregoing expert opinions, it can be concluded that information literacy skills empower people with critical skills, which will help them to become independent information seekers and users and further help them to apply their knowledge from the familiar environment to the unfamiliar.

Conclusion

It is very clear that the importance of information literacy skills in service delivery of research librarians cannot be over emphasized. Furthermore, these skills can be acquired through reading of books, discussion with colleagues, attending conferences and seminars, hearing law cases on information misuse, attending lectures, frequent surfing of the Internet, engaging in research works, visiting other libraries and information centers, associating with journalists, engaging in literature search services, constant validation of research instruments, engaging in the editing of research works, etc. these skills when acquired and be applied in offering quality and effective reference services, referral services, bibliographic search services, literature review services, books and articles publication, advertisement placement on the media, selection of library materials, ICT/digital services and library websites maintenance, library blogging services, among other services. It also clear that when this is done, there is a positive effect on the research library as can be seen in the areas of leading to effective reference services delivery by research librarians, making for quality literature search, making librarians task easy and accurate, bringing about acquisition of right information resources, guide against plagiarism, enhancing copyright and protection of intellectual properties, making research librarians independent entities, creating positive image on library services, helping differentiate the research librarians from ordinary Internet users, enhancing the promotion of library publications, and improving on the library institutional repository.

Recommendation

Based on the importance of information literacy, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- i. Research institutes or establishment should intensify efforts in creating further avenues to enable research librarians acquire more information literacy skills as well as impact literacy skills in various research units.
- ii. Library authorities and management should place more emphasis on acquisition of information literacy skills among research librarians by providing other sources and supporting librarians who wish to acquire more skills, either through scholarships, organization or sponsoring of conferences, workshops and other programmes.
- iii. Since information literacy is a life-long practice, research librarians should be constantly trained and retrained in information literacy skills to remain abreast. They should also be allowed to invest their information literacy skills in the discharge of their duties, and positive results, celebrated. This will go a long way in giving the librarians zeal to acquire information literacy skills and apply them in their services delivery, which the study revealed that information literacy skills have positive effects when applied

to services delivery.

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