

AN INITIATIVE TO ENHANCE THE LINKING OF INFORMATION LITERACY IN TEACHING THROUGH FACULTY-LIBRARY COLLABORATION

Nayana Darshani Wijayasundara¹ and Diljit Singh²

¹Library, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka

²Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

e-mail: nayana@webmail.cmb.ac.lk; diljit@um.edu.my

Abstract

This paper is based on a study conducted with a group of university lecturers in Sri Lanka. The objective was to examine how faculty-library collaboration can be used for linking Information Literacy (IL) to their teaching process. The study was initiated because the use of linked-IL in teaching could eventually break down barriers to acceptance of IL by students, if IL components are used and modeled effectively in teaching with the support of the librarian. Developing information skills among university students will help to make them effective users of information. Information literacy cannot be introduced in isolation. Linking of IL in teaching is needed in connection to the teaching in the classroom. Hence, collaboration becomes a key concept. The study group consisted of a librarian and 26 lecturers from various disciplines who had from 1 to 19 years of teaching experience. This study group engaged in four 30 minutes sessions from January to March 2005 with the librarian, discussing the importance of IL in the university system, how to link IL to the curriculum, how to link IL with student assessment, the role of the lecturer and the university librarian in adopting and implementing IL in their work, and how to implement IL programs in collaboration with librarians. After the discussion sessions, the lecturers were interviewed. Before the discussion sessions, the number of lecturers who linked IL to their teaching was 8, and this number increased to 26 after the completion of the discussion sessions. The feedback of the participating lecturers showed that all 100% of them were interested to collaborate with librarians in the area of linking information literacy in teaching. These preliminary findings will be discussed to emphasize the continuation of these programs to foster an information literacy culture in the Sri Lankan university system in view of producing information literate output which will support the development of the country.

Keywords: Information literacy; Faculty-library collaboration; Sri Lankan universities

INTRODUCTION

Today, obtaining a correct piece of information has become complicated due to information overload. The information environment is becoming increasingly complex due to the ever changing information and communication technologies. Developing information skills among university students will help to make them effective users of information. Information literacy is the catalyst of transforming information society today to a learning society tomorrow (Bruce 2004). Information literacy is an important concept of this information age.

Information literacy is considered as a unique set of skills and cognitive abilities that co-exists with and is as relevant as other learning imperatives in contemporary higher education (Scales, Matthews & Johnson 2005). They further state that librarians can begin to translate the relevance of information literacy not only within academics, but to society at large. Information literacy is a dynamic concept that continues to grow to incorporate a larger set of skills essential for a life of meaning in an information era.

Information literacy is not an idea which is static and limited (Ward 2006). As new methods of teaching and learning have emerged in the higher education, the users need more library instructions. A broader context of information literacy has emerged as a framework for effective information inquiry.

The existing problem is that the belief of the use that the ability to use of information technology and the ability to retrieve information are the same skills, which in real terms is not true (Macklin & Fosmire 2004). The concepts of information literacy and information technology literacy are different in the intellectual capabilities involved in using information, and the capabilities required for using technologies that deliver or contain 'information' (Bruce 2004). There are slight differences between being information literate and being able to use information technology. According to Cunningham and Lanning (2002), students do not believe (or unaware) that they need help on information seeking process.

The effective use of information will help the students to develop critical thinking skills and to become independent and life-long learners. The need for life-long learning is emphasized by the explosion of knowledge. Critical thinking skills enable students to evaluate and select the best information for their needs. A capacity for life-long learning and critical thinking skills are independent of any particular discipline and they are identified as important goals of a good education.

Information Literacy cannot be introduced in isolation. Linking of IL in teaching is needed to be done in connection to the teaching in the classroom. Hence, collaboration becomes a key concept. Information literacy education is not possible without partnerships (Bruce 2004; Black, Crest & Volland 2001). These partnerships should be established within and between organizations and are essential for the success of achieving information literacy goals. The most important partnership in IL in the university environment is the collaborative relationship between the university teachers and librarians. The Competency Standards (ACRL 2000) state that "Incorporating information literacy across curricula, in all programs and services, and throughout the administrative life of the university, requires the collaborative efforts of faculty, librarians and administration". In the past information literacy was promoted only by librarians, but now with the explosion of the Internet and other new forms of information sharing, there is an increased emphasize on it by other professionals.

Providing seminars, workshops and events for teaching faculty by librarians increase the faculty understanding of the importance of integrating IL into their courses (Hayness 1996; Iannuzzi 1998; Raspa & Ward 2000). When the number of parties addressing information literacy is increasing, the need for collaborative efforts among professionals become more important.

FACULTY-LIBRARY COLLABORATION

Collaboration is a shared responsibility among the teachers and the librarians (Grafstein 2002). According to Monteil-Overall (2005), collaboration is a process in which two or more individuals work together to integrate information in order to enhance student learning.

The critical need for faculty-library collaboration becomes clear, when reading the literature reviews written by most of the current students with lack of higher cognitive skills. This is combined with the lack of entry-level graduate student information literacy

skills (Lampert 2005). The increasing demands for information literate graduates have projected additional interest for more collaboration (Fiegen 2002).

Success or the failure of library instructions depends on faculty-library relationships (Kraat 2005). Literature on faculty-library collaboration efforts has improved the consideration about the integration of IL into the curriculum (Lampert 2005). One of the main reasons to move library instruction model to information literacy model is faculty-library collaboration (Stein & Lamb 1998). The faculty-library collaboration provides opportunities to increase faculty awareness of information resources and library services. Since teaching faculty is the primary campus contact for students, this awareness is crucial to information literacy instruction.

A survey carried out in 1998, shows that approximately 60% of the faculty-library collaboration projects were on instructional collaboration (Raspa & Ward 2000). Unlike bibliographic instructions, IL is not restricted to a specific medium and its focus is not restricted to the library (Grafstein 2002). According to a survey carried out by Karisiddappa and Rajgoli (2008) in library and information centres of higher learning and research and development organizations/ institutions at Bangalore, India showed that only 26.10% of the librarians are collaborated with other units of their organization to develop and deliver IL programmes apart from other methods. Hence it is important to find out ways to promote faculty-library collaboration in information literacy initiatives.

The results of these studies emphasize that faculty-library collaboration is used at a minimal level in fostering information literacy among the university community. Hence it is important to find out ways to build the faculty-library relationships to deliver information literacy programs as it is the most effective delivery mode as many of the past studies shown (Hardesty 1999; Raspa & Ward 2000; Black, Crest & Volland 2001).

Collaborative IL activities

In 1990, the California State University started a program on information literacy (Curzon 2002). They conducted a series of workshops to the teaching faculty on information literacy as the initial stage and the program was a success. In 2001, the grant receiver, the department of Educational Psychology and Counseling stated the goal of the department was to incorporate the skills of information competence in the departments' student learning outcomes, so that information competence is a required learning outcome for the degree program. This paper also discusses about an initiative taken by conducting discussion sessions with the teaching faculty as same as the workshops described in Curzon's paper.

Owusu-Ansah (2003) gives many examples of faculty-library collaboration in his study which both parties bring their respective knowledge and experience to bear as the development of course-integrated information literacy curricula. Grafstein (2002) proposes a discipline based approach to teaching information literacy. He further states that if librarians teach generic IL skills, the teaching faculty need to impart those IL skills embedding within the research paradigms and procedures of their disciplines.

Cooney's (2003) study discusses a collaborative framework initiated by a librarian and a course instructor for incorporating information literacy into graduate business courses. The findings support the need for information literacy instruction and its assessment for business studies even at the graduate level. At New Jersey City University, a project has started to expand the general Information Literacy Tutorial into WebCT for distance

learning students (Fang 2006). This project has confirmed the importance of the collaboration of academic librarians with the faculty. Moreover it shows the collaborative relationship is important not only on higher education institutions, where the relationship traditionally maintained, but as well as in the online learning environment.

Fiegen's study (2002) looked at two aspects of incorporating information literacy into the business school curriculum of the Business school at California State University, San Marcos. Teaching faculty's identification of course objectives and methods/ assignments that linked to information learning outcomes was the first aspect of the project. The second phase was the developing and testing an assessment instrument that would measure specific information literacy learning outcomes identified for the course.

In a study carried out at Washington State University, it is described that how information literacy is defined and presented to students by different categories of players. The terms of the role of players play in each category, their impact on information literacy curriculum standards, and their goals for assessing information literacy are discussed (Scales 2005).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to garner support and foster an understanding of information literacy among academics by providing definitions, models and practices of information literacy through discussion sessions. The ultimate objective was to examine how faculty-library collaboration can be used for linking Information Literacy (IL) to their teaching process.

The Sri Lankan university system was originated in 1921. Presently it has developed and grown to 14 public universities, an open university, 3 campuses and 6 postgraduate institutes and 9 other institutes. The total student population is around 75,000. For this number of students only 3822 number of academic staff is in the university system (IRQUE 2008). The student-teacher ratio is nearly 20 to 1. Linking of IL in teaching at Sri Lankan universities is at a minimal level. Some university librarians provide information literacy programs directly to students. Since it is not linked with the subject matters students do not pay attention to attend these sessions. Hence it is important to link IL in teaching through faculty-library collaboration.

METHODOLOGY

Most of the past studies on faculty perceptions on information literacy have used survey questionnaire as the data collection instrument. According to Manuel, Molloy and Beck (2003), if research studies use interviews, focus groups, or other constructed-response methodologies, that will allow faculty members to voice their concerns in their own words. Further, it will also helpful in clarifying the library jargons in responding to the questions. In this study the researcher used group discussions which made the teaching staff to discuss the matters on Information Literacy in a more direct way.

The discussion study group consisted of a librarian and 26 lecturers from various disciplines who had from 1 to 19 years of teaching experience. They represented 5 universities out of the 15 universities in the system, Colombo, Moratuwa, Sri Jayawardenapura, Eastern and Rajarata. There were 10 (38.5%) female and 16 (61.5%) male lecturers participated in the discussion study sessions. This group engaged in four 30 minutes sessions from January to June 2005, discussing the importance of IL in the

university system, how to link IL to the curriculum, how to link IL with student assessment, the role of the lecturer and the university librarian in adopting and implementing IL in their work and how the faculty- library collaboration would enhance the IL among university students. At the end of the fourth session, each lecturer was asked the 5 questions shown in Figure 1.

Interview Questions
1. Do you use the following methods in support of your teaching?
2. Why do you use IL in teaching?
3. What changes in teaching are needed for linking IL?
4. What is the most effective way of delivering IL instruction to students?
5. How do you like to work with the librarians?

Figure 1: Interview Questions

The sessions were conducted on the days after their participation on another course conducted at the University of Colombo. Hence the participation on IL discussion sessions was successful and managed to get 100% participation on all four days. Participation by the university is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Participation by University

Name of the University	Number of participants	Percentage
Colombo	8	30.8
Moratuwa	3	11.5
Sri Jayawardenapura	6	23.1
Eastern	4	15.4
Rajarata	5	19.2
Total	26	100

FINDINGS

Using IL in teaching

After the first day of discussion sessions it was asked whether the lecturers use any of methods given in the Table 2 in their teaching. That was the only question asked from the participants apart from the demographic information.

Table 2: Using IL in teaching

Interview Question 1: Do you use the following methods in support of your teaching?	First session	Final session
Consult a librarian before developing lesson plans/ assignments regarding the available resources in the library	0 of 26	10 of 26
You make students to use the library resources in support of your lessons	8 of 26	18 of 26
You ask them to get support of the librarians in citation methods and related	0 of 26	18 of 26

At the end of the first session, 8 out of 26 (30.8%) said that they make students to use the library resources in support of their lessons. None of the other two methods were using in their teaching. That is only 30% of the group which is a low rate.

The same question was asked on the final day discussion to check how many of them have decided to incorporate IL in their teaching after participating in the IL discussion sessions conducted by a librarian. 10 out of 26 (38.5%) lecturers said that they consult a librarian before developing lesson plans/ assignments regarding the available resources in the library. This is very important as the lecturers can make sure to develop the lesson plans/ assignments in accordance with the available library sources. The librarian would be able to provide additional sources related to the topic.

A total of 18 out of 26 (69.2%) respondents showed that they make students to use library resources in support of their lectures, while the same number of respondents aid that they ask students to get support of the librarians in various information needs.

Importance of using IL in teaching

When asked why they use IL in teaching, 15 of 26 (58%) respondents noted that students lack of information literacy skills. Most of the university students have not acquired basic information skills when they were school students. This may be a result of not having school libraries in many of the schools in the island. According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of Education in 1995, out of 8179 schools 70% did not have school libraries and this was excluding the North-East province (Wijetunga & Alahakoon 2005). An Engineering faculty lecturer added that the assignments they mark are not organized properly though they contain the subject requirements. He emphasized that information literacy will help the students to overcome this matter. The lack of information skills among university students is discussed in the study carried out by Raspa and Ward (2000).

Table 3: Importance of using IL in teaching

Interview Question 2: Why do you use IL in teaching?	
Students lack of information literacy skills	15 of 26
IL will help the students to become life-long learners	20 of 26
Develop critical thinking abilities of students	14 of 26

About 77%, i.e. 20 out of 26 academics stated that IL in teaching will help the university students to become life-long learners. Fourteen of 26 respondents (53.8%) also mentioned using IL in teaching will develop critical thinking abilities of students. Critical thinking is defined as the ability to identify central issues or assumptions in an argument, evaluate conflicting claims, eliminate useless information, evaluate evidence of authority, provide support for a conclusion, interpret whether conclusions are warranted on the basis of the data given, incorporate anomalous data into a coherent framework, and read with a high level of comprehension (Furedy & Furedy 1985). Many of the lecturers from the Arts faculties voiced that their final year project essentially contains a research component and this needs the critical thinking ability.

Unlike the results in the Manuel, Molloy and Beck (2005) study, the results of this study show a match between the librarians' perspectives of information literacy and lecturers reasons for valuing information literacy.

Changes needed for linking IL in teaching

The next important thing that discussed was what changes we need to do for linking IL in teaching. About 57.6 % (15 out of 26) lecturers were in the impression that teaching need to be moved from teacher-centred to learner-centred.

Table 4: Changes needed for linking IL in teaching

Interview Question 3: What changes in teaching are needed for linking IL?	
Teaching need to be move from teacher-centred to learner-centred	15 of 26
Using more resource based assessment is needed	18 of 26

“Using more resource based assessment is needed” was agreed by 18 out of 26 of the participated lecturers. Connecting information literacy to appropriate assignments will give librarians an opportunity to teach. Library activities should be designed to involve investigation and problem solving processes. University of Washington (UW) developed a campus-wide program aiming that IL to be a hallmark of a UW degree. Active student learning is an initiative under the program and librarians were the active partners (Williams & Zald 1997)).

Though the ideal may be the campus-wide information literacy programmes, they are relatively rear. Iannuzzi (1998) suggests that librarians make themselves aware of the initiatives on campus and think the ways to get support of information literacy to make those initiatives successful. Faculty-library collaboration can be forged to design class assignments to highlight information literacy concepts (Cox & VandaPol 2005). Librarians play a vital role in collaborating with faculty to implement the changes necessary for an effective IL curriculum. By conducting discussion sessions faculty build a confidence that the library as more of a service and training-centred resource.

Effective ways of delivering IL instruction to students

20 out of 26 (76.9%) said that the most effective way of delivering IL instructions to students is by integrating instructions with the curriculum. This supports the results of the other studies which show that course-integrated information literacy instruction programs are the most prevalent and is the most effective way of delivering information literacy instructions to students (Haynes 1996; Black, Crest & Volland 2001).

Table 5: Ways of delivering IL instruction

Interview Question 4: What is the most effective way of delivering IL instruction to students?	
Integrating instructions with the curriculum	20 of 26
Carried out in one-shot sessions	0 of 26

None of the respondents were agreed that IL instructions need to be carried out in one-shot sessions. Students do not achieve information literacy by attending one library

session. Students learn relevant information skills when they are systematically integrated and sequenced throughout the curriculum (Ward 2006).

Ways to work with the librarians

All the respondents said that they like to collaborate with librarians particularly in the area of linking information literacy in teaching.

Table 6: Ways to work with librarians

Interview Question 5: How do you like to work with the librarians?	
Like to share the teaching and mentoring processes with librarians	19 of 26
Like to share the assessment/ evaluation process with librarians	20 of 26
Like to get the librarians' support on learning activities	17 of 26
Need to initiate and maintain communication with librarians	20 of 26

Nineteen (19) out of 26 (73%) lecturers said that they like to share the teaching and mentoring processes with librarians. 20 out of 26 (76.9%) respondents have shown an interest to share the assessment/ evaluation process with librarians. And 17 out of 26 (65.3%) said that they like to get the librarians' support on learning activities. 20 (76.9%) of them said that there is a need to initiate and maintain communication with librarians. Collaboration has to have open and clear communication. Quantity of communication and quality of communication are needed to be considered in the collaboration process. Interpersonal communication is the state that the members of the group have activities or process of communicating to express ideas and feelings, give or exchange information. These results show that a willingness of lecturers to work together with librarians in universities.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, all the lecturers have good understanding of the concept of information literacy and its importance in making university students empowered in utilizing information for productive use in their own use and for the development of the nation as a whole. It is shown that information literacy programs help to make a positive difference. In order to do so, university librarians must work with the teaching faculty to define and live into the highest aspirations of education helping the students to become information literate so that they might change the world.

The library professionals should also recognise that teaching of IL skills requires a campus wide partnership that combines the expertise of library staff, academic staff and other teaching and learning support services. Library professionals need to have an active role in the restructuring of the teaching-learning environment. Establishing mixed team of library professionals and teaching staff may serve to improve IL products and develop synergies between library and institution's developments (Karisiddappa & Rajgoli 2008). In working towards these common goals, librarians need to equip with new teaching techniques.

This study is an effort taken to initiate information literacy through the faculty-library collaboration. It is important to continue these programs to foster an information literacy culture in the Sri Lankan university system in view of producing information literate output which will support the development of the country.

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