Full Length Research

Information Literacy Skill for Improved Information Seeking Among University Undergraduates in Nigeria

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The study focused on information literacy skill of selected students of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike to know whether they possess information literacy skill to support information seeking in their academic pursuit. Questionnaire containing four research questions correlated at r=83 was used to collect data for this study. The questionnaire was administered by circulation staff to 400 level students as they entered the library which they filled and returned before leaving the library. This level of students was chosen believe that they ought to know how to use the library compared to 100 level students who are considered as new entrants. The questionnaire was distributed for a period of one month during the 2014/2015 academic session. The questionnaire recorded 100% return-rate. Students are aware of information literacy skill but without adequate skills, students use information literacy skill to search information and they agree that information literacy skill assist them to search /seek information

Keywords: Information Literacy, Information Seeking, Skills, Information Search, Information Search Process

INTRODUCTION

The rate of information creation or production, transmission or transfer has increased the quantum of information available for use in our everyday life when compared to over a decade ago. Today, the larger society is information driven such that different kinds of information are readily available for use in both print and electronic versions. It is imperative for users to be prepared to master the necessary skills required to exploit information resources.

It is important for the user to understand why and when information is required to avoid wasting much time during information seeking. This requires that the information user will be able to scrutinize and obtain the needed information before use and exchange for the benefit of the larger society. Again, knowledge of information literacy skill will greatly assist the individual to search and access information required for daily assignment. As a complement to life-long learning experience, information literacy skill will improve learning abilities and information utility of students which is critical for national

development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Information Literacy Skill for Improved Information Seeking

Information literacy skill can be said to be synonymous with information seeking process in that both of them emphasize cognition of the need for information, why, when, where to locate or find information, use and exchange of information. In essence, information literacy skill and information seeking process both address issues of being knowledgeable in information seeking for the attainment of a set of goals. Kahlthau (1994) and CLIP (2012) writing on the concept of information seeking process and information literacy skill respectively reveal the alignment between the two fundamental issues in information searching. Wilson (2000) gives an insight into the synergy between information seeking process and information literacy skill both of which addresses issues of accessibility and skills required to achieve same.

The American Library Association (2008) notes that an individual's ability to recognize information need, locate, evaluate and effectively use information is information literacy. In the same vein, information seeking process addresses issues of strategies employed by an information user when he/she searches for the required piece of information. The underlying ingredient is the need, search and retrieval of the required kind of information. Information literacy skill encompasses information technology skills which complements and enhances information literacy and information seeking processes. Consequently, it can be adduced that those skills which a user require to be said to possess information literacy skill are no doubt similar to those strategies required by an information seeker to be able to access the needed kind of information. The essence of information literacy skill is an important knowledge for the information user to be able to access and use information for social, education, research and other learning purposes. The Chartered Library and Information Practitioner, CLIP (2013) listed skills such as recognition of information need, availability of information resources, knowledge of how to find information and ability to evaluate information as requisites for information literacy. Information literacy skill is a strategy that will significantly assist students to develop cognitive and intellectual capacities necessary for ethical information management. It will enable students to recognize information need, develop search strategies, evaluate and select relevant information from available resources for the achievement of a set of goals. It is this information searching/seeking strategies or know-how that is often referred to as information literacy.

Libraries and information centres in Nigeria are yet to achieve the benefits of information literate society. Information literacy skill is akin to library instruction in universities in Nigeria which is aimed at teaching students how to use the library and how to search for information. Libraries and librarians must form the hub for the deployment of information literacy skill for the enhancement of academic achievement and for life-long learning, Ojedokun (2007) and Chimah (2014). Information literacy will improve students' learning and information seeking abilities as students can search, find, locate, evaluate, use, communicate and exchange information to attain set objectives and Moore (2002) and (Abilock, 2004). A skilled information user is better equipped for the use of different library and information systems to seek and use information for present and future needs. This may not be said to be the case with a user who does possess the requisite information literacy skill.

A common idea canvassed in information literacy skill is the need for an information user to be able to find the information required for a given task. It enthuses that the information user recognizes an inalienable need for information and devices the appropriate strategies, methods or processes to get the required piece of information. Information literacy is a complex strategic process involving the ways and means of searching, evaluating, using and exchange of information. Information seeking or searching process is a response which emanate from a perception of need for information to accomplish a task by the user (Tahir, 2008), (Wilson, 2000), (Marchionini, 1997) and (Leckie and Given, 2005). Wilson (1999) set the agenda for an understanding of the concept of information seeking model even as Tahir (2008) and Obinyan (2014) identified inadequate and lack of information literacy skill as an impediment to information seeking process.

Information literacy skill and information seeking process are two concepts in librarianship that deal with issues of enhanced access to information. Both are concerned with the development of methods and processes that will enable the information user to search and find the required piece of information to accomplish a given task or information need. Information is available in different forms and all the user needs is an in-depth knowledge of who, what, where, when, why and to access it. Information seeking processes and information literacy skill are complementary when we consider information model. Here, question formulation/conceptualization, recognition of existing body of knowledge and information resources precedes information search or information seeking and even information literacy skill which are geared towards improved access.

INFORMATION LITERACY SKILL AND DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital literacy helps the information user to broaden his/her search horizon through the use of digitized or electronic resources especially the Internet. However, digital literacy is not synonymous with information or with information seeking let alone information literacy skill. While information literacy skill assists the user to articulate, strategize, plan and access available information before use, digital literacy provides the gateway for faster or quicker search and retrieval with the use of information and communication technologies and modern telecommunication hardware and software. Digital literacy a tool which supports the user to execute and exhibit information literacy skill required to access information. Information literacy skill can be said to be an association between information sources and tools employed to access information. Information literacy skill and digital literacy skill enables the information user to contribute and benefit from communication exchange. Umebali (2014) highlighted some areas where information literacy skill requires attention while CLIP (2013) enumerated some competencies the information user needs to understand to be able to explore and exploit the benefits of information literacy skill. Meanwhile,

INFORMATION LITERACY SKILL FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION

Tertiary education is that level of education above secondary school level such as polytechnics, colleges, distance learning centres, universities, etc. Tertiary education affords students the opportunity to acquire necessary skills for development and progress in life. It also prepares students for more challenges and responsibilities later in life. To be able to achieve the required level and quality of education necessary for the attainment of a better society, students at this level require adequate information to expand their knowledge horizon and improve on their career development. To be able to achieve this require that students have sound knowledge of information literacy skill and an understanding of information seeking strategies or processes to enable them to accomplish a given task.

Success in tertiary education revolves around availability and accessibility of information resources from different sources. Information is an important ingredient required for the attainment of social, educational, economic, environmental, religious, scientific and technological, etc advancement of mankind. Quality tertiary education can only be attained when students have access to quality information resources for research and learning. High level manpower required for national

development of every society can be achieved if students learn and develop necessary information literacy skill and information seeking processes which they can depend upon later in life considering the near knowledge/information dependent economy of the 21st century (Playdon, 2013) which has revolutionized the way we live and work.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It has been observed that students from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike who use the Library, National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike encounter some difficulties getting the information they need from the library. They lack adequate knowledge of how to access information from the library collection. Students often find it difficult to ask the right kind of question which will assist the library staff to give them the necessary assistance to enable them retrieve the information they need. It is based on this observation that this study sets out to know the extent of the students' knowledge and understanding of information literacy skill as an element in information/ information seeking process.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of this study:

(i)   To find out whether students are aware of information literacy skill
(ii)   To see whether students possess information literacy skill
(iii)   To know whether students use information literacy skill for information seeking
(iv)   To find out whether information literacy skill enhances information seeking / search among students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(i)   Are students aware of information literacy skill
(ii)   Do students possess information literacy skill
(iii)   Do students use information literacy skill to seek information
(iv)   Does information literacy skill enhance information seeking among students

METHODOLOGY/METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION/DATA ANALYSIS

Simple descriptive statistical was adopted and structured

Table 1. Data Presentation

S/N	Research Questions	Frequency	Weighted score
1	Are students aware of information literacy skill?	60	3.04
2	Do students possess information literacy skill?	34	2.4
3	Do students use information literacy skill to search/seek information?	56	3.1
4	Does information literacy skill enhance information seeking among students?	50	2.7

questionnaire used for data collection to enable the researcher to describe the population used in the study. Two hundred undergraduate students (200 level and above) of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture who occasionally use the Library, National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike were randomly selected. They were given the questionnaire during the 2013 academic session for a period of one month each between the first and second semesters before the commencement of their semester examination. The questionnaire was tested and correlated at r=83%. The questionnaire was given to the students to fill as they enter the library and returned as the students leave the library. The Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 15.0) was used for collation and analysis and results presented using frequency, percentages and tables (Table 1) with an acceptable benchmark of 2.5.

DISCUSSION

The awareness of information literacy skill among students is high at 3.4. This awareness may be as a result of their various course assignments which require information which they need to access or simply as a result of their being taught use of library. However, students do not possess information literacy skill necessary for improved academic pursuit as shown on the table 1. Students' use of information literacy skill in information seeking is notwithstanding high considering the weighted mean at 3.1. Employing information literacy skill in seeking information has the potential to improve information search as confirmed by the result of this investigation as represented by the weighted score of 3.1 and 2.7 in research questions 3 and 4 in the table. Nevertheless when one puts the responses in research question 2 and that for questions 3 and 4 side by side, one may be tempted to say that the students did not understand the questions asked. This is because possessing information literacy skill is what enables and enhances a user's information seeking. Meanwhile it is possible that users equate the assistance which they get from library staff and sometimes from research assistants

to mean information literacy skill. This is also in consonance with overall objective of the idea of information literacy skill which is to improve access to information.

CONCLUSION

Information literacy skill is not new to the students since they are aware of it, make use of it and agree that it enhances their information seeking. Nevertheless, what is lacking is possession of the required skill that will enable students to effectively deploy it in their information seeking to further improve their studies.

RECOMMENDATION

Effort must be made by librarians and other information practitioners to ensure that students understand the importance of good knowledge of information literacy skill as a complement of successful information seeking process or strategy which will improve learning among students. Students need to be taught information literacy skill as part of the general studies course and librarians must be allowed to teach it in schools.

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