

ROLE OF LIBRARIANS AS PRESENTED IN THE INFORMATION LITERACY MODELS

*Dr. A. K. Baradol

**Gopakumar.V

Abstract

The Paper defines the term information literacy. Discusses the information literacy models prescribed by US National Commission on Library and Information Science, ALA, U.K. Standing Conference of National and University Libraries. The role of librarians in imparting information literacy is discussed. An account of the Indian scene is presented. Paper suggests a phase wise approach for the development of information literacy in India. The importance of information literacy for the distance learners also is discussed.

1. Introduction

The post-industrial society is characterized by the evolution of advanced telecommunications technology and the evolution of computers. The computers and the network of telecommunication systems together have converted the world into a global village. Use of short messaging service over cell phones, use of ATM cards and e-mail has become quite common in modern society. Now we can see the new ways and methods by which social and economic exchanges are conducted, knowledge is created, retrieved and utilized. To be an active member of this society one needs to be aware of these methods and the jargons associated with it.

It was once said that if you were not able to use computers you would be an illiterate. But the scenario has now changed. The development of Internet from the simple ARPANET in USA to a worldwide information super highway caused the unimaginable volume of information output. It also helped quick and easy information transaction in the form of www, e-mail, Newsgroups etc. Everyone is expected to cope with the tremendous volume of information output from all over the world. One's ability to trace out the required information at the required time makes a person a winner. To feel the requirement of information, searching the relevant item and making its maximum use are all considered as the abilities in this information era. "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, he feeds himself for lifetime" (Chinese proverb). Hence the inculcation of these abilities, otherwise called as Information Literacy, into the future generations is the responsibility vested with all

* Professor and Chairman, Department of Library and Information Science, Mangalore University, Mangalagangotri

** Research Scholar under F.I.P. of the UGC, Department of Library and Information Science, Mangalore University, Mangalagangotri

in the field of education. Let us now discuss in detail what actually is Information Literacy.

Information Literacy is the process of knowing when and why information is required, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical way. It is the combination of all the skills (competencies) that are required for the effective and maximum use of information.

2. Existing Models of Information Literacy

In 1990 Eisenberg and Berkowitz proposed the **Big Six Skills** model for information literacy. The Big Six Skills are a 'general problem solving approach to library and information instruction'. The skills are process based and follow a logical order:

- Task definition
- Information seeking strategies
- Location and access
- Use of information
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

The approach of Big Six Skills is similar to the one advocated in much traditional library user education: thinking through the information search process before actually conducting the search. (Webb and Powis)¹

The US National Commission on Library and Information Science, 2003 defines Information Literacy as "It encompasses knowledge of one's information concerns and needs, and the ability to identify locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand; it is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the information society, and is part of the basic human right of life long learning."²

The current and most cited definition for Information Literacy comes from American Library Association, which reads as "Information Literacy is the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze and use information"(American Library Association)³

The U.K. Standing Conference of National and University Libraries' (SCONUL) Task Force on Information Skills has proposed another model for Information Literacy. This model is popularly known as the '**Seven Pillars of Wisdom**' (SCONUL)⁴ According to this the seven headline skills are;

1. The ability to identify the need for information
2. The ability to distinguish ways in which the information requirement may be addressed:
 - knowledge of the appropriate kinds of resources, both print and non-print
 - selection of resources with 'best fit' for task at hand
 - the ability to understand the issues affecting accessibility of sources
3. The ability to construct strategies for locating information
 - to articulate information need to match against resources
 - to develop a systematic method appropriate for the need
 - to understand the principles of construction and generation of databases.
4. The ability to locate and access information:
 - to develop appropriate searching techniques (e.g. use of Boolean)
 - to use communication and information technologies, including terms international academic networks
 - to use appropriate indexing and abstracting services, citation indexes and databases
 - to use current awareness methods to keep up to date.
5. The ability to compare and evaluate information obtained from different sources:
 - Awareness of bias and authority issues
 - Awareness of the peer review process of scholarly publishing
 - Appropriate extraction of information matching the information need

6. The ability to organize, apply and communicate information to others in ways appropriate:

- To the situation
- To cite bibliographic references in project reports and theses
- To construct a personal bibliographic system
- To apply information to the problem at hand
- To communicate effectively using appropriate medium
- To understand issues of copyright and plagiarism.

7. The ability to synthesize and build upon existing information, contributing to the creation of new knowledge.

The information skills model proposed diagrammatically gives the gradual development of an information literate person from a novice to an expert.

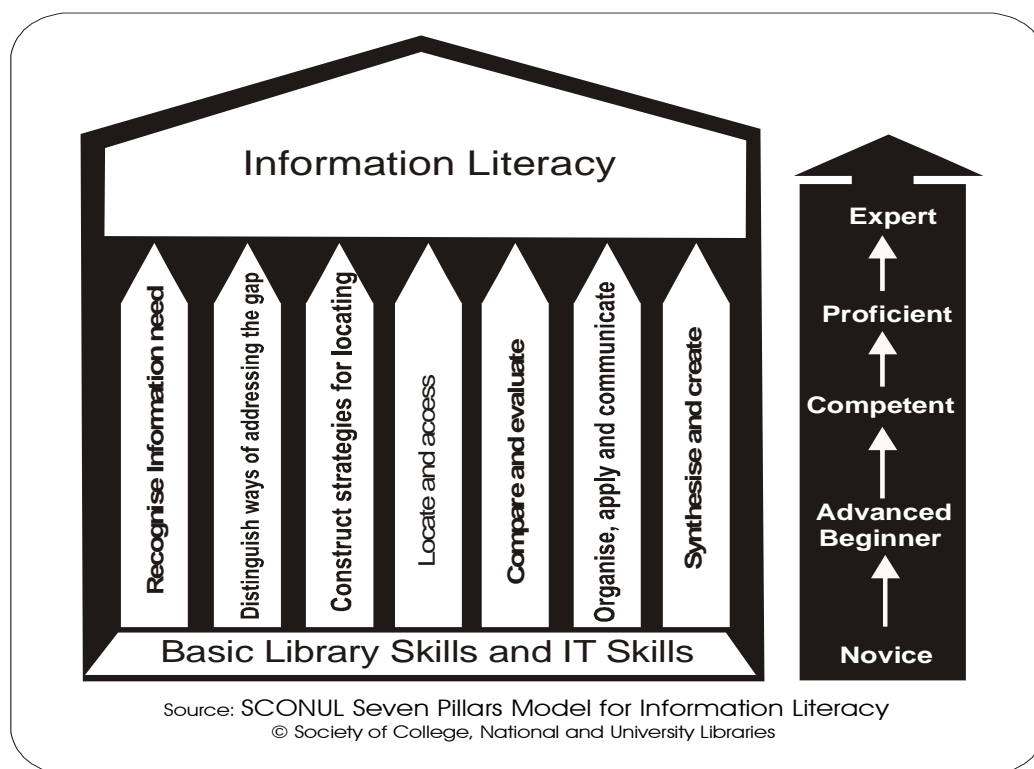


Fig. 1 Chart showing the seven Pillars model of Information literacy

From the above discussions, we can rationalize that Information Literacy is not a single skill, but a combination of certain coherent skills. An Information Literate person must have the understanding of-

- a need for information
- the resources available
- how to find information
- the need to evaluate search results
- how to work with the exploit results
- ethics and responsibility of use
- how to communicate or share the findings
- how to manage the findings.

Vickery and Vickery⁵ had schematically represented the social transfer of information of all kinds in the following way.

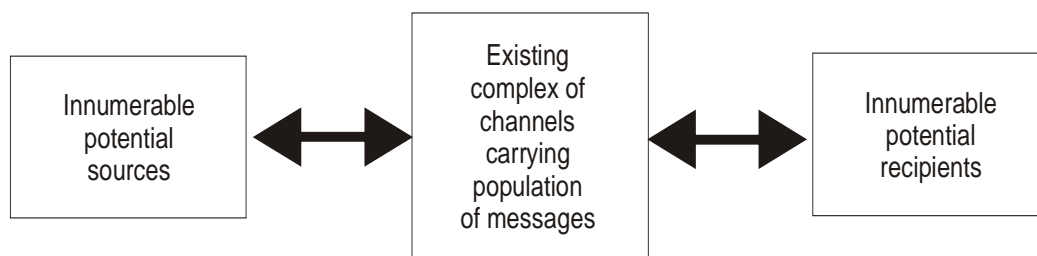


Fig. 2 Chart showing the flow of information

In this system sources and recipients seek each other. The complex of channels is the essential link between them in our society, but it is at the same time a filter through which informative communications must pass. Information literacy has a great role to play in this transfer cycle. The Potential recipient of information should be literate enough to feel the need of information, find out the sources of relevant information, gather it and analyze and later should be able to communicate the results of his research in the most ethical way. This liberal art of information literacy has to be inculcated into the students so that he can make use of it in the process of life long learning. (Shapiro and Hughes)⁶

3. Role of librarians as presented in Information Literacy models:

Traditionally library professionals used to provide guidance to the users of the library on making use of the various bibliographic tools like catalogue, indexes and

abstracts, so that a user himself can find out the required source of information. This was known as Bibliographic Instruction. The important intention behind Bibliographic Instruction was that the user would develop a capacity to find required resources by oneself later on.

Even now the scenario is the same. But the information resources available are of multifarious kinds and are in abundance. The resources range from printed documents, e-resources, WebPages, online databases of full text journals and other multimedia formats. In this age of flooding information also librarians are able to tell

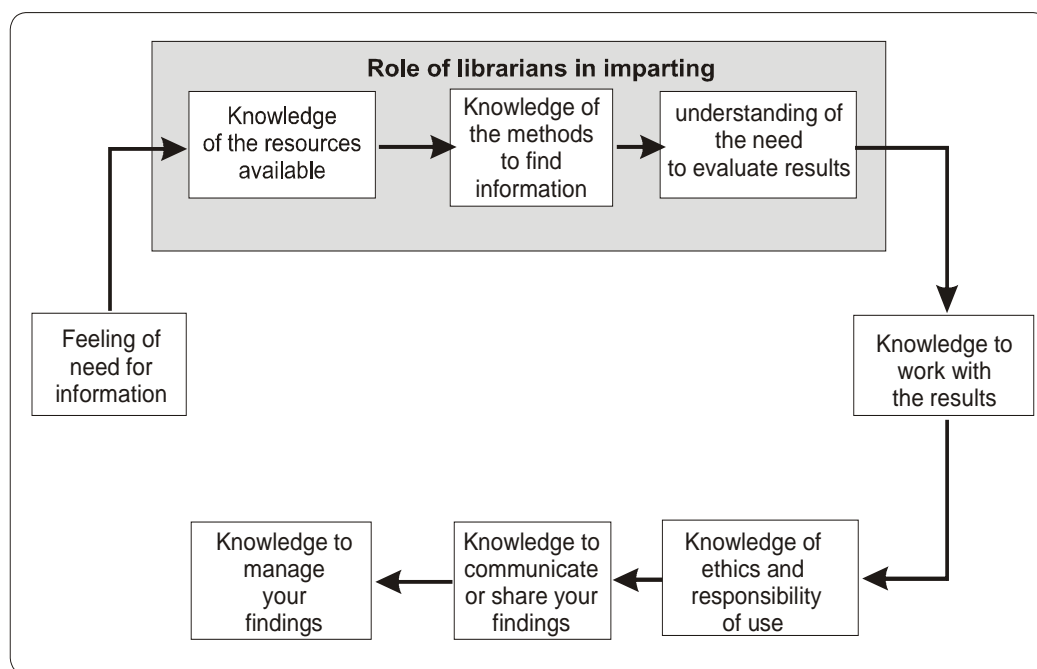


Fig.3 Role of librarians in imparting information literacy

the users regarding the potential resources, build up suitable devices to help in searching the relevant sources and to an extent help the user in evaluating the retrieved resources. Hence the role of librarians is confined to educate the users to take advantage of the new and emerging technologies.

There is another view among professional librarians that the era of bibliographic instruction is over and to day we cannot expect clients to come over to the library in order to get a product. Modern service economy in which we all must now operate, the professional librarianship will simply not survive unless we wake up and provide the users with the tailor made information products. They also fear that

our role will be taken over by others who are more accommodative and ready to provide the required service. (Goodson, C.)⁷

The role of librarian in providing information literacy remains the same. The professionally qualified librarian should continue with the traditional support of users with such instructions, so that life long learners and researchers are produced. Librarians are able to do this as they are trained to do so. Hence let us continue with what we were doing in this present scenario also but with the required variations.

The Information literacy has other segments. A person will approach a library when he feels the need for information. Hence aptitude towards information has to be developed through class assignments and research themes. Further, the ethical use of information and the bringing out of the information product are all to be inculcated among the future generations. These priorities cannot be made part of librarian's role. But should be integrated with the curriculum of formal education at all levels. Hence imparting information literacy is a shared responsibility with the faculty and the library professionals. Librarians are aware of the latest trends in the information scenario and the technical know how. But to teach these to the students they have to be send to the libraries through class assignments and research initiatives. Just as how librarians imparted bibliographic instruction to the students, information literacy aspects also can be taught.

The total task of information literacy instruction carries some areas which faculty should accomplish, like igniting research problems in the fresh minds of the students, teaching various documentation styles and copyright skills and making maximum use of the information they have created in the most useful way. These tasks can be completed only through their lectures or notes.

Librarians can help students in developing suitable search strategies. They will also help the students in the use of various mechanisms and software tools to accomplish search. Evaluation of the search output also can be carried out with the help of librarians.

4. Indian scenario of Information Literacy

The importance of this concept has not been a subject of serious discussion in India. This is indicated by the lack of literature on the subject. However debates on information literacy going on. Every body, including educators accept the fact that IT instruction is necessary for the future. But the importance information and search strategies in the digital scenario are not at all seriously considered so far. A White paper on Information Literacy needs to be published by the Government of India to bring about serious discussion on the subject. As the penetration of Internet has not attained to a satisfactory level in India, the subject is to be considered with special care. Otherwise we will be adding to the awful digital divide existing in our country.

Value added Curricula

As on now the curricula of the High schools, Higher Secondary Schools and Colleges in India do not possess Information Literacy components. But the School Boards at the national level have added assignments in their curricula. This creates the skills for the development of information seeking attitude. However, this is lacking in the statewide syllabi. Hence to have a uniform approach the syllabi of the national and state boards of education must be re-written adding Information Literacy components. This is value addition for the curricula. The possible impacts of adding Information Literacy components in curricula are the following.

- Value addition of general education curriculum by including information literacy concept helps in the promotion of learning with high standards.
- Students would start to work in teams to gather information and to solve the problems before them, which will lead to collaborative efforts and teamwork. Hence adding information literacy into the course content makes it a learner centered experience.
- Multiple times Increase in the use of information.
- The negative tendencies of plagiarism and copy paste attitudes get eliminated from the forth-coming generations through this value addition.

- The addition of Information Literacy in the curricula enhances creativity among the students. They formulate the research question, traces out the relevant information and solves the problems before them. They will be tempted to have positive attitudes all along their life.

5. Proposal of phase wise development of Information Literacy

“Information Literacy is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It forms the basis of life long learning” (ACRL Task Force on Information Literacy Standards)⁸

The question as to where we should start the instruction for information literacy has to be answered first. As already stated Information literacy is a set of related skills and its instruction can be developed in a phased manner.

- The first phase consist of imparting the tendency to look for information. As already stated class assignments and research themes given to high school students will help to develop a new thirst for information among the students.
- The second phase consists of bibliographic instruction to carry out search for information. This should be done during the higher secondary stages of education. Gradually computer skills can also be imparted at this phase.
- The third phase consists of both bibliographic instruction and computer skills, which is imparted during the graduation period. The ethics and methods of publishing the research output also can be imparted in this phase.
- The post graduation period is for polishing the skills they have acquired so far. By that time each student will be able to find out the required information by himself and will develop into a life long researcher and learner.

Distance education mode is getting predominance all over the world and in India as method of learning and hence we cannot ignore the majority of students in

that stream. Distance learning is primarily a self-learning method. Distance Education is 'the various forms of study at all levels which are not under continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms on the same premise, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organisation'. (Holmberg) ⁹.

'Distance learners have special need for training in information literacy, however, for several reasons. The special circumstances include distance learner's access to an on-campus library, the essential nature of technology assisted-learning, the importance of fostering broad-based information skills, and their need to master the information technology itself (Johnstone and Krauth) ¹⁰. Traditional library services are not sufficient enough to meet the library needs of the distance learning students who have unique challenges before them regarding information access and delivery. The methods by which information literacy training can be given to them also varies from that of regular students as they are not regular visitors of the library.

The concept of information literacy is more important to the distance education students as the modern trend is to provide distance education through online courses. The libraries are also gradually coming up with support in the form of access to remote databases, databases of full text journals and other web resources. Libraries also arrange e-mail and chat reference services for distance learners. Hence handouts are mailed to distance learners in making use of these resources. Usually a web component imparting basic training in the use of the resources is available in the library websites.

6. Conclusion:

The buzzword 'Information literacy' has got its importance and attention in India too. We cannot neglect the concept in the period of globalisation and liberalisation. If the next generations are to be competent enough, instill in them the skills to frame a research question, frame search strategies and conduct the research necessary to answer the question.

References:

1. Webb, Jo and Powis, Chris (2004): *Teaching Information Skills*, Facet Publishing; London. (pp.7-8)
2. *ibid.* (pp. 8-9)
3. American Library Association (2003): Introduction to Information Literacy, available (www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/acrlinfolit/infolitoverview/intotoinfolit/introinfolit.htm)
4. SCONUL Advisory Committee on Information Literacy (1999): *Information Skills in Higher Education, Briefing paper*, London, SCONUL available at (www.sconul.ac.uk/activities/inf-lit/papers/Seven-pillars.html)
5. Vickery and Vickery (2004): *Information Science in Theory and practice*, K. G. Saur, Munchen
6. Shapiro and Hughes, (1996): *Information Literacy as a Liberal Art*, *Educom Review* Vol.31 No. 2
7. Goodson, C. (1997): *Putting Service Back in Library Service*, *C&RL News* Vol.58 No.3: 186-87
8. Association of College and Research Libraries (2000): *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* available at www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html
9. Holmberg, Borje (1989): *Theory and Practice of Distance Education*, CroomHelm, London
10. Johnstone, Sally M and Krauth, Barbara (2002): *Information Literacy and the Distance Learner*, White paper for UNESCO, the U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, and the National Forum on Information Literacy for using at the Information Literacy Meeting of Experts, Prague, The Czech Republic available at www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitcon&meet/papers/johnstone-fullpaper.pdf