INFORMATION LITERACY: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The present paper deals with information literacy, its concept, definitions, evolution of IL, aims & objectives, need & importance and information literacy benefit also deals in this paper in brief.

Keywords: *Literacy, Information Literacy, Lifelong Learning, UNESCO, ALA, ACRL*

1.1   INTRODUCTION

The greatest challenge for society in the 21st century is to keep pace with the knowledge and technological expertise necessary for finding, applying and evaluating information. It is acknowledged that we live in an information-rich society where the amount of information in the world is presently doubling every three years. Therefore it is necessity of 21st century to include information literacy in education.

Information literate people have a number of qualities and skills (Engeldinger, 1998). We are living in the information age. Information is the basic requirement for every human activity and it is important as food, air and water. Information in itself has no value, but its value lies in its communication and use. Information literacy plays a transformational role in building the information capability at large (Rao and Nagar, 2005). Information literacy is a skill that is widely relevant and extends beyond the walls of the classroom into the world of social responsibility (Idiodi, 2005).

1.2   DEFINITIONAL ANALYSIS

1.1.1 INFORMATION

Information can be defined as "the meaning that a human assigns to data by means of conventions used in their presentation". In other words, information is data that has given shape. It may be considered as processed data. Thus, information is data plus the meaning, which has to be a result of human action (Seetharama, 1999); some active principal governing the human capacity to process fragments which are meaningless in isolation into a coherent and meaningful whole the receiver (Losee, 1997) .

1.1.2 LITERACY

Literacy (derived from Latin litteratus) is a concept that has been evolving over time and has had a variety of meanings, to include the skills needed to perform well in society. The simplest form of literacy involves the ability to use language in its written form: a literate person is able to read, write and understand his or her native language and expresses a simple thought in writing (Bawden, 2001).

The term literacy as the quality of state of being literate, knowledge of letters, ability to read and write (Oxford, 1978, Chambers English Dictionary, 2003); ability to read 40 words per minute, write 20 words per minute and do 2 digits arithmetic (India, 2008); ability to read, write and do arithmetic. It comprises other skills needed for an individual's full autonomy and capacity to function effectively in a given society (UNESCO, 2002).

1.1.3 INFORMATION LITERACY

Information Literacy is an understanding and set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed, have the ability to locate, evaluate, use effectively the needed information and create information within cultural and social context (Abid, 2004; ACRL, 2000; ALA, 1989; CAUL, 2004; Dudziak, 2006; CILIP, 2005; UNESCO, 2003; Webb and Powis, 2004; Karisiddappa and Kavita, 2005; and then to use that information to make wise decisions or choices (Kuffalikar and Rajyalakshmi, 2006); simply in old material (i.e. bibliographic instruction) in a new package (Lawrence, 1991);

The standard definition of information literacy now used in Australia is found in the

Council of Australian University Librarians' (CAUL) information literacy standards, released in March, 2001:

An information literate person is able to:

1. Recognize a need for information;

2. Determine the extent of information needed;

3. Access the needed information efficiently;

4. Evaluate the information and its sources;

5. Incorporate selected information into their knowledge base;

6. Use information effectively to accomplish a purpose;

7. Understand economic, legal, social and cultural issues in the   use of information;

8. Access and use information ethically and legally;

9. Classify, store, manipulate and redraft information collected or generated; and

An information literate person must be learn to know, to do, to be and to work together; able to make sense, ensure quality, learn independently, think critically, use information ethically and strategically (Jagtar Singh, 2008).

1.3   EVOLUTION OF CONCEPT

The term information literacy achieved its current prominence within the library community with the advent of the information explosion. An information environment characterized by an exponential increase in information that is freely available over the internet, along with the rapid development of information technologies that facilitate the access and dissemination of this information (Grafstein, 2007).

The term "information literacy" was first introduced in 1974 by Zurkowski (the President of the US Information Industry Association), in a submission to the US National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, to identify people trained in the application of information resources to their work (Carbo, 1997; Joint, 2005; Jagtar Singh, 2008; Faust, 2001).

The idea of information literacy, emerging with the advent of information technologies in the early 1970s, has grown, taken shape and strengthened to become recognized as the critical literacy for the 21st century. He recognized that 'information literates' would be better able to exploit information resources (Bruce, 2002).

The information Literacy built upon and expanded the decades-long efforts of librarians to help their users learn about and how to utilize research tools and materials in their own libraries. Librarians wanted users to be able to transfer and apply this knowledge to

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new environments and to research tools that were new two them. Information literacy expands this effort beyond libraries and librarians, and focuses on the learner, rather than the teacher (Grassian, 2004).

1.4   AIMS OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Information literacy aims are given by ALA (2005) is as follows.

1. To teach students how to find information and prepare them for lifelong learning because they can "always find information needed for any task or decision at hand.

2. It forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education.

3. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning.

4. To ensure that people understand how to, and why they need to learn about sources in the information society.

5. To preparing students to enter the world of scholarship. The shift in focus from teaching to learning in higher education can be paralleled in the shift from bibliographic instruction to information literacy.

6. Learning theories state that successful learning includes the person's ability to increase their knowledge, to memories and reproduce that knowledge, to apply it and understand what was done, to see something in a new way, and finally to change as a person.

7. It gives people the ability to question, research, find meaning, develop ideas, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, reason, communicate, transfer, solve problems, make decisions, understand nature of information, reflect, use technology effectively, use information safely and responsibly and produce new knowledge.

8. It is necessary to make the learners feel more confident and skill in their ability to manage information (ALA, 2005).

9. To apply the principals of scholarly communication to problems of information handling.

10. Confidence in using and satisfaction in carrying out information searching (Ghosh and Das, 2006).

The basic aim of Information Literacy is to develop sense-making ability among the stakeholders (Jagtar Singh, 2008).

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1.5   NEEDS AND IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Information literacy is the critical issue for the 21st century of keen importance to all educational stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, librarians etc. The information explosion of the late 20th century subsequently gave birth to the concept of information literacy (ACRL, 2002).

Information literacy instruction assists users in identifying and selecting necessary information, and using appropriate search strategies in evaluating, organizing and synthesizing the information thus acquired into a meaningful state. It makes them self-reliant and gives them a sense of being in control of their learning (Kavulya, 2003).

An additional factor that has also made information literacy an essential attainment is that participative citizenship in today's world requires that all people, not only students, become information-literate. This means that they must not only be able to recognize when information is needed, but also be able to identify, locate, evaluate and use effectively information needed for decision-making or fulfilling different goals. Information literacy is a skill that is widely relevant and extends beyond the walls of the classroom into the world of social responsibility (Idiodi, 2005).

The development of information literacy is central to the academic success (Faust, 2001). Information literacy makes the students beyond the role of passive listener and note taker and allows them to take some direction and initiative during class. The main purpose of including this in education system is to direct the students that will allow them to discover the material they work with fellow students to understand the curriculum.

1.5.1   Need

The need of information literacy may be essential due to the following reasons.

1. Rapid increase in the stream of information due to information revolution;

2. Advent of information and communication technologies;

3. Significant changes in information environment in content are affecting information users in several dimensions.

4. Changing shape of libraries ;

5. Wide dispersal of information ;

6. Increase in number of users , and

7. Research on complex and interdisciplinary topics. (Dhiman, 2006; Jayaprakash and Gupta, 2005; 2006).

8. Availability of information in abundance in various forms & formats.

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9. Availability of information is free of any geographical boundaries.

10. Abundance of information makes it difficult to find enact information.

11. The question of authenticity, validity & reliability of culled out information clubbed with expanding quantity is a serious problem and needs valid consideration.

12. Abundance of information will not create informed citizenry.

13. Majority of users to use IT & to take advantage of wealth of resources currently available is becoming an important objective, for learners of all ages.

14. Information kiosks, learning resource centers etc. play key role in imparting Information Literacy to their beneficiaries to acquire compatible skills for handling printed vis-à-vis electronic sources.

15. Skills of Information Literacy would train beneficiaries to take a logical path in their search for & application of Information (Mokhtar and Majid, 2008).

1.5.2 Importance

A brief overview of importance of information literacy is presented here.

1. To be an independent lifelong learner it is essential to achieve a high level of information literacy (Rockman, 2005).

2. Equity of opportunities among citizens is extremely important. One of the ultimate benefits of information literacy is to help close the gap between the information poor and the information rich (Ercegovac, 1998).

3. Information literacy is required to have a critical thinking approach. An approach that would lead to economic and cultural progress of a nation.

4. Information literacy is important for a strong democracy.

5. A sheer abundance of information in electronic format has made information literacy increasingly important. Traditional print resources could be subjected to a quality assurance process. Whereas, on line e-resources in the form of web pages look alike. "With the Internet sources, none of the quality assurance mechanisms can be assumed. The onus is on the user to apply a critical faculty.

6. Information literacy is also important to understand the difficult questions of ownership of information and copyright.

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7. Students should learn to respect the author's rights. The cutting and pasting culture that is widespread among the students can be addressed with the help of information literacy programmes (Hadengue, 2005).

8. Information literacy is a prerequisite for – participative citizenship; social inclusion; the creation of new knowledge; personal empowerment; and learning for life (Bundy, 2005).

1.6 BENEFITS OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Following are the benefits of information literacy are.

1. Expansion of knowledge through substantive operations of knowledge creation.

2. Synthesis of data and information into knowledge.

3. Appropriate and critical application of information and knowledge in problems solving.

4. Enhancement of the critical thinking

5. Incorporation of validated information in the personal or corporate knowledge base.

6. Motivation for self-directed learning.

7. Appreciation for lifelong learning (Dhiman, 2006; Khairah, 2005).

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