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## **Information Literacy: Positioning Librarians for Sustainable Development**

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### **Abstract**

Information literacy is a very important resource for every librarian in achieving sustainable development. This paper discusses the role of Librarians in achieving sustainable development through information literacy. The different roles the librarian is expected to play in information literacy and the components of sustainable development are highlighted. The importance of information literacy in the society is also discussed. It maintains that librarians should be well positioned for effective and sustainable information literate society by equipping themselves with certain competencies and skills highlighted also in the paper. The various characteristics of an information literate person were also highlighted. Emerging trends which facilitate information literacy was also discussed. Challenges faced include lack of training, lack of modern library facilities and it is recommended that Librarians participate in continuing professional development to keep them updated, and the use of social media in information delivery.

**Keywords:** information literacy, sustainable development, competencies, emerging trends, web 2.0, social media, Librarians.

### **Introduction**

Over the years information literacy has emerged as a central purpose for librarians particularly academic librarians. The concept of information literacy was first introduced in 1974 by Paul Zuruwski, the president of the United States Information Industry Association; in a proposal submitted to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS). According to Zuruwski: "People trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literates, they have learned techniques and skills for utilising the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in moulding information solutions to their problems" (Brehens, 1994; Bruce, 1997). This stands as a major focus in librarianship. The proliferation of information and information resources being made available in print and electronic formats through the World Wide Web (WWW) has made it more difficult to gain access to relevant information. Retrieving information especially in the electronic format calls for appropriate information literacy skills to be applied.

Information literacy is knowledge of when and how you need information, where to find it, how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner (ALA 2005). It has to do with the ability to recognise when information is needed and how to locate, evaluate, effectively use and communicate information in various formats.

Librarians who are the custodians of information should be able to train their users with knowledge and skills to identify, retrieve, evaluate, and ethically use and communicate information from various information resources. According to Ojedokun and Okafor (2011) “libraries are now putting more emphasis on electronic and digital information resources”. Nigerian Library Association (2010) also added that library and information professionals must project and advocate for a new educational philosophy based on a fuller understanding of the literacy that includes information handling skills. Thus specialised job responsibilities are daily emerging to handle resources.

For information literacy to become sustainable it must become an integral part of libraries and the part of wider system, it must be embedded in everyday information seeking activities. In this process, libraries should realise that they are not isolated islands in society, but an integral part of it which must be open to knowledge acquired outside their walls.

### **Information Literacy for Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Librarians need to build and acquire the necessary educational skills so as to properly equip themselves for immediate and future needs. Information literacy for sustainable development promotes the development of the use of techniques and skills for utilising the wide range of information materials and tools to solve problems.

The concept of sustainable development can be interpreted in many different ways, but at its core is an approach to development that seeks to balance different and often competing needs against an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations we face as a society. All too often, development is driven by one particular need, without fully considering the wider or future impacts. For development to be sustainable it must simultaneously satisfy economic, financial, social, political, and environmental criteria. Brower (2011) noted that to be sustainable, there is much greater complexity than merely providing resources to meet specific needs. People must be involved and ultimately take over ownership of

solutions. It is therefore pertinent to equip individuals with information literacy skills so as to encourage critical thinking and exploration, leading to sustainable development.

Sustainable national development can also be seen as a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable people to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems. (Ohunene and Ozoji, 2014). To ensure sustainability, Librarians must focus on skills, values, and perspectives that encourage and support meeting up with modern trends. To achieve this, they must also be restructured to address sustainability, and expanded to include critical-thinking skills, skills to organize and interpret data and information, skills to apply Information Communication and Technology (ICT) effectively in information services delivery.

Information literacy is necessary for surviving this technological age. The aim of information literacy is to use the techniques and skills for utilising the wide range of information materials and tools to solve problems. Information literacy can be viewed as a situation whereby a person is able to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information (American Library Association as cited in Nigerian Library Association). Information literacy also has the following impact on the society:

- Information literacy promotes lifelong learning
- It supports the mission of teaching, learning and research
- Information literacy programme equips the students with the 21<sup>st</sup> century research skills
- The library's mission is to develop information literacy skills and knowledge

### **Role of Librarians**

Librarians are professionals trained and have acquired at least a degree in Library and Information Science (LIS) in accredited library schools. They should also have the competence to administer libraries and perform other professional library duties. After a Librarian has been given necessary training in an educational institution and is employed, he develops on the job in order to acquire new knowledge, skills and abilities which ensure their continued usefulness to the organisation and at the same time meeting personal desire for advancement. Today the expectation of the LIS professionals is that they should be competent enough to manage, to provide access, to organize, acquire

and preserve materials in print and electronic form. For this they must keep pace with the technological changes, and emerging trends abounding in the profession by engaging in continuing professional development.

Librarians work as information organisers and providers in various types of libraries and are pivots in which the library rotates since they are responsible for delivering required services to users. They work closely with users to provide them with skills to effectively and efficiently retrieve and use the information available from the large pool of resources. The mission of the librarians is to improve the society through facilitating access to knowledge and information in their communities. According to Ezekwe & Muokebe (2012) the library is an organised, carefully selected collection of books and non-book materials managed by Librarians who interpret the contents of these materials in the process of use.

Librarians must be equipped with the necessary skills to meet up with their professional duties. These duties include cataloguing, classification, indexing, collection development, serials management, reference services, storage and dissemination of information and other library services. Wikipedia (2012) records that a librarian may provide other information services including computer provision and training, coordination of public programmes, basic literacy education, assistive equipment for people with disabilities, and help with finding and using community resources. Lawal (2010) observed that the library plays a key role in delivering learning resources and services to students and staff of tertiary institutions.

Librarians are custodians of information and they play a key role in navigating for information both online and offline and making them available to their users. Librarians are expected to work closely with their users to fully equip and impart them with skills of information literacy to effectively and efficiently retrieve and use the information available from the vast pool of information resources. This will instil confidence in users and provide satisfaction in them. Information literacy is a survival skill of the information age.

Librarians are expected to equip their users with the following information literacy skills so as to produce information literate individuals:

- Recognise the need for information timely
- Formulate questions based on information needs
- Identify potential sources of information
- Develop successful and effective search strategies

- Access various sources of information independently and efficiently.
- Evaluate information obtained meaningfully.
- Organise information effectively.
- Integrate new information into an existing body of knowledge.
- Encourage critical thinking.
- Use information critically.

### **Emerging Technologies to Facilitate Information Literacy**

The utilisation of new technologies and web services are essential in promoting and sustaining information literacy. The introduction and utilisation of different aspects of information technology to Information literacy has been beneficial to facilitating access to needed information. Examples of relevant technologies to be provided by library and information science professionals include:

**Web 3.0:** Web 3.0 is an interactive aspect of the internet. It gives room for the internet user to give their input. The participatory aspect of web 3.0 encourages users to add value as they use an application. Characteristics of web 3.0 include convergence of the virtual and physical world (metaverse); access to information anywhere, anytime. dynamic content, metadata, web standards and scalability as well as openness, freedom and the creation of collective intelligence by way of user participation. The effective utilisation of web 3.0 results in users' satisfaction through increased and improved access to popular resources as well as little or never used materials in a library's collections.

**Library 3.0:** This is a model for modernised form of library services that reflects a transition within the library world in the way services are rendered to users. It describes a subset of library services designed to meet user needs caused by the direct and peripheral effects of web 3.0 services. It refers to libraries using technologies such as semantic web, cloud computing, mobile devices and re-envisioning our use of established technologies such as federated search to facilitate user-generated content and collaboration to promote and make library collections accessible.

**SOPAC:** The SocialOnline Public AccessCatalogue (SOPAC) enables libraries around the world to share data beyond physical limits. Library's catalogues are shared online for other libraries to access their collections. Tags are also incorporated into the catalogue where they are searchable as key words; this improves the search and retrieval experience of users.

**Library Portals:** This is a website which is an entry point to other websites or relevant resources by being an aggregation of subject specific link. It is a search engine that can be used by library users to access information.

**Mashups:** This is the combination, visualization, and aggregation of data that can be used to disseminate and acquire information.

**Folksonomies:** This is the practice and method of collaboratively creating and managing tags to annotate and categorise content in the World Wide Web.

**Web 2.0:** These are services that allow users to create content and to comment on content provided by others. It encompasses various social sharing services, such as those for photographs (e.g. Flickr, Instagram), videos (e.g. YouTube), Instant messaging sites (e.g. Whatsapp, MSN messenger), Communication sites such as Facebook and MySpace. Their applications in the library are enumerated below:

**Twitter:** According to Parkes and Walton (2010), increasing number of librarians and information professional use twitter. This 'micro blogging' service is being used for a variety of purposes like peer support, engagement with fellow librarians, dissemination of information and engagement with library users.

**Facebook:** This is a social media site that is being used in the library to provide links to institutional resources, embedded search facilities (such as searches of the JSTOR and COPAC services), the ability to become a fan of the learning centres and a means of providing news in an environment which many students at the university are likely to use and be familiar with. (Parkes & Walton, 2010).

**Blogs:** Blogs provide a simple and easy to use mechanism for alerting users to new developments within a library and soliciting feedback. Blogs can also be used to advertise new products in the library and share ideas.

**Wikis and Wikipedia:** Wiki is a website or database developed collaboratively by a community of users, allowing any user to add content. According to Parkes and Walton (2010) although its detractors points to the lack of formal and well established quality assurance processes, the popularity of Wikipedia cannot be disputed.

### **Competencies for Librarians**

Competencies connote the abilities, skills, knowledge, and attitudes

required to perform some specified tasks. Competencies are the interplay of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes required to do a job effectively from the point of view of both the performer and the observer. There are two types of competencies for special Librarians. The first are professional competencies which relate to knowledge in the areas of information resources access, technology, management and research and ability to use these areas of knowledge to provide library and information services. The other comprises personal competencies which represent a set of skills, attitudes and values “that enable librarians to work effectively, be good communicators, be able to focus on continuing learning throughout their careers, be able to demonstrate the value added nature of their contributions, and survive in the new world of work” (Marshal et. al., 2003).

Gulati and Raina (2000) added unique competencies of the librarian to include in-depth knowledge of print and electronic information resources in management of information services that meet strategic information needs of the individual or group being served. For Eric (2006), competencies refer to the optimum level of awareness, understanding, and perfection which a librarian must achieve in order to be rated as effective and competent librarian. Competencies for Librarians could be discussed as follows:

### **Management Competency**

Management competency entails the ability of Librarians to carefully harmonize the material and human resources within the library to create a good research and learning situation. Librarians should be able to manage the physical conditions of the library such as security, ventilation, lighting, and seating arrangement to allow for comfort for library users.

**Foundational Knowledge Competency:** Librarians must be equipped with all the adequate knowledge necessary in impacting information literacy which includes:

- Thorough awareness of the needs of the users.
- Knowledge of how information is created and communicated and how to help users develop a sense of context when using information.
- Use of search strategies to locate and access relevant information, this is the use of Boolean logic operators which are 'AND', 'OR', 'NOT'.
- Analysing and critically evaluating research findings.
- Knowledge of the legal and ethical issues relating to the use of information.
- Skills on citation and referencing.



**Communication/Inter personal skill Competency:** These are skills and values that librarians need to acquire to enable them work and contribute effectively to the institution, client and profession. One of the strong points of Librarianship is the ability to communicate effectively to library users at their level of comprehension so as to enable them acquire the needed information. This competency requires having good communication skills that will enable bringing the services positively to their users. It is also the ability of the librarian to assess the users' level of competence in information literacy.

**Technology (Manipulative) Competency:** Librarians are expected to acquire technology or manipulative competency to be able to decide why, when, where, and how ICT tools could contribute to the delivery of information literacy. Technology competency facilitates the use of software packages, computers, bibliographic control tools, Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI), etc. Librarians should be able to conduct on-line searches using Internet and web search tools like search engines, meta search engines, web directories, library gateways, specialised databases, etc. The use of projectors and Public-Address Systems (PAS) and other audio-active equipment is also necessary in transferring knowledge. Other technology areas in which librarians should show competencies include, but not limited to:

- Competency with internet and database searching
- Competency with Formatting operations in word processing
- Competency with Familiarity with search engines
- Competency with Familiarity with gateways
- Competency with Cataloguing e-resources
- Competency with Database Management
- Competency with web design

### **Approaches to Building Librarians Competencies**

Approaches could be regarded as ways or strategies of reaching out for solutions or improvements. In building Librarians' competencies, there are some critical elements that must be taken into consideration by all stakeholders. This paper suggests the following approaches towards building Librarians' competences viz a viz sustainable development.

**Training and Retooling:** Education and training of librarians remain the most critical ingredients for building competencies. Education is simply the process or art of imparting knowledge, skills, ability, and judgement on individuals to enable them function effectively. Training, on the other hand, is a continuous assistance or coaching given to librarians in order to make them have current knowledge associated with the library profession. Abba & Dawha (2009)

opined that the library profession has become aware of the need for continuous training, because of the increasing variety of information formats and increasing dependence on automated systems. The changing nature of library users and the demand for managers with appropriate skills have added to the need for training.

For librarians to be properly positioned to offer effective and sustainable information delivery services they have to undergo continuous professional development which will keep them abreast with emerging trends that abound in the profession. Gbaje and Ukachi (2011) posit that training is the cornerstone of any effort to retool library staff to meet the challenges and opportunities of digital work environment. Such training programmes in higher institutions include study leave with or without pay; study fellowship; staff development award; in-service training; externally sponsored study; part-time studies/day release, short-term refresher courses; and sponsorship to attend local and international conferences, workshop, and seminars. It is believed that when Librarians are given continued access to these programmes, their competences will be built towards imparting relevant knowledge and skills capable of sustaining national development.

**Research and Publication Approach:** One of the ways to build Librarians' competencies is through research and publication. This allows for systematic investigation into issues relating to teaching and learning process and information management and publishing the research results using various media. Librarians could build their competencies by being involved in collaborative or individual researches to discover ideas that could bring about exhaustive knowledge on new or sometimes better information literacy methods and supporting facilities as well as modern ways of information generation, organization and delivery.

**Collaboration Approach:** Collaboration could be regarded as cooperation, partnership, alliance, or network aimed at mutually beneficial outcome. The issue of collaboration among Librarians within and beyond Nigeria seems not to be given desired attention despite its relevance. Librarians should adopt collaboration approach to jointly tackle the problems and challenges facing librarianship. Johnson (2009) explains that collaboration may be within defined national boundaries (local), within a particular region of the world (regional) or across national boundaries (international). For collaboration to be successful, the libraries involved should ascertain their sustaining capacity; the existing influences - political, economic, and social realities; the facilitators; the areas of collaboration and any other aspect that could strengthen the collaboration.

## **Conclusion, Challenges and Recommendations**

Sustaining information literacy in a networked society that is based on the information economy entails that the library professionals change their outlook and methods to learn new tools and retain the dwindling clientele encroached upon by the IT people and allied professions. Librarians are not mere information retrievers and providers; they are guides and torch bearers of knowledge. There is a need for the qualified professional to keep abreast with the emerging trends in the profession for future challenges.

To ensure sustainability librarians have to reposition themselves by acquiring new skills and competencies relevant to delivering effective information literacy services. It should also be the aim of Librarians to ensure that they are well positioned to impact information literacy skills in their users; this will help to achieve optimum use of the information resources available in the library for sustainability.

Some of the challenges being faced by librarians in ensuring information literacy for sustainable development include:

- I. Traditional method of information services delivery is still predominant in many libraries.
- II. Lack of training and experience of professionals on cutting edge library services.
- III. Inadequate financial support to acquire continuous professional development.
- IV. Lack of modern library facilities and equipments.
- V. Lack of visibility of the libraries on the World Wide Web.

The following recommendations are being proffered for consideration:

- I. Librarians should as much as possible try to remove all barriers to information access.
- II. Librarians should organise regular user education programme to equip their users with adequate information literacy skills. This can include one on one training or group trainings.
- III. Librarians should take part in continuing professional development to update themselves on current and emerging trends.
- IV. Librarians should make themselves visible on the web so as to effectively reach users.
- V. Librarians must be ICT compliant and be versatile in using it to promote information literacy.

- VI. More digitised and electronic record data should be made available to people at a faster and cheaper rate.
- VII. Different forms of media including social media should be used to achieve information literacy.

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