

LIBRARY & INFORMATION LITERACY INITIATIVE: THE SSC-R DE CAVITE EXPERIENCE

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Rationale

The explosion of information has created serious implications to the academe and in the society in general, thereby changing the directions of most libraries around the world. This new information environment has created emerging challenges to libraries and information centers as well as to individuals wherein they must be information literate or must possess the necessary information skills in order to access the proliferating information and guarantee their survival in the Information Age. To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information (ALA, 1989).

Library and information literacy goes beyond the conventional concepts information competency, but now include the mastery of other literacies such as visual, media, computer, digital, network, and of course basic literacy (Eisenberg, Lowe, and Spitzer, 2004).

Library & Information Literacy Defined

Reitz (2002) defined information literacy as the ability or skill in finding the information one needs, including an understanding of how libraries are organized, familiarity with the resources they provide (including information formats and automated search tools), and knowledge of commonly used research techniques. The concept also includes the skills required to critically evaluate information content, and an understanding of the technological infrastructure on which information transmission is based, including its social, political, and cultural context and impact.

Library and information literacy is more than just teaching students on how to use the library; its goal is to develop a 21st century information and technology competencies and the skills for lifelong learning. Information literate individuals are able to find, evaluate and use information effectively to solve problems and make decisions (ACRL, 2000).

Information literate students understand and are able to use information tools, including databases, printed indexes and physical arrangements of sources.

Zurkowski (1974) made a clear description of an information literate person as, those who are trained in the application of information resources in their work.

Situationers & the World Information Literacy Initiative

Information literacy has been an area of increasing interest to librarians and information professionals all over the world. All nations around the globe observed that the continuing information explosion, the ever-changing educational processes, and global competition greatly affect the information seeking competencies of all individuals.

In 1990, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization issued the World Declaration on Education For All (UNESCO, 1990). The document bared some social realities on the state of the world education. One of these realities is that more than one-third of the world's adult have no access to printed knowledge, have no skills and library don't have technologies that could empower and help them shape, and adapt to social and cultural change.

Rader (1996) opined that countries around the world should consider information problem as a determinant on their global competitiveness and stresses the urgency to address information issues in order to ensure that all people should become information literate to facilitate lifelong learning.

Schools, colleges and universities play a leadership role in incorporating library and information literacy programs into their curricula so that students will be able to gain survival skills in the information age.

In another study Rader (1995) emphasized that in the United States, the department of education, higher education commissions, and academic governing boards are beginning to assume responsibility in ensuring library and information literacy to be part of all students' courses of study within an interactive and resourced-based teaching and learning. The integration of the program to the curriculum is very critical and necessary in preparing students to be globally competitive. The students have to possess necessarily those skills in order to survive and be able to cope with the emerging demands.

Earlier in 1996, U.K. government issued a paper, articulating that lifelong learning would lead to a highly motivated, flexible and well qualified workforce (Brophy, 1997).

On the other hand, as cited by Mittermeyer and Quirion (2003) the French Ministere de Education Nationale de la Recherche et de la Technologie published a document on information literacy instruction entitled *Former les Etudiants a la Maitrise ae l'information: Reperes pour l'elaboration d'un Programme*. This document revealed a certain consensus among Europeans and North Americans supporting the emerging importance of information literacy education to life long learning.

The Asian countries are also keeping abreast with this trend. Malaysia conceptualized the need for developing the country in all dimensions with its main thrust as an information-rich society. The Malaysian higher education institutions are advised to produce graduates who are knowledgeable, well rounded and balanced, giving greater emphasis on information technology knowledge (Zainab, 2002).

The Philippines had also undertaken several literacy advocacies to promote the value of books and libraries, reading, and transfer of skills in almost all levels (R.A. 7743; Barzaga, 1995; Braid, 1995 and Foronda, 1993).

In 2004, Pres. Gloria M. Arroyo issued Proclamation No. 614 to support to the UNESCO's Call for Action during the United Nations Literacy Decade Launch in Bangkok, Thailand in September 2003. There are about 600 million people out of the 860 million, or nearly 70% of the world's non-literate populations living in Asia. Furthermore the said Act, has commissioned the Literacy Coordinating Council (LCC) and the agencies from the private and government sectors involved in the promotion of literacy to provide the overall coordination in policy formulation and program implementation of all inter-agency activities to achieve the goals of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD).

This situation is present in developed nations as well as in developing countries. Governments, business, educational agencies, organizations and citizens' worldwide feel the need to address information problems in a variety of settings. Educating citizens to achieve information literacy is quickly becoming an important goal in any country.

The library as a key component in the nation-building and education of the citizens must also carry out the program of the government as agent for the promotion of literacy. Libraries are gateways to knowledge and provide basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.

Information Literacy Studies

Several studies have been conducted in the country aimed at achieving common objectives, such as: evaluating their collections and services; determining the needs of libraries to have a basis for formulating an effective development programs; and building up a comprehensive collection of materials and enhancing library services.

Arlante (1999) observed that one of the highest number of researches in the field of library and information science in the country is on the topic on user studies. These studies usually focus on user needs in terms of resources, facilities and services provided by the libraries. There were only few studies that focus on the competency skills of information users.

In foreign countries studies have been conducted in relations to user education or library and information literacy education of the end user of information.

A great deal has been written on the topic in Great Britain and other parts of the world. Lubans (1974) presented in his paper the library instruction program of selected European universities and the studies conducted including evaluation, integration of library instruction in the university curriculum, universal library skills, and freshman library skills. These only manifest the emerging importance of the library and information competency program in the life of the students.

Sun and Rader (1999) reported that 421 academic institutions in China had developed library instructions programs. Instruction has been created to teach students how to use the integrated library information system.

One interesting study was conducted by John Hickock (2006) on the state of Southeast Asian libraries has this findings particularly on the Philippines that:

1. Filipino student were less interested in reading, prevalence of “borrowing” from other classmates’ work instead of researching information independently;
2. less continual user education and continuing library education are less common; and;
3. subject-specialization endeavors not always maximized and some libraries do create subject-based endeavors but many others do not, leaving students to hunt on their own.

In another study conducted by Mittermeyer & Quirion (2003) on information literacy competency of incoming first year undergraduates in Quebec, the results indicate that a significant number of students have limited knowledge, or no knowledge, of basic elements characterizing the information research process.

The following studies presented have strong influence in the conduct of my study and also to revalidate their findings considering that the students of today are continuously bombarded with information and the changing technological trend.

These pathetic situations greatly affect the performances of students both in academic and in their personal quest for knowledge. Students are expected to be information literate and independent learners but the reality student culture toward reading/research is at feeble state.

Therefore, this study was undertaken in order to assess the library and information literacy competency of the engineering students of San Sebastian College-Recoletos de Cavite.

The ACRL Information Literacy Standards

In order to generate more ideas on the competency level of the students, evaluation or assessment was conducted using the ACRL information literacy competency standards in determining the library and information competency level of the respondents.

The ACRL Model (ACRL, 2000) outlined five competency standards for higher education. These standards are the extension of the American Association of School Librarians’ information literacy standards (AASL, 1998), so that continuum of information literacy competencies is created, from K-12 through the college years.

The first competency expected from the information literate is the ability to determine the nature and extent of the information needed. Performance indicators include the abilities to define and articulate a need for information, and identify a variety of types and formats of information sources.

The second competency is on the ability of the student to access needed information effectively and efficiently, which include selection of the most appropriate methods of investigation or retrieval systems, construction of well-designed search strategies, retrieval of information, and extraction, recording and management of information.

The third competency considered is the ability of the student to evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporate information into his or her knowledge base. Included in this ability is the application of criteria for evaluating information, construction of new concepts by synthesizing main ideas, comparison of new versus prior knowledge and validation of the understanding and interpretation of information through discussion with others.

The fourth competency and fifth competency is the ability of the student to use information to accomplish a specific goal. This includes application of new and prior information to plan and create a product or performance to effectively be able to understand the economic, legal and social issues related to the use of information and be able to access and utilize information ethically and legally.

Furthermore, the ACRL competency standards fall into three categories such as information literacy, independent learning, and social responsibility. Both information skills and information technology skills are essential parts inclusive of the standards of information literacy.

The Problem of the Study

The study aimed to assess the library and information literacy competency of the students of the College of Engineering of San Sebastian College-Recoletos de Cavite as basis for the development of an intervention programs.

The study attempted to look into the following:

- the level of library and information literacy competency of engineering students in terms of
 - ▣ determining the nature and extent of information needed (competency 1)
 - ▣ accessing information & its sources (competency 2)
 - ▣ evaluating information & its sources (competency 3)
 - ▣ using information and its sources (competency 4);
- the respondents strengths and weaknesses in terms of the identified competencies

Methodology

The researcher used the descriptive-normative method, using the CSPU (California State Polytechnic University) and the CREPQU (Conference of Rectors and Principals of Quebec Universities) Information Competency Assessment instruments. The reliability index suggests that there is a high degree of internal consistency among the items as well as there is a marked reliability of the instrument; hence, the instrument was valid. It was then, administered to 341 engineering students enrolled in a 4- and 5-year program with 87.38% (298) response rate.

Results / Findings of the Study

On the level of library and information literacy competencies of engineering students in terms of:

- Competency 1 which is their ability in determining the nature and extent of information needed revealed a below average performance and as well as in competency 2 that is their ability in accessing information and its sources.
- *Only* in competency 3 that is their ability in evaluating information and its sources marked a notable performance of above average.
- *Subsequently*, in competency 4 that is their ability in using information, three groups got an average level of competency, namely Computer Engineering, Information Management and Information Technology and the rest showed a below average level of competency.

- *But*, the overall performance of all the respondents from six (6) engineering courses fall on the below average category based on the computed z-value of 4.63 for Civil, Industrial and Mechanical Engineering; 9.18 for Computer Engineering; 6.66 for Computer Science; 8.70 for Electronics and Communication Engineering; 5.92 for Information Management; and 3.44 for Information Technology which is greater than the tabled z-value of 1.96.

In terms of the respondents strengths and weaknesses in each of the identified competencies:

- In competency 1, majority of the respondents were not able to meet the expected 60% assumed performance level. The respondents find difficulty in question numbers 3, 4, 8, 13, and 15.
- *However*, in question number 20, three (3) groups got a significant performance to wit: Computer Engineering (60.34), Information Management (70.73) and Information Technology (66.67).
- *Additionally*, in competency 2, the respondents found to be deficient in the following questions: numbers 1, 2, 7, 9, 12, 14, and 16 with a performance rating of below the expected level of performance. *On the other hand*, in items no. 6 and 17, majority of the respondents showed a significant performance and this is considered as their strengths. In question number 6, four (4) groups portrayed a high performance namely: Civil, Industrial and Mechanical Engineering with 68.57% (24 respondents who got the correct answers; Computer Science, 75.00 (42); Information Management, 78.05 (32); and Information Technology, 72.73 (48). Moreover in question number 17, almost all respondents showed a significant performance of above-average performance ranging from 85.71 - 96.43%.
- In competency 3, only in item number 21 that all respondents portrayed a high level of performance ranging from 70.69-87.88 is which above the expected level of performance of 60%. *But*, for question number 22 only 2 groups got a significant performance, namely Civil, Industrial and Mechanical (65.71%) and Computer Engineering students (67.24); question number 23, 1 group (Computer Engineering, 60.34); and in questions numbers 24 and 25, 2 groups (Computer Science and Electronics and Communication engineering students and the rest got a low performance rating.
- *Furthermore*, in competency 4, in items number 5 and 10, majority of the respondents find it difficult or not proficient with performance rating of 11.90 – 51.68 except for Computer Engineering and Information Management students who got a rating of 60.98 – 63.79% level of performance. *But* still it was marked a weakness considering the overall performance level. In items numbers 18 and 19 were marked as their strengths with performance level of 72.41 – 100.00%.
- *But*, the overall results of the study implies that the respondents were not performing very well and find difficulties in almost all areas, to wit, determining the nature and extent of information needed; accessing; and using information and its sources.

Conclusion

The ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education clearly describes that information literate students are able to recognize when information is needed and have the capacity to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.

With this, it is therefore concluded that the Engineering students have limited knowledge and have not acquired the desired library and information literacy competencies in determining the extent of information needed; accessing the needed information effectively and efficiently; evaluating

information and its sources critically; and using information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; and understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information.

Recommendation

The researcher recommended that:

- the proposed intervention program may be offered as a one-unit credit course;
- findings of the study be presented or submitted to the Order of the Augustinian Recollect Secretariat of the Educational Apostolate of the Philippines (SEAP) and to the Commission on Higher Education and to the Department of Education for implementation and promulgation of the national initiative on the integration of library and information literacy instruction into academic programs at all levels;
- design training program for implementers; and
- the conduct of relevant studies related to library and information literacy is also suggested.

Suggested Studies to be Conducted:

1. Assessment of the library and information literacy competencies of all OAR students, in particular College students enrolled in all colleges and universities under the Recoletos System.
2. Conduct a regionwide/nationwide assessment of the library and information literacy competency of all Filipino students at all levels as basis for national library and information literacy initiative.
3. Assessment on high school or undergraduate students and their use of the web or Internet for research.
4. Assessment of the current trends and practices in the teaching of library and information literacy.
5. A sequel of this study should be conducted noting the significant difference between the pre-post assessment results.
6. A replication of this study for all faculty members in SSC-R de Cavite or OAR schools could be conducted.

Final Words

Finally, the development of a regional information literacy initiative is explicitly recommended, and acknowledges the Association's role in developing lifelong learners and that individuals achieve intellectual abilities in reasoning and critical thinking and able to translate information to valuable creation. Therefore, information literacy is a key component of, and contributor to life long learning or life long education.

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