

## Information Literacy (IL): Essential Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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### Abstract

Today, information literacy (IL) is inextricably associated with information practices and critical thinking in the information and communication technology environment. The term 'Information Literacy (IL)' occurred in 1974 by Zurkowski in US. Its widespread use started after 1989 and has gained importance worldwide over the last decade. The IL is the ability to know locate and evaluate the information sources through which ability to take right decisions for the development of the society with the objective of transforming the world into a knowledge society. It is the basis for lifelong learning and to develop sense-making ability among the readers. India is moving towards information and knowledge-based society it must be necessary for university students, research scholars and faculty members possess competencies and information literacy skills to accomplish their research goals. There are various programmes taken throughout the world from 1980s to make the people information literate. Librarians, Teachers Library schools and Library Associations can play major role to promote information literacy. This paper discusses on concept of information literacy, its need in present scenario and its role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Information literacy; Knowledge management.

*"Literacy unlocks the door to learning throughout life, is essential to development and health, and opens the way for democratic participation and active citizenship"*

*Kofi Annan*

### Introduction

"Within today's information society, the most important learning outcome for all students is their being able to function as independent lifelong learners. The essential enabler to reaching that goal is information literacy." (Pitricia, 2000).

Information Literacy (IL) is widely recognized as a key part of lifelong independent learning. It is viewed by some as a set of skill, attributes and behavior that underpin student learning in the digital age. Information literacy skills ensure

better employability and success in the professional life information literacy is critically important because we are surrounded by a growing ocean of information in all formats. Information skills can be broken down into the following sequential sages; formulate and analyse need; identify and appraise likely sources; locate individual resources; examine, select and reject sources; interrogate sources; record and store information; interpret, analyse, synthesise and evaluate information collected; present and communicate resulting work and evaluate what has been achieved.

### What is Information Literacy?

Information literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning. It empowers people in all walks of life to see, evaluate, use and create information effectively



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to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations.

Information literacy therefore not only comprises “the competences to recognize information needs and to locate, evaluate, apply and create information within cultural and social contexts,” but it also includes within it elements of democracy and social justice.

Most commonly cited and used Information Literacy (IL) definition is the one adopted by the American Library Association (ALA), 1989; “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. The information literate individuals are those who have learned how to learn”

**Concept of Information Literacy**

There are several terms that are part of or contribute to the information literacy (IL) concept. They each have their own semantic content in addition to differences characterized by the type of skills, level, and the categories of learning and instructional

facilitating methods. IL has evolved beyond early library instruction and information skills-focused programs to the current concept of information literacy. While library instruction emphasized the location of library materials, another IL concept focuses on information strategies, and in yet another concept, IL is used to describe the process of information-seeking and information use competencies. To literate, information literacy focuses on information use rather than on bibliographic skills, that is, students must develop information competencies to become effective learners some of the IL related terms are;

Information fluency	- Capability or mastering of information competencies
User education	- Global approach to teach information access to users
Library Instruction	- Focuses on library skills
Bibliographic instruction	- User training on information search and retrieval
Information competencies	- Compound skills and goals of information literacy
Information skills	- Focuses on information abilities
Development of information Skills	- Process of facilitating information skills

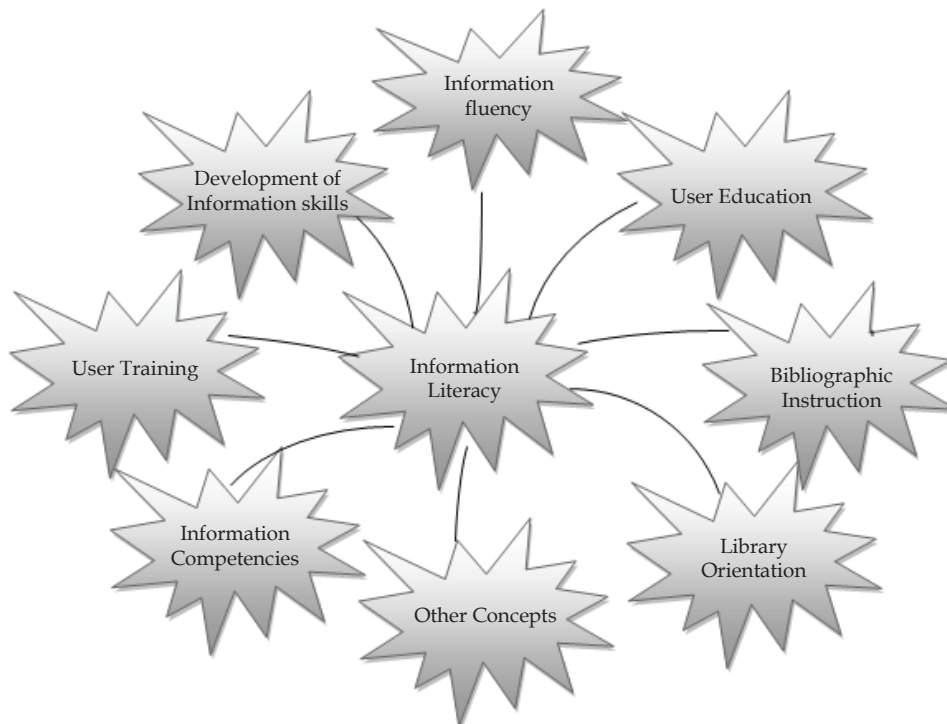


Fig. 1: Concept of Information Literacy

### *Aspects*

Information literacy for library users consists of two aspects; knowledge of networked information and skills to locate, select, evaluate and use the networked information, Knowledge of e-information etc.

- To recognize the range and uses of global networked information resources and services
- To understand the role and use of networked information in problem solving and in performing basic life activities; and
- To know the system used by which networked information is created, managed and made available.

### *Skills*

- To define information needed for specific purpose
- To locate information needed from networks with efficient information retrieval methods, skills and tools;
- To select and evaluate information gained from networked information on a given topic;
- To manipulate and organize E-information with other resources to enhance its values;
- To use, analyze and present networked and E-information for problem solving and life-long learning.

### *Requirement*

To acquire information literacy as defined above, users should first of all possess other basic literacy;

- Traditional notion of literacy—to read and write
- Computer literacy—to understand and operate computers which are interfaces between networked information and end-users
- Media literacy—to understand different media storing networked information and use them; and
- Traditional information literacy—to locate, select, evaluate and use information effectively.

### **Need for Information Literacy**

Today most of the developing and underdeveloped countries including India are languishing in the mine of oodles of problem on the way of their development. Corruption, slip-sod work, lack of awareness, poor participation and exploitation are some few teething problems to mention out of many. To mitigate these problems, these countries have taken many a significant steps. But in reality these countries have not realized the crux of their mission through them. Logical analysis revealing the major cause for the ever existing malady is lack of literacy in promulgated steps taken by the government. The identified problem can be solved with practical implementation of information programme in public, academics and special library and other organizations that are working for the benefits of general public.

The basic purpose of information literacy is to develop sense-making ability among the readers. Once the information seeker becomes aware of the information gap and its critical consequences, he would try to define his information need. Tasks, time interest, and information are the other parameters which influence end user's informant behavior. The end result of the whole exercise is independent learning and critical thinking. An information literate person will be a competent person to develop focus, find right answers, and build personal perspective. He would be able to convert knowledge into information and information into knowledge on continuing basis. Information literacy must facilitate sense-making and reduction of vast quantities of information into fundamental patterns into a given context. This is in fact hallmark of Information Literacy in knowledge management.

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extends their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning.

### **Information Literacy and it Literacy**

The difference between information skills (required to evaluate the quality and relevance of information) and technical skills (required to work a computer and access electronic information resources) is not always recognized. In a knowledge economy both

sets of skills are essential. Acquisition of one skill set does not guarantee the acquisition of the other. Perhaps in some sense due to a pervasive utopian vision of technology as symbol of social progress, information obtained through a computer seems to acquire validity simply from the medium of its delivery. As anecdotal evidence of this one might cite the content of chain e-mails which is of dubious informational value yet is consumed (by some) as if it were a public statement of the same reliability as a newspaper article.

The speed of communication flows enabled by constant developments in technology demands information literacy (rather than simply a narrower set of IT skills) in order to process the volume of information that we receive. Information providers in an economy based on “digital capitalism” (Muddiman, 2003)<sup>1</sup> have their own agendas. The immediacy the television coverage of the war in Iraq seemed as significant to the networks themselves (in terms of competitive advantage rather than public spiritedness) as its accuracy. The role of information mediation is as important now as it ever has been, if we are to avoid becoming

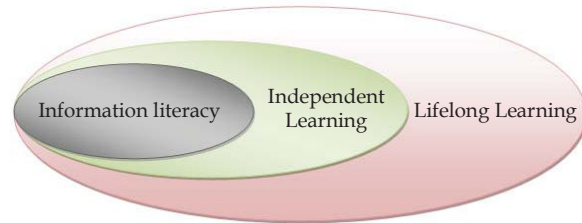


Fig. 2: Relationship between information literacy and lifelong learning (Bundy, 2004:5)

“an information-saturated and simultaneously ignorant” (Webster and Dempsey, 1999) society, a scenario that would be not only educationally undesirable but also socially disastrous.

### Information Literacy Models

One approach that has been adopted is to develop a set of standards and indicators that can be used to demonstrate what might be reasonable expected from an information literate person. Examples of these standards are; the Seven Pillars Model for Information Literacy (SCONUL, 1990), the

Table 1: Information Literacy Models

ACRL IL Standards	ANZIIL IL Standards	SCONUL information skills
An information literate person is able to:		
1 Determine the extent of information needed	1 Recognize a need for information and to determine the extent of information needed	1 Recognize a need for information
2 Access the required information effectively and efficiently	2 Find information effectively and efficiently	2 Distinguish ways in which the information gap may be addressed
3 Evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporate selected information in to his/her knowledge base and value system	3 Critically evaluate information and the information-seeking process	3 Construct strategies for locating information
4 Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose	4 Manage information collected or generated	4 Locate and access information
5 Understand many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally	5 Apply prior and new information to construct new concept or create new understandings	5 Compare and evaluate information obtained from different sources
6 -	6 Use information with understanding and acknowledge cultural, ethical, economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information	6 Organize, apply and communicate information to others in ways appropriate to the situation
7 -	7 -	7 Synthesis and build upon existing information, contributing to the creation of new knowledge

Australian and New Zealand Institute of Information Literacy (ANZIIL, 2004) and Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL).

- Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL Standards)<sup>2</sup>
- Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy (ANZIIL)<sup>3</sup>
- Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL)<sup>4</sup>

### Conclusion

We must learn to take organize of the changes taking place around us and asopt a holistic approach to information literacy. It should start with the learner at the centre stage interacting with local sites of information and then extending his reach to the source of information available across the globe. In other words, IL must facilitate the paradigm shift from rote learning to resource based student centred learning. Information literacy must include media literacy, computer literacy and network literacy. Use of the information, knowledge and wisdom (IKW) for progress should be the heart of the matter. So Information Literacy is an essential

skill for the twenty-first century. Information Literacy Education is, thus has an undeniable importance for everyone.

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