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Information Literacy and the Role of the Librarian

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Abstract:- The present age is the Information Age, and the pedagogic implications of this age are that people should learn new skills to use information stored on computers. Libraries and Information Centres have responded by acquiring information technology and encouraging computer literacy. The information that is available through libraries, community resources, special interest organisations, media and the Internet comes to individuals in unfiltered formats, raising questions about its authenticity, validity and reliability. In addition, information available through multiple media poses new challenges for individuals in understanding the landscape of information and acquiring knowledge of how to gather, evaluate and use information in today's world. Information literacy, therefore, is increasingly important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed and assume greater control over their own learning. With the advances in Information and Communication technologies, the traditional concepts of organization, user orientation, bibliographic description, and dissemination of information are to be fine-tuned to the new environment by the Library and Information Professionals. So the LIS professionals working in the environment have to face challenges in providing the right information to the right user at the right time.

Keywords:- Information, Information Literacy, Librarians, Information & Communication Technology, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

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 ethically. It is the combination of all the skills that are important for the effective and maximum use of information. The term information literacy has been used as a collective term covering all or quite a lot of of literacies, viz., computer literacy, digital literacy, hyper-literacy, information technology literacy, interactive literacy, Internet literacy, library literacy, media literacy, multiple literacy, network literacy, oral literacy, and visual literacy, etc. These literacies need to be developed and maintained throughout life, not only by information users, but also by librarians and other information workers. Information Literacy or IL is variously defined as follows:

Paul Zurkowski is supposed to be the first, who defined information literacy during 1970s as "People trained in the application of Information resources to their work can be called information literates". They have learned techniques and skills for using the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in moulding information solutions to their problems" (Jayaprakash and Gupta, 2005).

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" (Webb and Powis, 2004).

Another most cited definition for Information Literacy comes from the American Library Association, according to which "Information Literacy is the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyse and use information" (American Library Association, 2003).

So, Information Literacy is the ability to identify what information is needed and the ability to locate,

Evaluate and use information in solving problems and composing discourse.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE INFORMATION LITERATE?

- Becoming a lifelong learner
- Using the library effectively
- Understanding what you read
- Using information wisely
- Organising resources
- Developing ideas
- Using IT
- Knowing where to look
- Interpreting, summarising
- Understanding how information works.



Early definitions of Information literacy have led to the identification of a list of attributes or competencies an information literate person is supposed to exhibit, for example, an information literate individual requires an understanding of:

- A need for information
- The resources available
- How to find information
- The need to evaluate results
- How to work with or exploit results
- Ethics and responsibility of use
- How to communicate or share findings
- How to manage findings.

III. NEED FOR INFORMATION LITERACY

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

- A rapid increase in the stream of information due to the information revolution.
- The advent of information and communication technologies;
- A wide variety of information sources;
- Changing shape of libraries;
- Wide dispersal of information;
- Increase in number of users; and
- Research on complex and interdisciplinary topics.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF INFORMATION LITERACY

The Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, Japan has defined the following objectives of information literacy (Anonymous, 1991):

- Capabilities of judgment (evaluation), selection, organization, and processing of information as well as of information creation and communication;
- Understanding of characteristics of information society, the effect of information user society, and human beings;
- Recognition of the importance of, and responsibility for, information; and
- Understanding of the foundation of information science, learning of basic operation skills of information and an information device, particularly a computer.

V. SCOPE OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Information Literacy includes a range of literacy. The range of literacy may be:

- *Traditional Literacy*: to read and write;
- *Computer Literacy*: to understand and operate computers those are interfaces between information and end-users;
- *Media Literacy*: to understand different media storing networked information and use them;
- *Network Literacy*: Network literacy for library users consists of two aspects: knowledge of networked information and skills to locate, select, evaluate and use the networked information; and,
- *Traditional Information Literacy*: to locate, select, evaluate and use information effectively.
- *Visual Literacy*: to see and understand the information, and
- *Web Literacy*: to locate, select, retrieve and use the information from web.

VI. BENEFITS OF INFORMATION LITERACY

The following benefits of information literacy may be observed:

- Expansion of knowledge through substantive operations of knowledge creation.
- Synthesis of data and information into knowledge.
- Appropriate and critical application of information and knowledge in problems solving.
- Enhancement of critical thinking.
- Incorporation of validated information in the personal or corporate knowledge base.
- Motivation for self-directed learning, and
- Appreciation for lifelong learning

VII. CONCEPT OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Several efforts have been made to define the concept of information literacy and its relationship to other skills and forms of literacy. Although other educational goals, including traditional literacy, computer literacy, library skills, and critical thinking skills, are related to information literacy and important foundations for its development, information literacy itself is emerging as a distinct skill set and a necessary key to one's social and economic well-being in an increasingly complex information society.



Shapiro and Hughes (1996) outlined a “prototype curriculum ” that encompassed the concepts of computer literacy, library skills, and “a broader, critical conception of a more humanistic sort”, suggesting seven important components of a holistic approach to information literacy:

- **Tool literacy**, or the ability to understand and use the practical and conceptual tools of current information technology relevant to education and the areas of work and professional life that the individual expects to inhabit.
- **Resource literacy**, or the ability to understand the form, format, location and access methods of information resources, especially daily expanding networked information resources.
- **Social-structural literacy**, or understanding how information is socially situated and produced.
- **Research literacy**, or the ability to understand and use the IT-based tools relevant to the work of today’s researcher and scholar.
- **Publishing literacy**, or the ability to format and publish research and ideas electronically, in textual and multimedia forms ... to introduce them into the electronic public realm and the electronic community of scholars.
- **Emerging technology literacy**, or the ability to continuously adapt to, understand, evaluate and make use of the continually emerging innovations in information technology so as not to be a prisoner of prior tools and resources, and to make intelligent decisions about the adoption of new ones.
- **Critical literacy**, or the ability to evaluate critically the intellectual, human and social strengths and weaknesses, potentials and limits, benefits and costs of information technologies. There are diverse views as to what constitutes information literacy, scholars have tried to explain information literacy in terms of certain competencies as evident from the diagram given below. The scholars have tried to describe the concept of Information Literacy in terms of the following:
- **Finding information conception** – with an emphasis on gathering information, mainly facts, using technology and the library, and the need for students to be able to navigate different sources, such as websites, books, the library.
- **Linguistic understanding conception** – basic comprehension of textual or verbal information, including instructions for a particular activity, relying to an extent on general knowledge and prior experiences in similar activities.

- **Making meaning conception** – cognitive processes, for example, summarising, synthesising, interpreting, decision-making, which make sense of, or derive meaning from, information in different sources and formats within the context of the specific subject under consideration.
- **Skills conception** – practical ability to apply effectively a wide variety of skills, techniques and strategies required for handling information, including traditional library and information skills and more cognitive skills required for making meaning and evaluating and reflecting on decisions.
- **Critical awareness of source conception** – focusing on the need to evaluate sources, recognise bias, determine the quality of the information and check the authority of a website.
- **Independent learning conception** – the ability to confidently make decisions to assess, select and apply relevant skills and strategies for the current purpose in and a variety of situations, to learning independently, with less reliance on teacher input.

VIII. INFORMATION LITERACY MODELS

A survey of the Literature published around the world especially in the developed countries in the form of documentary sources, conferences and seminar proceedings, case studies related to universities, institutes, countries and websites, standards, policy guidelines and reports are the inspiring indications to a developing country like India and even to other developing countries for that matter to catch up with the main stream. Enormous research has been carried out in the developed countries, especially in the USA, UK, New Zealand, Australia and Mexico. It has been noticed that the collaboration between the professional organisations and the universities in developed countries has helped a lot in bringing out the standards and performance indicators to judge the Information Literacy competency of the students.

According to **Webb and Powis (2004)**, 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; and
- Evaluation



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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.

UNESCO in 1994 set up a manifesto for public library, in which information literacy is one of the important issues to be carried out by Librarians. These guidelines support the various services to be offered by libraries and Library Associations in the respective countries. On the basis of these guidelines, the network of libraries in education, public services, for disabled people's interest in learning, extension services, etc., is set up with workshops and conferences, also some training programs for the information providers as well.

IX. ROLE OF LIBRARIANS

Information & Communication Technologies have changed the complete scenario in libraries. Nowadays, the library has become the centre point of resource-based learning, and the role of the Librarian is changing radically with shifts of education paradigms. The impact of moving from text-based learning to resource-based learning will involve heavier use of library materials and a demand for more and varied media resources, including print and non-print. Today, information has become a major economic commodity. The Librarian is responsible for locating, acquiring, disseminating and tracking information resources of many types. It might include database searching, interlibrary loans, monitoring Internet newsgroups, or maintenance of a computerised library information system. All these tasks involve managerial expertise and information literacy. Every citizen needs to be educated for productive information use. Libraries and Librarians play an important role in the education of people for effective and efficient information use by teaching them information skills at all levels of education to enable to be informed citizens of the country. Librarians have to identify and select good age-appropriate and age-specific literature. They have to look more too online and other electronic sources to meet the information needs. Acquisitions and selection criteria take on entirely new meaning when considering access to online services. Traditional materials evaluation measures have little meaning when applied to Internet sites. New paradigms of selection and evaluation evolve with new technologies and their application to the classroom and resource centre. Librarians are key personnel in the implementation of resource-based programmes. They can design an information literacy curriculum, which matches readers' capabilities, because they have the expertise and knowledge to teach these skills. They are leaders in new information technologies as well as extended resources across many disciplines.

Their experience with information-finding tools gives them a context for the application of new tools such as the World Wide Web. They must accept that they are good educators and knowledge managers. Today, librarians are really in the most favourable position to be the leaders in developing an information-literate community. Thus, LIS professionals have to play a significant role in promoting information literacy in society. There exists a gap between Librarians and the users' information needs. To bridge this gap, they need to educate and re-educate themselves to acquire new skills and competencies for a new role and need to cultivate the concept of lifelong learning of information literacy skills. LIS professionals need to play an important role in the education process by making people aware of the need and motivating the use of information, new knowledge and new abilities. Some short-term courses or user-orientation programmes may be organised in the libraries for these purposes. There may be two components of the course for information literacy:

(i) One is orientation, which is primarily concerned with the way of introducing the users to the general techniques of library usage and services available and to the organisation layout and facilities of a particular library. During orientation library staff deliver a lecture, which introduces the program, demonstrates the use of the catalogue and shows readers how to access the self-paced on-line tutorial. Readers work through the library catalogue unit of the tutorial and also complete an exercise. They are able to create a network account and configure and email account during one of their orientation week sessions.

(ii) Other is instruction that is concerned with learning to make use of the information resources available in specific subject disciplines. It consists of library staff demonstrating CD-ROM network and web-based databases, and searching the Internet using search engines and subject gateways. A lecture by library staff called researching a Topic is another great motivation for readers to appraise critically the material they find, especially information found on the Internet. To undertake this core activity effectively, the Librarians need to be:

1. Strongly committed from the institutional and library administration,
2. Educate and reeducate themselves and acquire knowledge, skills and competencies.
3. Cultivate the concept of life-long learning through information literacy skills, acquired and developed in the library.
4. Make a library staff proficient in instruction and able to work effectively with faculty/ readers to implement institutional change, and



5. To develop a faculty or other staff who cooperatively team with them and other information-handling professionals involved in the institutions/organizations. The institutions of higher education should also pay attention to promote information literacy in a way by developing statement of mission or goals. The goals should be to:

- Prepare themselves to become effective teachers of information literacy programs.
- Support themselves and other educators and administrators in playing leadership roles in the development and implementation of information literacy programs.
- Forge new relationships throughout the educational community to work towards information literacy curriculum development.
- Offer opportunities for growth and development in the changing field of information literacy.

X. CONCLUSION

Information Literacy concept has been widely discussed and implemented in national curricula as well as in tertiary non-formal and lifelong learning in developed countries. The librarians are well equipped to teach such skills, but the major obstacle in promoting Information Literacy programme in developing countries like India is the lack of public awareness of the problem created by information illiteracy. The other obstacles in promoting information literacy are:

- Lack of cooperation among professional organization and lack of well articulated and/ or promoted information literacy policies and programs;
- Underdeveloped library & information systems and networks;
- Expensive telecommunication infrastructure services;
- Shortage of information & library educated and trained professionals who would give the necessary impetus to the information literacy promotion and implementations;
- Intimidated users who are not so well acquainted with the nature of information and its creation, how information is published and disseminated i.e., the pattern of flow of information within a discipline.

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