

Nigerian Libraries and Information Literacy in the 21st Century: How Far, So Far?

21. Yüzyılda Nijerya Kütüphaneleri ve Bilgi Okuryazarlığı: Nereden Nereye?

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Abstract

The study examined the status of information literacy in Nigerian libraries by surveying librarians who subscribed to the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) online forum. Seventy three librarians responded to the multi-item, self-developed questionnaire designed for the study. The survey revealed that information literacy was still at the formative stage and that it was more commonly taught in academic libraries than in other types of libraries. Similarly, the study discovered that information literacy was not regularly implemented in the libraries. Stemming from the findings of the study, recommendations were suggested to improve the status of the programme in Nigerian libraries.

Keywords: Information literacy, Nigerian libraries, User education, Use of library, Nigeria

Öz

Bu çalışmada Nijerya Kütüphaneciler Derneği Online Forumuna üye olan kütüphaneciler araştırılarak Nijerya'daki kütüphanelerin bilgi okuryazarlığı durumları incelenmektedir. Araştırma için tasarlanan ankete yetmiş üç kütüphaneci yanıt vermiştir. Araştırma sonuçları bilgi okuryazarlığı kavramının halen oluşum aşamasında olduğunu ve diğer türdeki kütüphanelere nazaran akademik kütüphanelerde daha yaygın öğretilildiğini göstermektedir. Benzer şekilde araştırma, bilgi okuryazarlığı programlarının kütüphanelerde düzenli bir şekilde uygulanamadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma araştırmanın bulgularına dayanarak Nijerya kütüphanelerinde bilgi okuryazarlığı programlarının durumunun iyileştirilmesi için önerilerde bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilgi okuryazarlığı; Nijerya kütüphaneleri; Kullanıcı eğitimi; Kütüphane kullanımı; Nijerya

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Introduction

Information literacy (IL) is a vital skill for the 21st century. It is a required competence for all and sundry in the era where information and knowledge are a common currency of the global village. IL is an essential skill that fosters social inclusion, economic empowerment and quality living for citizens to function effectively in the global village (Bruce, 2003).

Information literacy has become necessary as a result of the advances in ICTs which have led to the explosion of information and information sources – a development that makes information users to “increasingly become overwhelmed by and frustrated with the quantities of information available” (Dadzie, 2009). Therefore, for anyone to make valuable decisions, achieve set goals and be relevant in this era, it is important to possess proficiencies for identifying, accessing, evaluating and using information effectively and efficiently.

Acknowledging the academic and socio-economic values of IL, libraries and librarians have, over the years, adopted various approaches to impart IL skills to various categories of users. In addition to their traditional functions of organizing and cataloguing library materials and providing reference resources, librarians also furnish advice and instruction for patrons to gain knowledge of the best library resources and to be able to use them intelligently and in proper order (Thomas, 2004). However, Lwehabura and Stilwell (2008) observed that implementation of IL programmes were not being seriously pursued in African libraries. It is against this background that this paper attempts to gauge the status of IL in different types of libraries in Nigeria in the 21st century. The paper seeks to pursue the following specific objectives:

1. to investigate the facilities and resources available in Nigerian libraries for effective IL training;
2. to explore the IL skills taught in Nigerian libraries;
3. to determine the IL approaches employed in Nigerian libraries;
4. to investigate the regularity of IL training in Nigerian libraries; and
5. to determine the awareness creation approaches for IL training in Nigerian libraries.

Gauging the status of IL will expose the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the programme in libraries. Such exposure should help the libraries to consolidate on the gains of IL and also assist them to effectively address the challenges confronting its implementation. The outcome of the study should also help libraries intending to implement IL to benchmark and sustain efficient programmes.

Literature Review

The purpose of information literacy (IL) in the library is to find effective ways to assist patrons in the information search process. Kuhlthau (1991) identifies six cognitive stages that information seekers pass through in their search for relevant information. The stages are: initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection and presentation. At each stage, information users pass through experiences that make them exhibit certain attitudes and behaviours that suggest that they require assistance. In order to intervene appropriately in taking patrons through these experiences, various information literacy approaches are adopted in libraries.

Academic and school libraries are in the forefront of information literacy training. Little wonder that Thomas (2004) asserts that IL training was most often considered their special province. According to Rader (2002), academic and school librarians developed the concept of information skills instruction from library orientation to library instruction or course-integrated user instruction during the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century. Academic libraries provided varying levels of reference support during the beginning and middle decades of the 20th century. However, the commonest approaches to library instruction then were library lectures which were usually followed by some sort of assignment that required students to use the library and its array of bibliographic tools and resources (Thomas, 2004).

Advances in technology which led to 'an increase in remote access to information and a demand for more rapid, anytime-anyplace sharing of information' noted by Bawden, Devon and Sinclair (2000) serves as an impetus for many academic libraries to offer information literacy via the internet. For example, Dupuis (2001) reported how the University of Texas at Austin's Texas Information Literacy Tutorial (TILT) integrates web-based ILI in first-year college courses and enhances students' information resource selection, database searching and Internet source evaluation. Also, Clay, Harlan, and Swanson (2001) narrated how interactive learning exercises and diverse audiovisual components, such as sound, quick-tune movies and animations, were incorporated with IL instruction tutorials at California State University.

Some institutions offer formal information literacy courses which could range from for-credit to non-credit, from required to elective, and from distance to face-to-face. Such courses could be integrated with a core curriculum, stand alone as a specific discipline or course, or taught as general information skills (Donnelly, 1998 in Kasowitz-Sheer and Pasqualoni, 2002).

Grassian and Kaplowitz (2001) in Kasowitz-Sheer and Pasqualoni (2002) submitted that institutional and situational factors including audience, purpose, budget, staffing, facilities and time determine the IL approach adopted by an institution. Therefore, due to the differences in mission and student body of higher education, Breivik (1998) opined that IL should be designed to address specific needs rather than a prescribed set of criteria.

Documented evidence in the library literature has revealed that past user instruction in public libraries has been minimal. For instance, Lai (2011) observed a lack of relevant study investigating IL training in public libraries, especially in the quality and organization of IL courses and the IL skills of public librarians. However, during the last decade of the 20th century the infusion of information technology and the development of the Internet have created many needs and demands in the public libraries for information and technical skill instruction (Rader, 2002). There are pockets of success stories of public libraries in developed countries conducting IL training to their patrons. For example, a survey conducted by Julien and Breu (2004) in the 22 largest Canadian urban libraries found that 36% of those libraries provided formal IL training and 71% offered informal training.

Based on the published literature (e.g. Rader, 2002), special libraries in business environments tend to do very little instruction for their users because special library users expect to receive information ready to use from their librarians. Librarians in medical, law and other professional libraries provide very specific and intense information skills instruction to their users as shown in the literature. Excellent course-integrated modules have been developed by these special librarians to aid their library users in learning necessary information skills.

In Africa, IL training is still evolving in higher education curriculum (Ojedokun and Lumade, 2005). Apart from a few initiatives reported about South African higher institutions by Rader (2002), IL in Africa is still invisible. Dulle (2004) observed that IL instruction in most African universities has not gone beyond user education and library orientation. These approaches were adjudged ineffective because they failed to produce information literate library users.

Recognizing the inadequacy of IL initiatives in Ghanaian institutions, Dadzie (2007) recommended a modification and upgrading of library orientation and user education programmes to credit –earning course in the curricula of the institutions. Likewise, Dadzie (2009) observed the need to improve information literacy programmes in Ghanaian Universities. To address this she recommended; improvements in ICT infrastructure of the institutions; visible commitment of the universities' management to ILI; fostering effective partnerships among the library and the faculty and a review of library schools' curricula to reflect new trends in information literacy.

A careful look at library literature revealed that information literacy in Nigeria; especially in higher education is being paid lip-service to. Higher education, according to Oni (1997), is taken to be the same thing as the education provided in universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture and similar institutions excluding the specialized ones founded by professional bodies such as schools of nursing, forestry, survey and other monotchnics which are regarded as post-secondary institutions set up essentially for training middle-level man-power.

Although, provisions of higher education regulation bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) mandated the inclusion of information literacy in higher education curricula, only a few institutions give serious attention to the provision (Baro, 2011). For instance, the NUC benchmark minimum academic standards for undergraduate programmes recommended a 2-unit course titled “use of library, study skills and ICT” for year one students of Nigerian universities. (NUC, 2007). NUC is the universities education regulatory body in Nigeria. Rasaki (2008) had observed that there were discrepancies in the implementation of IL in Nigerian Universities. He noted that while some offer IL as a credit-earning course, some only have library orientation; while some others cluster it with other general study courses. In a few Universities, IL is offered as a credit-earning course but Rasaki (2008) submitted that the time and space allotted to the course are not always sufficient to achieve the desired results. Similarly, Okoye (2013) found all the federal universities which participated in a study titled “user education in Federal university libraries: a study of trends and developments in Nigeria” to offer compulsory and credit-bearing IL courses to their students. However, only one of them had a formal user education policy. The implication of this is that information literacy was still at the formative stage in Nigeria.

Baro, Seimode and Godfrey (2013) compared IL in university libraries in Nigeria with those in the United Kingdom and USA and deduced that libraries in Nigeria lagged behind in its implementation. Baro et al (2013) claimed that lack of facilities, lack of understanding of IL, students’ nonchalant attitude towards attending IL sessions and low acceptance of low approach to IL were factors militating against IL training in university libraries in Nigeria. They submitted that IL initiatives would be effective only when necessary management supports and facilities for delivery are provided by university authorities in Nigeria.

Insights from the reviewed literature uncovered the fact that previous studies in IL in Nigeria have not adequately addressed the status of IL in Nigerian libraries. The focus of most studies was on challenges, barriers and problem of IL implementation. At best, some articles compared IL practices in selected Nigerian universities to other institutions in foreign lands. Discussions on the status of IL programmes in Nigerian libraries are uncommon and this is the gap that the present study intends to address.

Methodology

The main focus of the study was to gauge the status of information literacy in libraries in Nigeria; therefore, the exploratory research approach was adopted. The approach was preferred because the status of information Literacy (IL) in Nigeria had not been properly situated in literature.

The target population of the study was librarians in Nigeria. Librarians who subscribed to the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) online forum were engaged for

the study because there was no known official list of library professionals in Nigeria from which samples could have been drawn. NLA forum is an online discussion group of librarians on the *Yahoo! Group* platform. Librarians from various types of libraries belong to the forum in order to enhance their status and improve networking and collaboration with colleagues. Personal visit to libraries was considered to collect the data for the study and also to have an on-the-spot assessment of IL practices in some libraries but financial constraints and time frame rendered the option impossible.

The data collection instrument was a self-developed, multi-item questionnaire. The questionnaire elicited information about the library and the nature and approach of information literacy therein. *Survey Monkey*, a web-survey development cloud-based software, was employed to prepare the questionnaire. The questionnaire link was sent to librarians via the NLA online forum. Reminders were sent at two weeks interval; and the exercise spanned two months. The data collected was analyzed using the appropriate sub-programmes of the SPSS version 14.

Results

Respondents' Profiles

Seventy three librarians responded to the online questionnaire and table I below shows their distribution according to the type of library where they worked.

There were more respondents from the academic library than other types of libraries. This is expected because librarians in academic institutions have access to better facilities than their counterparts in other types of libraries. The mandate of academic librarians to support the teaching, learning and research goals of their parent institutions which requires them to collaborate and network with colleagues to keep abreast of developments and trends of practices could inform their more active participation in the online survey.

Table I. Participants' Type of Library

Type of library	Number of respondents	Percent
Academic	48	68.57%
Public library	2	2.86%
Research library	8	11.43%
Special library	13	18.57%
National library	1	1.43%
Other	1	1.43%
Total	73	100%

Among the 63 respondents that indicated the age of their libraries, thirty (about 50%) work in libraries that were between 1 and 20 years old; and these were mainly private university libraries. The private university is a recent initiative designed to address the perennial problem of incessant closures of state-owned universities occasioned by students' unrest and work-to-rule actions of both academic and non-academic members of staff that has bedeviled university education in Nigeria. Libraries within the age range of 21- 40 were 17 in number while the ones within 41- 60 and 61- 80 age ranges were 10 and 4 in number respectively. Only one library was over 100 years old and it was a special library established in 1898.

Availability of Information Literacy Programme

When asked if there was any form of information literacy programme in their libraries, 40 (55%) answered in the affirmative. They were also requested to point out when the programme started in their libraries. Only 33 responded to the question and their responses are presented in Fig. 1. Apparently the figure showed that information literacy was less than 20 years old in majority of the libraries (22; 67%). Out of twenty two libraries whose information literacy programme was less than 20 years old, ten were less than five years old in the IL practices and these were libraries in private universities. The private university system is a recent development in the Nigerian higher education system. Similarly, the respondents were asked if they had dedicated units/divisions for information literacy in their libraries. Only 17 (12%) participants affirmed that there was and that the units were coordinated by various cadres of librarians. Also, the coordinators were given diverse designations to reflect their duties. Such designations include resource officer, reference bibliographer, head of learning center, coordinator of reference and IL services among others. This finding supported Ojedokun and Lumade's (2005) assertion that IL was still evolving in African libraries.

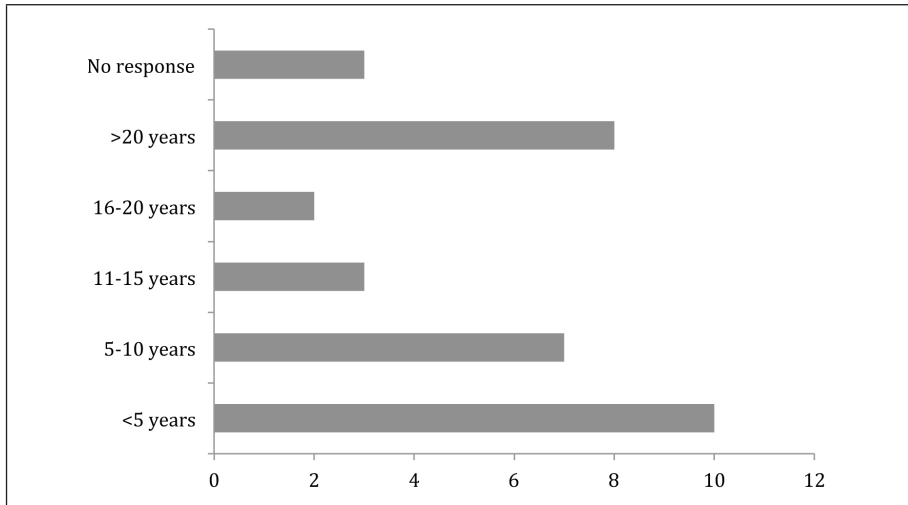


Figure 1. Age of Information Literacy in Nigerian Libraries

The study also sought to know the facilities and resources used in the libraries for information literacy training. Table II presents the facilities that the respondents identified as being used in their libraries for information literacy trainings. PowerPoint projector was identified by about 60.47% of the respondents as a facility used in their libraries.

Table II. Facilities and Resources Used for Information Literacy in Nigerian Libraries

Facilities	Number of respondents (n = 43)	Percent
PowerPoint projector	26	60.47%
Internet	19	44.19%
White board screen	17	39.53%
Computers	17	39.53%
Technology manuals and handbooks	13	30.23%
Database use manuals	8	18.60%
Other	7	16.28%

Skills Taught in Information Literacy

Table II presents the information literacy skills taught in Nigerian libraries as indicated by 44 respondents. Ability to locate and access information was the leading skill taught; closely followed by ability to recognize needed information.

Table III. Information Literacy Skills in Nigerian Libraries

Information literacy skill	Number of respondents (n= 44)	Percent
Ability to recognize needed information	34	77.27%
Ability to evaluate and use needed information	30	68.18%
Ability to construct strategies for locating information	25	56.82%
Ability to locate and access information	38	86.36%
Ability to organize, apply and communicate information to others	24	54.55%
Ability to synthesize and build upon existing information	21	47.73%

Information Literacy Approaches in Nigerian Libraries

The study also investigated the approaches adopted by the libraries to implement their information literacy programmes and found, as presented in Fig. 2, that 'library class approach' was the most popular as indicated by 26 out of 41 participants that responded to this item of the questionnaire. Six respondents said they used other unspecified methods to implement the programme in their libraries.

However, personal experience of one of the researchers had shown that some libraries, particularly academic libraries, adopt and adapt the two IL approaches and found them to yield good results in the academic library where they were used (Adeleke and Olorunsola, 2010). The approaches are:

- ◇ group method designed for students on subject related database in the faculties of Natural sciences, Humanities, Social/Management sciences, and project writing students in their final classes;
- ◇ individual training approach in which staff and students voluntarily approach the e-resources librarian for training particularly in the area of online resources.

These approaches have been confirmed to yield good results in the library where they were used as reported by Adeleke and Olorunsola (2010).

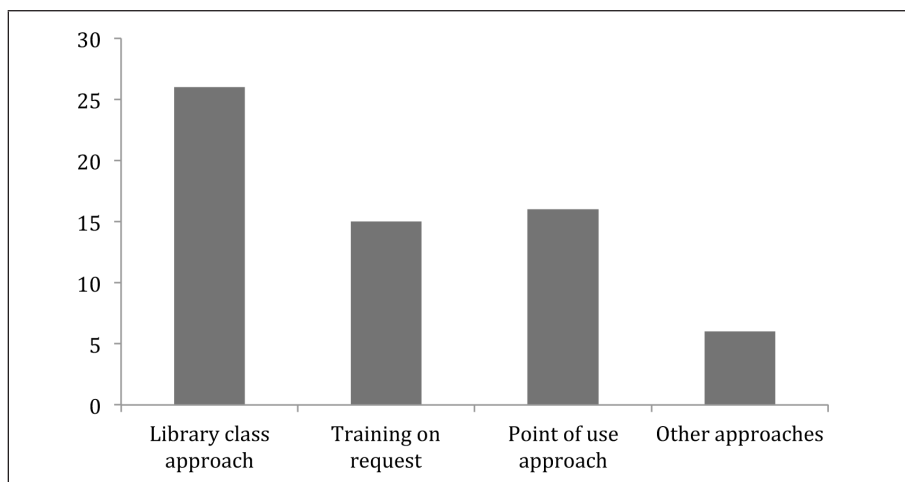


Figure 2. Information Literacy Approaches

Regularity of Information Literacy Training in Nigerian Libraries

Table IV represents how regular information literacy was conducted in the libraries. About 71% of the participants in the survey said that IL training was conducted at the beginning of the year or semester as the case might be with academic libraries where majority of them worked. Generally speaking, IL training was not as frequent as expected of the 21st century library that should be more proactive in attracting patrons to the library and equipping them adequately enough to use various forms and formats of information sources and resources in Nigeria.

Table IV. Regularity of Information Literacy in Nigerian Libraries

Period of IL training	Number of respondents (n= 44)
At the beginning of session/year	29 (70.73%)
At the beginning of semester/month	9 (21.95%)
Every week affair	2 (4.88%)
Whenever the need for it arises	18 (43.90%)
When new technologies are acquired	13 (31.71%)
When users demand for it	15 (36.59%)
When deemed necessary by library management	20 (48.78%)

Information Literacy Awareness Creation Approaches in Nigerian Libraries

The respondents indicated that various means were employed to create awareness about information literacy in their libraries with the most popular being the conventional notice board as presented in Table IV. Other traditional means of information dissemination such as 'official memos', 'interpersonal relation', and 'newsletter' were also employed. However, the use of technology especially internet applications such as email, weblogs, and World Wide Web was not very popular. This could be attributed to underdeveloped ICT infrastructure in most African countries and institutions as observed by Dadzie (2009).

Table V. Methods of Creating Information Literacy Awareness in Nigerian Libraries

Awareness creation approaches	Responses (n= 44)	Percent
Notice boards	35	74.47%
Official memos	23	48.94%
Emails	15	31.91%
Interpersonal relations	15	31.91%
Newsletters	11	23.40%
Institutional website	9	19.15%
Library websites	7	14.89%
Library blogs	1	2.13%
Other	9	19.15%

Discussions

One major finding of this study was that information literacy was still evolving in Nigerian libraries. Many of the libraries started the practice less than 20 years ago in spite of the fact that there are libraries that are more than 60 years old in the country. The implication of this is that early libraries and librarians did not realize the importance of user education to the use of library resources and facilities early enough. Another reason could be that early library personnel in Nigeria might not have had the requisite knowledge to impart such skills to library users.

Also the study revealed that information literacy was more commonly taught in academic libraries than others as found in other works such as Rader (2002) and Thomson (2004). This is predictable as academic libraries were usually better equipped in terms of qualified personnel and necessary facilities than other types of libraries in Nigeria. The mandate of academic libraries to support teaching, learning and research placed them in a vantage position to attract funding and other forms of support required to realize their objectives of promoting scholarship and excellence.

Another major finding of the study was that library class approach was the most popular method of information literacy training in Nigerian libraries. This was expected because majority of the respondents worked in academic libraries where it was mandatory for students to undergo either a for-credit or a non-credit library course as part of the graduation requirements recommended by the National Universities Commission (NUC). Technology-based instructions were feebly mentioned as an approach of imparting information literacy in the libraries because of underdeveloped ICT infrastructure and epileptic power supply experienced in most Nigerian institutions. The internet that should be a veritable tool for self-training was not well developed as a result of low bandwidth and high cost.

Moreover, it was discovered from the study that information literacy was not regularly implemented in the libraries; a development that corroborated the authors' earlier observation that "only a few institutions give serious attention to the provision of the NUC for the inclusion of the programme in higher education curriculum" in Nigeria. The irregularities gave credence to Rasaki's (2008) observed discrepancies with the implementation of information literacy in Nigerian libraries.

Conclusion

The study has examined the status of information literacy and found it to be still at the formative stage in Nigerian libraries. It was also found that academic libraries paid more attention to information literacy than other types of libraries, though not as regularly as expected of a 21st century library. It was therefore recommended that:

1. libraries and librarians should take up the challenge of promoting the course of information literacy instruction by adopting every possible means to sensitize their teeming users to the benefits of the programme;
2. libraries should employ the use of popular media to announce and publicize IL training programmes;
3. libraries can create a weblog to pass information on training programmes, sessions and content of the training; an approach Adeleke and Habila (2013) have found to be useful in this regard.
4. governments at all levels should do more to improve the facilities in other types of libraries than academic libraries, especially the public library that could be considered as the 'school' of the general public;
5. professional librarians should be engaged to manage every type of library as it is their responsibility to impart information literacy skills to library patrons;
6. libraries should work with the administrations of their parent institutions to advocate for improved ICT and internet facilities in order to upgrade IL services;
7. librarians should acquire more skills to deliver on good library practices particularly on information literacy instruction; and

8. library schools should enrich their curricula by including information literacy instructions for librarians-in-training.

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