

Information Literacy Program for Social Sciences

S Majumdar

Rajesh Singh

Abstract

Defines Information Literacy and introduces the need of Information Literacy Program (ILP) in academic libraries. Deliberates the objectives of ILP in Delhi University Library System (DULS). Describes the methodology adopted to conduct ILP in DULS for Social Sciences. Explains the presentations as vital tool to conduct ILP. Analyzes the feed back of the audience shows that such programs are very essential to reap the full benefit of ICT, Internet and other digital resources.

Keywords : Information Literacy Program, ICT, Internet, Digital Resources, User Study

1. Introduction

From leaf to clay tablets, from manuscripts to microfilms, from printed documents to CD-ROMS and online electronic resources, Libraries and Information Centers (LICs) have always been in the business of facilitating information to its diversified categories of users. Since the time immemorial the professions have always been in fore front in devising, developing and using various tools and technologies to facilitate content-based information to its end users. In this context Information Communication Technology (ICT) has made its effective presence in LICs. ICT has drastically transformed the way for collection, processing, storage, retrieval and communication of information. Particularly the Internet has completely transformed the traditional method of processing information from collection to communication.

The abundance of information available on the Internet in public domain in the form of subject gateways, e-books, e-journals, subject and subject concept based web pages, etc., as well as the information available through different subscription based databases made available by various hosts and aggregators, is bound to play a very important role in teaching, learning and research, particularly in higher education and R&D institutions.

Keeping in view the huge amount of information available through the Internet, today, again library and information profession is at a crossroad. The LIS profession is striving to find out the ways and means to organise and make accessible this huge information available through the Internet. For maximum utilisation of these resources in teaching learning and research, the Information Literacy Program (ILP) is the need of the hour. It makes the end users competent enough for retrieving precise and relevant information as per their need. In this context the LICs have a very important role to play through Information Literacy Programs.

2. What is Information Literacy?

Information Literacy can be defined in terms of a set of competencies that an informed citizen of an information society ought to possess to participate actively and intelligently in that society.

According to Jeremy Shapiro and Shelly Hughes Information Literacy is “a new liberal art that extends from knowing how to use computers and access information to critical reflection on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure and its social, cultural, and philosophical context and impact”(1). Thus Information Literacy is not only knowing how to use computers and access information but also evaluating the nature and impact of information in relation to its technical infrastructure and its social, cultural and philosophical context.

The American Library Association's (ALA) Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, final Report defines Information Literacy, as, a “set of abilities requiring individuals to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information”(2). In other words information literacy is a set of skills, which enables the individuals to recognise his/her information need. In addition it also enables to locate, evaluate and use the needed information effectively.

A close analysis of the above definitions and a review of the related literature reveal the following aspects of information literacy, which should be kept in mind while planning any information literacy programme. These aspects may be termed as components of a information literacy program.

- ◆ The very important aspect of information literacy is tool literacy. It is 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 is another important aspect. It is an important aspect for conducting information literacy programs in academic institutions. It is the ability to understand the form, format, location and access methods of information resources.
- ◆ Research Literacy is another aspect. It is the ability to understand and use the IT based tools relevant to the work of today's scholars and researchers.
- ◆ The other aspect of Information Literacy is Critical Literacy. It is the ability to evaluate critically the intellectual, human and social strengths and weaknesses, potentials and limits, benefits and costs of information technologies.
- ◆ Last but not the least aspect of information Literacy is regarding emerging technology. Technology never stands still, it always advances. This is the ability to adapt, understand, and evaluate the emerging technologies and make use of the continually emerging innovations in IT so as to make intelligent decisions about the adoption of new technology.

Information Literacy is basically a library instruction program. It focuses on content, communication, analysis, information searching and evaluation. In view of the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources Information Literacy in libraries have become increasingly important. It “forms the basis for life long learning”(3) by enabling the learners

to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning.

3. ILP at DULS

Delhi University Library System (DULS) comprising of more than 34 libraries in its fold, caters to the information needs of entire University community. In addition to the e-resources available through UGC-Infonet, DULS also subscribes a good number of e-resources. Besides, it also promotes prominent public domain e-resources available free of cost through its website: [<http://crl.du.ac.in/>] With a view to educate the users and enhance their capabilities regarding access and use of electronic resources and make them competent for retrieving precise, relevant and authentic information through Internet, ILP has been started by DULS since last academic session 2006-2007, with precisely defined objectives.

4. Objectives

Keeping in view the various components and standards, DULS has started the innovative Information Literacy Program with following precise objectives:

- ◆ To acquaint the users with the academic power of Internet;
- ◆ To provide an indication as to what is there on Internet related to the area of study and research.
- ◆ To show how web resources could be of immense use in their academic pursuit and research;
- ◆ To show the usefulness of various multimedia resources on web in Social Science Research.
- ◆ To promote the use of subscribed databases in academics and research;
- ◆ To describe specific features of various databases being subscribed by DULS;
- ◆ To acquaint the users with the use of various search techniques to retrieve relevant information;
- ◆ To recognize the need for information, and to evaluate, organize, interpret, and communicate information in all its formats;
- ◆ To promote that Information Literacy is for participants' academic and vocational success and for lifelong learning;
- ◆ To provide research-integrated instruction in collaboration with the faculty and in alignment with research objectives;
- ◆ To establish a direct interaction between users and library professionals.
- ◆ To explain the necessity of bibliographical citations and its usefulness.
- ◆ To promote the use of standardized citations of bibliographical references.

DULS has already completed the first phase by conducting Information Literacy Programs in different departments basically for Post Graduate students. As a next step DULS has conducted a workshop on E-Resources and Bibliographical citations' with a sponsorship from NASSDOC, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.

5. ILP for Social Sciences

Keeping in view the various aspects/components of information literacy DULS conceived, designed, and developed Information Literacy Programs for different user categories in close proximity with teaching faculty members. On successful completion of ILP's for post graduate students, DULS, with financial assistance from NASSDOC, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, conducted one day workshop for M.Phil. and Ph.D. scholars in social sciences in University of Delhi. The program was conducted on 20th November, 2006.

All the Social Science Departments of the University were requested to send the names, mailing addresses and telephone numbers of scholars registered either for M.Phil or Ph.D. On receipt of the list from the departments, the scholars were invited to attend the workshop. A total of 150 M.Phil. and Ph.D. Scholars attended the program. A brief description of the presentations made during the workshop is given below.

6. Social Science Research and the Internet

Internet and its most used component WWW has turned into a biggest source of information with widest coverage and the fastest access. It is the most powerful tool for global communication and exchange of information. The amount of publicly available information on the web is increasing consistently at an unbelievable rate. It has revolutionized the way that people access information, and has opened up new possibilities in areas such as digital libraries, information dissemination and retrieval, education, commerce, entertainment, government and health care. The World Wide Web can be a great place to accomplish research on many topics but finding quality web materials and using them to advantage in writing can be challenging.

It is because putting documents or pages on the web is easy, cheap or free, unregulated, and unmonitored. It is a self-publishing medium, that is, anyone can publish anything. This means that not everything one finds on the Web is equally valuable or reliable. There is a famous saying in this "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog." Unlike most print sources, web sources do not have to be professionally accepted and edited to be published. Therein lies the rationale for evaluating carefully whatever one finds on the Web. The burden is on the reader to establish the validity, authorship, timeliness, and integrity of what he finds. With above introduction to the Internet and web resources in public domain, types of web pages and evaluation criteria's such as Authority, Accuracy, Currency, Coverage, Objectivity, Ease of use, Purpose and Design and Navigation were explained to the audience.

Besides, the basic web searching techniques were also explained. As an important search engine for social science resources Google was described to the audience including the anatomy of a Google search, special searching tips for Google, Google Books and Google Scholar. A brief orientation to e- resources in the form of subject gateways, e-books, e-journals, and scholarly websites etc .in

social science discipline was also given to the researchers. The quality and variety of information readily available through these public domain resources was also explained to the audience.

7. Information Competency in Social Sciences

The presentation mainly described the following aspects.

- ◆ Internet and Academic Research in Social Sciences.
- ◆ Electronic Information Sources in Social Sciences.
- ◆ Importance of subscribed databases
- ◆ Role of e-resources in Social Science Research.
- ◆ Orientation to subscribed databases
- ◆ Practical exposure

In this presentation the scope, coverage and important features of all the Social Science databases subscribed by DULS and some important social sciences databases from UGC- Infonet were described to the audience. Some selected topics of research culled out from the titles of research reports were practically searched and demonstrated.

8. Bibliographic Citations

The presentation of Bibliographic citations was based on the Chicago Manual of style, 15th edition. The presentation comprised of the Introduction to bibliographic citations; Need & Importance of citations in scholarly writings; what is plagiarism? ; How can we avoid plagiarism?. Sources that need to be credited or acknowledge in scholarly writings; Some tips on preventing plagiarism; Different manuals of style for bibliographic citations; The Chicago Manual of Style. The 15th ed. of the Chicago Manual of Style comprising, general guidelines and how to cite different sources: rules and examples was described to the audience.

The presentation practically demonstrated the various rules regarding bibliographical citations and how to make the citations in research.

9. Search Techniques

Use of Internet in teaching, learning and research largely depends upon the knowledge of search techniques, be it public domain resources or subscribed databases. The presentation deliberated on the

- ◆ Role of WWW in academic research.
- ◆ Use of Internet worldwide.
- ◆ Features of web resources.
- ◆ Types of resources on the web.
- ◆ Importance of e-resources in academic research.
- ◆ How to find relevant and precise information.

- ◆ Recall, Relevance and precision in web search
- ◆ Kinds of search.
 - ◆ Phrase search
 - ◆ Field search
 - ◆ Boolean operators
 - ◆ Proximity search
 - ◆ Controlled vocabulary
 - ◆ Concept map.
 - ◆ Limiting/Refining searches
 - ◆ Publication search
 - ◆ Visual search
 - ◆ Related topics

The above web search techniques were defined and practically demonstrated to the audience. Important subscribed databases were used to practically demonstrate the search techniques.

10. Feedback Analysis

Any kind of orientation, workshop or information literacy program is incomplete if it does not make provisions for feed back from the participants. Keeping in view the above necessity the participants were given a well-designed feed back form at the time of presentation. The effectiveness and success of the entire workshop is well reflected in these feedbacks and thus has emerged as the most important aspect of the workshop.

Feed back from the audience were sought on the selected statements where they were requested to select one option from strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and not sure. The statements were:

- 1 The Presentation is focused on materials and skills that are relevant to current research.
- 2 Various subscribed databases, electronic resources on www, search technique and the concept of bibliographical citations are clearly explained.
- 3 Instructional material (e.g. multimedia, websites, etc) are useful for our research.
- 4 Workshop is going to improve web searching capabilities, use of electronic resources and citation pattern in my research work.
- 5 Researchers are more prepared to use library and www services for research assignments as a result of this session.
- 6 It will be more useful if these presentations are made available on line through library website.
- 7 The content given in the presentation shows the academic flavor of the librarians' grasp on the subject matter.
- 8 The physical environment is suitable for instructions.
- 9 On an average how much time you spend surfing the Internet weekly.
- 10 How frequently you use the Internet for academic purpose.

Besides they were also asked to grade the over all workshop as, excellent, good, fair or poor. An open-ended question was also asked to share any general comment or suggestion regarding the workshop or any other library services. A detail analysis of the total feedback is made hereunder. The workshop consisted of well-developed power point presentations in which 150 research scholars have participated. In fact there was a overwhelming response to this workshop. However, at the very initial stage of planning the workshop, the number of participants was decided to be only 150. Likewise only 150 research scholars were selected on the first come first serve basis. A brief description regarding the workshop audience is given below.

1.	Total number of respondents	:		150
2.	Course of Study of Total number of respondents:		M.Phil	89
	Stage of Research work	i.	Preparatory stage	79
		ii.	Advance stage	07
		iii.	Final stage	03
3.	Course of Study of Total number of respondents:		Ph.D.	61
	Stage of Research work :	i.	Preparatory stage	24
		ii.	Advance stage	22
		iii.	Final stage	15

Through out the presentations the students maintained pin drop silence. Their responses to each of the statement have been analyzed and presented in table No. 1.

Table-1: Total number of responses to each statement provided

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A or not sure
The Presentation is focused on materials and skills that are relevant to current research.	48.67%	50.00%	--	--	1.33%
Various subscribed databases, Electronic Resources on www, Searching Technique and the Concept of Bibliographical Citations are clearly explained.	32.00%	54.67%	10.67%	--	2.67%
Instructional material (e.g. multimedia, websites, etc) are useful for our research.	44.00%	48.00%	3.33%	--	4.67%
Workshop is going to improve web searching capabilities, use of electronic resources and citation pattern in my research work.	53.33%	42.00%	1.33%	--	3.33%

Researchers are more prepared to use library and www services for research assignments as a result of this session.	43.33%	49.33%	4.00%	--	3.33%
It will be more useful if these presentations are made available on line through library website	60.67%	32.67%	5.33%	--	1.33%
The content given in the presentation shows the academic flavour of the librarians' grasp on the subject matter.	34.00%	51.33%	5.33%	--	9.33%
The physical environment is suitable for instructions.	31.33%	57.33%	1.33%	1.33%	8.67%

As described earlier in the very beginning of ILP, Delhi University Library System had visualized the importance of Feed Back from the audience to improve this innovative programme and make it a more interactive and as per the requirements of the audience. The feed back collected through this work shop has brought out very important facts, which has been analyzed and presented here under.

There were total 150 research scholars who participated in the workshop out of which 89 researchers were from M.Phil and 61 researchers were from Ph. D. As far as the stage of research work is concerned a maximum of 68.67% of participant (88.78% of M.Phil and 39.34% of Ph.D) are at preparatory stage, 19.33%, of participants (7.87% of M.Phil. and 36.07% of Ph. D.) are at advanced stage, where as 12% of participants (3.37% of M.Phil and 24.59% of Ph.D.) are at final stage.

It is very essential to know how much time on an average the target audience is spending surfing the Internet. Since it will be the pivotal point around which all the responses will be analyzed. In this context 47.33% of respondents has reported to use the Internet 1-5 hours weekly, 22.67% of respondents use it 5-10 hours weekly, 13.33% of respondents use it 10-15% hours weekly, 14.67% of respondents use it 15-20 hours weekly where as 2% of respondents have not responded. As far as the frequency of Internet use for academic purpose is concerned 57.33% of respondents have reported to use regularly, 24.67% frequently, 12.67% occasionally, 02% seldom and 03.33% of respondent have not responded.

As for as the relevancy of materials and skills is concerned a total of 98.67% of participants (48.67% strongly agree and 50% agree) have reported that the presentation is focused on materials and skills that are relevant to current research. Only 1.33% of participants have either not responded or were not sure. In terms of clarity of explanation as good as 86.67% of participants (32% strongly agree and 54.67% agree) have responded that the various subscribed databases e-resources on

WWW, searching techniques and the concept of bibliographical citations are clearly explained. Only 2.67% of respondents have either not responded to the statement or were not sure. However 10.67% of the participants have responded vice versa. They have disagreed to the statement. A chose analysis reveals the reason for the same. Since the participants are from a diversified widespread area of social sciences, respondents from the subjects, which have not formed the basis of examples, have responded negatively.

Responding to the usefulness of instruction material a total of 92% of participants (44% strongly agree and 48% agree) have found the instruction material (e.g multimedia websites etc) useful for their research. Only 4.67% of the respondents have either not responded to the statement or are not sure, where as 3.33% of audience disagree to the statement. As for as the impact of the workshop on research activity is concerned 53.33% of respondents are strongly agree, 42% agree, and 1.33% disagree to the statement that the workshop is going to improve web searching capabilities use of e-resources and citation pattern in my research work. However, 3.33% of respondents have either not responded to the statement or were not sure.

To the statement, 'Researchers are more prepared to use library and WWW services for research assignments as a result of this session' 43.33% participants strongly agree, 49.33% agree, 4% disagree and 3.33% of respondents have either not responded to the statement or were not sure. A total of 60.67% of participants are strongly agree, 32.67% agree, 5.33% disagree and only 1.33% of participants have either not responded or were not sure to the statement, 'It will be more useful if these presentations are made available on line through library website'.

The feedback has also worked as an instrument to evaluate the understanding and performance of the librarians who has made the presentations. A total of 85.33% of audience (34% strongly agree and 51.33% agree) have found that the content given in the presentation shows the academic flavor of the librarians' grasp on the subject matter. Only 5.33% of total respondents disagree to this statement. As far as physical environment is concerned 88.66% of participants have termed the physical environment suitable for instruction. However 2.66% of respondents (1.33% disagree and 1.33% strongly disagree) have rejected the suitability where as 8.67% of respondents have either not responded or are not sure about the suitability of physical environment. The rating of over all workshop is very encouraging. A total of 89.33% of respondents have found the workshop from excellent to good and only 8% of respondents have found it fair. 2.67% of respondents have not rated the workshop. However none of the respondents have found the workshop poor. This fact in itself shows the usefulness of such efforts.

An open-ended question was also asked to share any general comments or suggestions regarding the workshop or any other library services. Out of the total 150 only 98 participants have responded to this open-ended question and given their comments and suggestions. The respondents have

highly praised the efforts of DULS to conduct such an innovative program. Some respondents have made valuable suggestions to improve the traditional library services.

References

1. Shapiro, J and Hughes, S. Information Literacy as a Liberal Art: Enlightenment proposals for a new curriculum. *Educon Review*. Available at <http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/reviewarticles/31231.html> . (Accessed on 09.09.2007)
2. American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy. Final report. Chicago. Author. (ED 315 028)
3. Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Association of College & Research Libraries. Available at <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informtionliteracy-competency.htm>. (Accessed on 07.01.2008).

About Authors

Dr. S Majumdar, University Librarian & Head, DULS, University of Delhi, Delhi.
Email: librarian@du.ac.in

Dr. Rajesh Singh, Deputy Librarian, E-Resource & Training Division, DULS, University of Delhi,
Email: rsingh@duls.du.ac.in