

Placing Media and Information Literacy at the Core of Instruction

Dr. Jagtar Singh,
Professor,
Department of Library and Information Science,
Punjabi University, Patiala -147 002 (India)
Email: jagtar.kindu@gmail.com

Abstract:

Information has become fourth need for surviving and thriving in the Internet era. With emergence of the Internet and the ascent of multimedia, it has become very difficult to manage quality information for decision-making and convert pertinent information into tacit knowledge for problem-solving. For the emerging knowledge societies, competency building is necessary to make sense of the chaos on the Internet particularly in the public domain. Similarly, various TV channels are also adding to the problems of the viewers. Instead of informing the masses, these channels in India are competing with each other and sometimes make issues of the non-issues. What is breaking news in the morning becomes barking news in the evening. Media is virtually setting the agenda and many-a-times misguiding the masses. In such a situation, it is required to equip the stakeholders with media and information literacy (MIL) skills to promote critical thinking among them and also to convert the typical information consumers into informed citizens. Only vigilant viewers and critical thinkers can contribute to the sustainable socio-economic development of nations. This paper is based on the assumption that majority of the students are moving away from libraries and consider 'Google' as their Godfather to solve their education and learning related problems. This is a very dangerous trend. It is high time to take these students out of the clutches of the 'Google' by making their respective libraries their second home. For this, media and information literacy courses must be offered across frontiers at all levels of education. Since today's students will be tomorrow's leaders, it is better to catch them young. This paper builds a strong case to place media and information literacy at the core of instruction to promote critical thinking and independent learning among the students.

Key Words:

Media and Information Literacy, Knowledge Management, Quality Information Management, Librarian-Faculty Collaboration, Libraries and Google, Critical Thinking skills.

International Initiatives

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This means that everyone is free to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media across frontiers. Media and information literacy (MIL) empowers people with competencies needed to survive and thrive in this world full of fierce competition. UNESCO and IFLA have taken MIL

as one of their top priorities. UNESCO has the 'Information for All Programme (IFAP)' and IFLA has the 'Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE)' core programme. Hence, before dealing with the heart of the matter in this paper, it would be appropriate to give a brief overview of the international initiatives that have taken place in the field of media and information literacy (MIL). Gunwald Declaration of 1982 emphasized on the need for political and educational systems to promote citizens' critical understanding of the phenomenon of communication and their participation in both old and new media. Similarly the Alexandria Declaration of 2005 underlines to place MIL at the core of lifelong learning. This paper is based on the spirit of the Alexandria Declaration because the author strongly believes that MIL empowers information seekers to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to obtain their personal, educational, professional and social goals. It is the basic human right that promotes equity to bridge digital divide and info-divide. Fez Declaration in 2011 endorses a far-reaching vision that today's digital age and convergence of communication technologies necessitate the combination of media literacy and information literacy in order to achieve sustainable human development, build participatory civic societies, and contribute to the consolidation of sustainable world peace, freedom, good governance, and the fostering of constructive intercultural knowledge, dialogue and mutual understanding. Similarly in 2011, UNESCO has also designed MIL Curriculum for Teachers. This curriculum focuses on the required core competencies and skills which can be seamlessly integrated into the existing teacher education without putting too much strain on already overloaded teacher trainees. The curriculum suggests nine core modules pertaining to citizenship, freedom of expression and information, access to information, democratic discourse, lifelong learning, understanding the news, media and information ethics, representation in media and information, languages in media and information, advertising, new and traditional media, Internet opportunities and challenges, information literacy and library skills, communication, MIL and learning- a capstone module. The non-core modules cover audience, media, technology and global village; digital editing and computer; camera shots and angles-conveying meanings; transnational advertising and super brands.

Prior to this a UNESCO Expert Group Meeting on the Development of Media and Information Literacy Indicators was held at Bangkok (Thailand) from 04-06 November 2010. This meeting ascertained the MIL indicators in two tiers. Tier-1 indicators were input related to measure enabling factors that impact individuals acquiring media and information literacy skills. Tier-2 indicators were meant to measure individual competencies among teacher-trainers, teachers in training and in service, as well as among students. Keeping in view that the MIL skills must enable people to achieve their personal, educational, occupational, and social goals and also develop critical thinking and public opinion to survive and thrive in the world which is highly competitive, insecure, and uncertain, the author conducted an IFLA sponsored International Workshop on Health Information Literacy (IWHIL) at East West University, Dhaka (Bangladesh) from 27-30 July 2011. This workshop was based on the premise that people are most important resource of a nation and only healthy people can contribute to the progress of

nations. After this, one more workshop on Health Information Literacy (HIL) was conducted at the same university in January 2012 for the students and faculty in universities in Bangladesh. The Governing Board of IFLA has also endorsed the IFLA Media and Information Literacy recommendations at its meeting held at Den Haag, The Netherlands on 07 December 2011. IFLA recommends that governments and organizations to commission research on MIL, support professional development, embed MIL education in all lifelong curricula, recognize MIL and lifelong learning as key elements for accreditation of all education and training programmes, include MIL in continuing education programmes, implement MIL programmes to increase employability and entrepreneurial capacities, and support thematic meetings which facilitate the MIL skills and lifelong strategies across frontiers.

Empowering-8 and the IMIL Survey

Earlier the 'Empowering-8 Model of Information Literacy' was developed by the participants of the IFLA Sponsored Workshop on Information Skills for Learning, hosted at Colombo in 2004 by the National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS), University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. This model is specially developed for the information seekers and teachers in the Asia-Pacific region. It contains eight steps to effectively access and use reliable information. Follow-up workshops were held at Patiala (India) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) respectively in the years 2005 and 2006. After this, to create a ripple effect at grass root level, eleven UNESCO sponsored Training-the-Trainers in Information Literacy Workshops were held in different countries of the world. Comprehensive report of these workshop is published in a special issue of 'International Information and Library Review' by Prof. F. Woody Horton, Jr. Now a UNESCO sponsored International Media and Information Literacy Survey (IMILS) is being undertaken by twenty countries of the Asia-Pacific to generate baseline data for UNESCO about the information seeking behavior, attitudes, problems and media preferences of graduate information seekers. Later on this project will be extended to the other regions of the world. As all these documents are easily available from the Internet by making a Google search, no references are given for them in this paper to save space. The author has been an active role player in all these events and is hopeful that the International Conference on Media and Information Literacy for Knowledge Societies being held at Moscow from 24-28 June would certainly set new standards for the promotion of MIL skills at the grass root level.

The Google and Libraries

Perhaps the future of libraries is uncertain as the end-users have fallen in the hands of commercial database providers and search engines like Google. Preservation of and access to our documentary heritage has been the historical mandate of libraries but now-a-days instead of buying documents, libraries are buying access from the commercial database providers. The commercial providers are always interested in their profit and not in the public good. On the other hand, the Net Generation thinks that Google has answer to all their problems. That is not true, and at stake is the quality of information and future of libraries. Hence, there is an immediate need to develop media and information literacy skills of the stakeholders, and turn the rote learners into independent lifelong learners and critical thinkers. This is necessary as

information from incredible sources is not always reliable. Information is now in over abundance and finding reliable information from the Internet is just like drinking from the fire hoses. Moreover, there is a lot of information deluge and the researchers are required to carefully find their way to the pertinent information they need. It is difficult than ever to be a good researcher because there is such a huge mix of reliable and unreliable information available on the Internet and in the libraries. Searching, browsing, and retrieving reliable information are critical challenges these days. In fact, accessing relevant information on the Internet is just like hitting the moving object. The Net Generation is mesmerized with the speed with which Google presents links to them. But many a time quality is at stake. Inaccurate information can mar the future of students in a fraction of a second as accurate information is instant power. Though libraries these days are not the only sources of information, yet they are reliable sources of information. It is very well said that if you have time to waste go to Google and if you don't have waste then go to a library. In libraries, everything is selection based and under control. But on the Internet, a lot of effort and skill is needed by the information seekers to manage access to quality information. Moreover, Google and the commercial publishers are another name for commoditization of information, whereas library is a social agency for the public good. Students need be equipped with the MIL skills and libraries need be made second home for them. Otherwise inaccurate information would lead to wrong decisions that would further mar the future of students, in other words the future of nations.

Promises and Perils of the New Media

TV channels and the new media have virtually overtaken the print-on-paper paradigm. Though the new media has the capacity to provide 24X7 real-time access to information, yet various TV channels are also adding to daily problems of the viewers. Instead of informing the masses, these channels in India are competing with each other and sometimes make issues of the non-issues. What is breaking news in the morning becomes barking news in the evening. Media is virtually setting the agenda and many-a-times misguiding the masses. In such a situation, it is required to equip the stakeholders with media and information literacy (MIL) skills to promote critical thinking among them and also to convert the typical information consumers into informed citizens. Only vigilant viewers and critical thinkers can contribute to the sustainable socio-economic development of nations. People must be able to ascertain the role, functions, and motives of the media. They should also be aware of the conditions under which media operates. Gagging, censorship and misuse of media must not be allowed by the vigilant citizens. Similarly media must also not be allowed to twist arms of the stakeholders without any rationale. Content evaluation and then ethical and legal use information and media are most important aspect of MIL skills. Stakeholders must also be trained in content creation and communication. Simply speaking, the MIL skills are the *sine qua non* for creating and leading change in the emerging knowledge societies. The critical challenge for present day teachers and academic librarians is to effectively educate and train students in the art of strategically collecting information from the Internet and other sources in ways that give the best sources in a cost-effective manner in the smallest amount of time. To be effective information managers, students must be equipped with media and information skills for effective searching. Students need to look beyond their academic assignments to be able to complete their research work. If educational institutions are to prepare graduates to be world-class professionals, then they must place media and information literacy skills at the core of instruction in across frontiers. This can best be accomplished when

librarians in collaboration with classroom faculty instill media and information literacy instruction into the curriculum. “Librarians, librarianship and libraries have always a leading role in the advancement of knowledge and the pursuit of learning. It has been the extremely close symbiotic collaboration between school teachers and school librarians that led to the information literacy idea in the first place” (Horton Jr., 2009, 119).

The Challenge before Librarians

The challenge before librarians is how to develop partnership with classroom faculty to share the responsibility of teaching students the value of a library. Another challenge is to free the information seekers from the clutches the Google and the Wikipedia. Google and Wikipedia can be good starting points, but these tools can not be the final authority on reliable information. Librarians must collaborate with the faculty to understand the problems that students face when they use computers and networks for searching and browsing the web-based information. This can be done only by treating the media and information literacy skills as the heart of education, and faculty-librarian partnership must be encouraged to develop critical thinking and independent learning in students. The Net Generation is not well versant with the print-on paper paradigm and the treasures of learning resources which libraries have for them. They most likely did not grow up with a stock of good books in their homes because for them the Internet has quickly replaced print sources as a primary and reliable platform for information. The problem with replacing the print-on-paper encyclopedia with the Wikipedia is in “assuming” the reliability of information that comes from the Web. The implications of using the information that is retrieved only from the Internet without the filter of media and information literacy skills are immediately visible to anyone who teaches research-based writing. The following example clearly shows innocence of the students with which they trust the reliability of information they find on the Internet. One of the students retrieved unreliable information from the Internet, and also used information from a credible source without giving its reference. When the teacher warned him of the inaccuracies of the retrieved information and the plagiarism issue pertaining to the not cited source, the student innocently told the teacher that no one has ever taught him such things. This speaks volumes about a teacher’s responsibility to equip students with MIL skills. The best way to do this is to introduce MIL courses at all levels of education across different streams.

Shift from Stacks to Computers

Majority of students enter a library to turn away from the books stacks and use networked computers to navigate beyond the boundaries of the library databases to the seamless horizons of information on the Web. Going to library as a place to access virtual resources and services is against the spirit of a library’s mandate, as well as the 24X7 nature of the Internet. ICTs and the Internet have given death blow to the traditional constraints of space and time but these dynamic developments have not been able to change the static mind-set of majority of the information seekers. Techno-savvy students know how to blog, create websites, download text and post to

YouTube, but don't have the critical abilities to use the Internet as a research tool and resource. This means that teachers must revise the curriculum to include media and information literacy. But librarians also have a pivotal role to play. "If, as all available evidence indicates, students and faculty are increasingly relying on Internet sources, then it is vital that what they rely on be of good quality and readily accessible. This is of importance not only for library patrons but also for librarians themselves." (Proctor, 2009, 435).

Conclusion

Recognizing the challenges that face novice researchers; librarians and teachers can help students to beat the info-glut that exists on the Internet. Rather than being overwhelmed by a flood of information, students can learn how to carefully search and browse the Internet. MIL skills are not innate, rather these need be taught in a systematic and cumulative way in the classroom and in the library and at any place where research is conducted. This is a task that is best accomplished by teachers who collaborate with librarians to enable students to see librarians as the information service professionals who can make students effective information managers. It means that libraries must redefine their role and library professionals must aggressively promote user education and MIL skills. ICTs cannot provide human touch but librarians can certainly do that by becoming pro-active professionals and effective MIL trainers. Having a collaborative approach to teaching media and information literacy skills reinforces the notion that library and research skills are integral to any education system that seeks to prepare students to be critical thinkers and independent lifelong learners. We need to change perception of the libraries as repositories and redefine them as pro-active service centers staffed by information professionals who are educated and trained in effectively using the entire information and communication system by which information is created, shared, stored, managed, and used. The challenge before librarians is how to collaborate with teachers to promote among students the use and value of the library. Another challenge is to free them from the grips of the Google and clutches the Wikipedia and the blogs. The librarians and the faculty must work together to understand the obstacles that students face when they use computers and networks for searching and browsing the web-based information. This can be done by treating the media and information literacy as the heart of educational programmes and placing the MIL skills at the core of instruction for developing critical thinking and independent learning skills in students. In fact, if information is fish, then MIL is the art of fishing. It is incumbent upon the faculty and librarians to equip students with the MIL skills to enable them to be quality information managers, critical thinkers, independent learners, opinion makers, and vigilant citizens who understand the role and function of the media and the conditions under which the media operates and with which motives. MIL skills can enable students and other stakeholders to enjoy the bliss of truth and truthful living.

References

Horton Jr., F. Woody (2009). Information Literacy and Learning to Learn. In Jagtar Singh, Malhan, Indervir, Trishanjit Kaur (Eds.). *Library and Information Science in Digital Age* (Essays in honour of Prof. M.P. Satija). New Delhi: Ess Ess. 117-119.

Training-the-Trainers in Information Literacy, *International Information and Library Review*, 41 (2), 2009. (Special Issue).

Proctor, Edward (2009). Facilitating research on the Internet: The rationale behind design of an academic resources website. In Jagtar Singh, Malhan, Indervir, Trishanjit Kaur (Eds.). *Library and Information Science in Digital Age* (Essays in honour of Prof. M.P. Satija). New Delhi: Ess Ess. 419-442.