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Librarians Conceptions of Information Literacy in Three Federal Universities in South East Nigeria: Implications for Effective Implementations of Information Literacy Programmes

By

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Abstract:

Information literacy education in Nigeria is yet to be fully developed and supported by a national standard. The paper examined librarians conceptions of information literacy in three Federal Universities in South East Nigeria and perceptions of its value for students in institutions of higher learning and draws on the implications for development of optimal formalized information literacy programmes in Nigerian universities. The research is a cross-sectional survey research which used questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire contained both structured and open ended questions. Sample was 63 librarians from three Federal Universities. Eight themes were gleaned from the conceptions of Information literacy supplied by the respondents. The highest number of Fifteen (15) respondents conceptualized information literacy as a Meta competence involving multiple information skills abilities. Analysis of librarians' perceptions of the value of information literacy for students show that they placed the value in six major areas which include ability to access information, improved academic performance, ability to use library resources and others. On perceptions of their roles in information literacy education, high mean score showed that librarians strongly felt that information literacy is the responsibility of librarians and not added burden. The implication of the result of the research is that giving a measure of support through a national policy guided information literacy standard, librarians in Nigeria will perform their expected role in contributing to students' information skills development and lifelong learning.

Keywords: Information Literacy, Librarians, Information skills, Library use skills, Technology skills

Introduction

All professionals have their unique roles in contributing to societal progress. The evolving role of the librarian in the 21st century, demands that they should be involved in inculcating information literacy skills that will help users apply information for personal and human development. In line with this premise, discuss on information literacy have moved from a mere skills to locate and use information to a much more assuming ingredient for personal and societal developmental and for empowerment. Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy (ANZIIL) presented an all-embracing role definition of information literacy as a pre-requisite for participative citizenship, for social

inclusion, for the creation of new knowledge, for personal, vocational, corporate and organisational empowerment, as well as for learning for life (Bundy, 2004).

Library Associations in some countries that have recognized the pivotal role of information literacy for education and national development have formulated standards and frameworks for the implementations of information literacy in their academic institutions. Notably are Australian and New Zealand information literacy framework: principles, standards and practice 2001, The American Library Association Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education 2000 National Information Literacy Framework (Scotland), Information Literacy Framework for Wales 2011. These frameworks outline various information skills and modalities for implementation of the training.

Information Literacy development in Nigerian academic institutions

Unlike their counterparts in other countries, Library Associations in Nigeria are yet to formulate or adopt a national information literacy standard that will help the citizens develop information skill competencies that is required to survive in the knowledge society (UNESCO, 2005). The only official support for information literacy related activity is indicated in National Universities Commission (NUC) Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards for Undergraduate Programmes (National University Commission, 2007). In this policy document a two credit unit was assigned to Use of Library, Study Skills and Information Communication Technology (ICT). However universities are yet to fully implement this policy to develop formalized embedded information literacy education. Many librarians who are involved in information literacy training focus on use of library skills. This content is usually subsumed under the umbrella of the Use of English course of General Studies Departments of the Universities. Attama and Igwe (2015) described information literacy education as a missing issue and neglected ingredient in the educational system of Nigeria in the 21st century. They also noted that the teaching of Use of Library as an insignificant part of Use of English is not only out-dated, but also no longer acceptable in this information literacy era. They noted that the worrisome aspect of this is that librarians of some universities and polytechnics are not even given the opportunity for its delivery; rather both Use of English and Use of Library content are left in the hands of English lecturers to teach.

Since it is the responsibility of librarians to inculcate information literacy skills in academic institutions, the major purpose of the research is to determine the readiness of library professionals to

undertake these roles through a study of their understanding of the concept and its importance to students' learning and research.

Objectives:

Specifically, the objectives of the research were:

1. To capture librarians conceptualizations of information literacy in South East Nigeria.
2. To determine the perceptions of librarians on the value of information literacy for students,
3. To find out librarians views on the entrenchment of a curriculum based information literacy training in Nigerian academic institutions
4. To find out librarians views on what should constitute the course content of information literacy programmes
5. To find out perceptions of librarians on their roles in information literacy education
6. To determine librarians' suggestions on how to embed effective information literacy programmes in Nigerian University System

Research Questions:

1. What are the conceptions of information literacy by librarians in South East Nigeria?
2. What are librarians' perceptions of value of information literacy for students of the Universities?
3. What are librarians' views on what should constitute the course content of information literacy programmes
4. What are librarians' views on the entrenchment of a formalized information literacy training in Nigerian academic institutions
5. What are perceptions of librarians on their roles in information literacy education?
6. What are librarians' suggestions for entrenching a lasting information literacy programme in the Universities?

Literature Review

Conceptions of information literacy

There have been many conceptual and theoretical discussions on the topic of information literacy. Many Library Associations present information literacy as Meta competence in information skills that the enable an individual to recognize information needs, have the ability to access the need, evaluate and use information ethically and effectively (The American Library Association, 1989; Chartered Institute of Library Information Professionals (CILIP) 2013). UNESCO (2003) further

assigned utilitarian value to the definition of information literacy as “encompassing 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 lifelong learning.”

Some researchers have tried to find the conceptions of information literacy from various professional groups. Williams and Wavell (2007) reported that teachers generally thought of information literacy as process and skills oriented, including reading skills and basic understanding of text and vocabulary, rather than outcome oriented i.e. knowledge building, creation, communication), with little emphasis on the relationship with learning or problem solving. Lloyd, (2004) drawing from the study of fire fighter described Information literate people as having a deep awareness, connection, and fluency with the information environment. Information literate people are engaged, enabled, enriched and embodied by social, procedural and physical information that constitutes an information universe. Information literacy is a way of knowing that universe.

Boekhorst (2003) finds that all definitions and descriptions of information literacy presented over the years can be summarized in three concepts: (1) The ICT concept: information literacy refers to the competence to use information and communication technologies (ICT) to retrieve and disseminate information. (2) The information (re)sources concept: information literacy refers to the competence to find and use information independently or with the aid of intermediaries (3). The information process concept: information literacy refers to the process of recognizing information need, retrieving, evaluating, using and disseminating of information to acquire or extend knowledge. This concept includes both the ICT and the information (re)sources concept and persons are considered as information systems that retrieve, evaluate, process and disseminate information to make decisions to survive, for self-actualization and development.

Perceptions on the value of information literacy

Just as there are various interrelated conceptions of information literacy, there are also various perceptions on its value. Abell and Oxbrow (2001) describe information literacy as a core competency, necessary for success in knowledge-based environment. An information literate person does not only know when information is needed, but should also be able to identify the type of information needed before locating it and evaluating its usefulness for the matter in hand. Rather

than taking the most convenient or easiest option, regardless of quality, the information literate use the media and/or technology which best suits his purpose.

According to the Association of College and Research Libraries, (2000) Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning. Mokhtar and Shaheen (2008) noted that information literacy is a necessary competency that is utilitarian in every aspect of a person's life. For students, information literacy competencies would facilitate independent and authentic learning, rather than dependence on the teacher to provide answers to questions or problems that they are faced with. For employees, information literacy competencies would equip them with abilities to source for the most up-to-date and authoritative information that would assist them in doing their work more effectively. As for ordinary citizens, information literacy competencies would help them effectively analyse information that they face every day and utilise it to their benefit.

How librarians conceptualize information literacy may affect the involvement in the programme. They can only be involved in a programme in which they understand and appreciate. The present study therefore examined the conceptualization of Information literacy by the academic librarians in South East Nigerian.

Method

The research is a cross – sectional survey research. Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Data for the study was both qualitative and quantitative. Since the main purpose of the study was to gather librarians' conceptions of information literacy, Data for conceptions of information literacy, perceptions on the value and suggestions for entrenching lasting information literacy programme in the Universities (Research questions 1, 2 and 6) were qualitative. They were derived from open-ended questions that required participants to supply their own answers. Statements were analysed and grouped according to their common theme elements. A similar technique known as phenomenography has been used by Bruce, 1997 and Lupton, 2004 to study conceptions of information literacy. Phenomenography is a qualitative research method usually through semi –structured interview methods used to describe ways which people experience conceptualise, perceive, and understand phenomena in the world around them (Marton, 1981, 1986; Yates, Partridge and Bruce, 2012)

However data for perception of librarians' role in information literacy education, views on course content, and entrenchment of formalized information literacy in university system (Research Question 3 - 5) were quantitative. Questionnaires were distributed in three Federal University libraries in South East Nigeria: A total of 63 usable questionnaires was retrieved and analysed.

Institutional distribution of the respondents is: University of Nigeria, Nsukka 32 (50.8%) Federal University of Technology, Owerri 19 (30.2%) and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka 12(19%).

Results.

Table 1: Respondents' Demography

	Frequency	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	20	31.7
Female	43	68.3
<i>Age</i>		
20-30	5	7.9
31-40	21	33.3
41-60	33	52.4
61	1	1.6
Missing	3	4.8
<i>Educational Qualifications</i>		
BLS	13	20.6
MLS	37	58.8
PhD	5	7.9
Missing	8	12.7
<i>Years of service in the library</i>		
1-5	13	20.6
6-10	13	20.6
11-19	20	31.8
20	16	25.4
Missing	1	1.6

As shown in Table 1, a higher percentage of the surveyed respondents were female 49 (68.3%), 20 (31.7%) were male. Majority of the respondents 33 (52.4%) were in the 41 – 60 years age group. In terms of education, Majority 37 (58.8%) had the Masters degree (MLS), 13 (20.6%) had BLS and 5 (7.9%) are PhD holders. In terms of work experience, majority 26 (41.2%) had worked for 1 -10 years. 20 (31.8%) had worked for 11-19 years and 16 (25.4%) had worked for 20 years and above.

Librarians' Conceptions of Information Literacy

In an open ended question, librarians were asked to give the definition of information literacy in their own understanding. 31 (49.2%) respondents gave answers to this question. Summary of conceptions of information literacy by the librarians is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Librarians' Conceptions of Information Literacy

	Conceptions of Information Literacy	No of Respondents	Statements
1.	Meta competence:	15	<p><i>"It is the ability to identify what information is needed, understand how the information is organized, identify the best sources of information for a given need, locate those sources, evaluate the sources critically and share that information"</i></p> <p><i>"Knowledge and skills in the identification, retrieval and application of information to solve personal and collective information needs"</i></p> <p><i>The ability to acquaint yourself with existing information, how to evaluate them and apply them for personal and society problem solving</i></p>
2.	Information technology conception:	4	<p><i>Ability to use the internet to search for information"</i></p> <p><i>Acquiring the skills that will enable one to use computers and internet easily</i></p> <p><i>"The ability to find, retrieve and use internet in solving everyday information needs"</i></p>
3.	Information source conception:	3	<p><i>"Capability for identifying various sources of information and in various formats to meet the information needs of information seekers."</i></p> <p><i>"Ability to know the right information resources and how and where to obtain them to solve problems"</i></p>
4.	Information environment conception:	3	<p><i>"When one is able to know the happenings in his environment"</i></p> <p><i>"Being knowledgeable of happenings around you at a given time"</i></p>
5.	Information awareness conception:	2	<p><i>"Aware of information and able to access it"</i></p> <p><i>"Creating awareness about the importance of information in solving our daily needs"</i></p>
6.	Use of library definition	2	<p><i>"It is the ability to search for the right information and locate it in the library"</i></p> <p><i>"Ability to locate, access, use and communicate information using the conventional and digital library services"</i></p>
7.	Search skills conception:	1	<p><i>"Simply put, skills in information search"</i></p>
8.	Information need conception:	1	<p><i>"Information literacy can be defined as the ability to articulate one's information needs"</i></p>

Eight themes were gleaned from librarians' definitions of information literacy. Excerpt of the definitions is shown in Table 2. Fifteen (15) respondents defined information literacy as Meta competence involving multiple information skills abilities. Four (4) of respondent's definitions centred on skills to use Information technology to access information. Two (2) respondents defined information literacy in terms of Information awareness. Three (3) respondents defined information literacy as ability to identify and use various sources of information. Another three (3) respondents conceptualized information literacy as knowledge of events in the environment, and two (2)

respondents as use of library. One (1) respondent each conceptualized information literacy in terms of search skills and skills to articulate information needs

Librarians’ perceptions of the value of information literacy for students

Respondents were asked to write their perceptions of the value of information literacy for students. Result and excerpts of their responses is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Librarians’ perceptions of the value of Information literacy for students

Value of Information Literacy	No of Respondents	Statements
1. Ability to access information	9	<p>“Students will be able to access information with minimum assistance from staff.”</p> <p>“It will make them to have access to information world wide”</p> <p>“It will help students to access and use information ethically without wasting time”</p> <p>“Effective and efficient in information generation, dissemination and retrieval”</p>
2. Improved academic performance	8	<p>“Knowledge of information literacy would enhance the academic performance of students as well as effective work performance after graduation”</p> <p>“It will help them to be versatile to their subject of study.”</p> <p>“It will make them to be enlightened not only in their field of study but also of the events of their environment”</p>
3. Acquisition of Information technology and search skills	4	<p>“It will help them to acquire the skills required to access information from the internet.”</p> <p>“It will enable students to use and access information from the computer and the Internet upon graduating without further training.”</p>
4. Research Value	3	<p>“It will aid the students in conducting independent and collaborative research in the library.”</p> <p>“It will enable them to have more detailed information about the topic they are working on.”</p> <p>“It will be of great value to them in writing thesis and reading. It will also develop their level of awareness”</p>
5. Ability to use library Resources	2	<p>“It will enable them optimize the resources and facilitate use of the library and reposition them to use information properly when they leave the University system.”</p> <p>“It will help the students to exploit library resources very well for their studies.”</p>
6. Employment prospects	2	<p>“It will improve the students’ skills and promote self-employment.”</p> <p>“It will enable them fit into the contemporary world of ICT and get them ready for 21st century jobs.”</p>

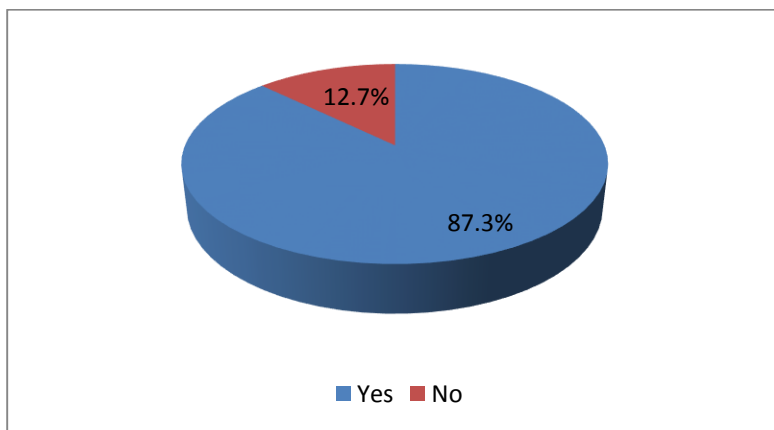
Analysis of librarians’ perceptions of the value of information literacy as shown in table 3 shows 28 (44.4%) respondents answered this question and they placed the value of information literacy for students in six major areas. Nine (9) respondents presented the value of information literacy for students as the ability to search and access information. Eight (8) of the respondents felt information literacy will lead to improved academic performance. Three (3) respondents felt information literacy has research value that can help students conduct independent study. Three (4) respondents felt

information literacy will help in accessing information from ICT. Two (2) wrote that information literacy will lead to ability to use library Resources and another two (2) employment prospects

Perceptions on formalized curriculum based information literacy training in Nigerian academic institutions

Respondents were asked to indicate if formalized curriculum based information literacy training is needed in Nigerian academic institutions. Result is showed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Librarians view of a formalized information literacy training in Nigerian academic institutions

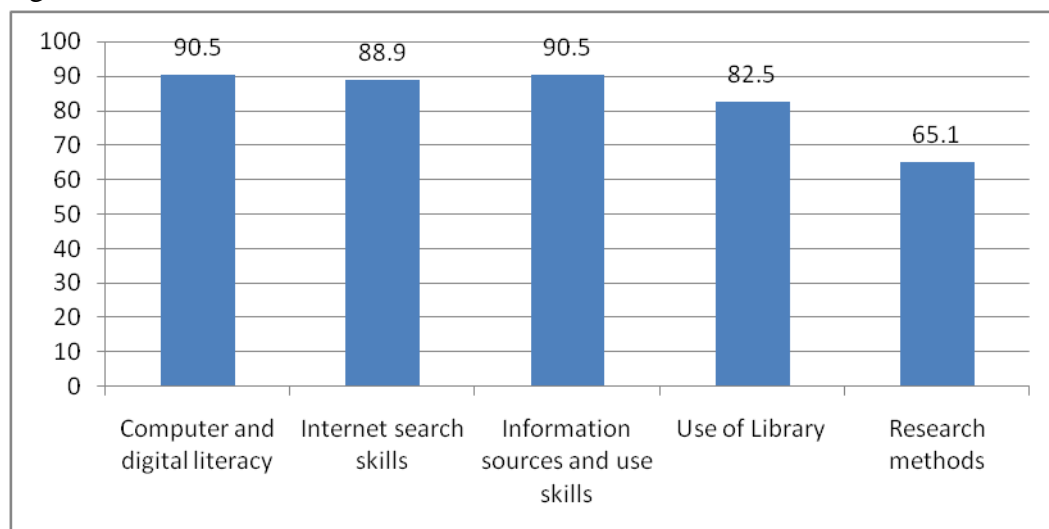


As shown in Figure 1, majority (87.3%) of the respondents were of the view that a formalized curriculum based information literacy education is needed in Nigerian University academic system.

Information Literacy Course Content

Respondents were asked to indicate what should be taught in information literacy programmes. As shown in Figure 2, large majority of the respondents were of the view that information literacy course content should be an all encompassing programme which should include computer and digital literacy training (90.5%), Internet search skills (88.9%), information sources and use skills (90.5%) and use of library skills (82.5%). The least percentage (65.1%) thought research skills should be included in information literacy programme.

Figure 2: Librarians views on what should constitute the course content of information literacy



Librarians' roles and involvement in information literacy education

Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions on librarians' roles and involvement in information literacy education on a four point scale of strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4). Result is shown in 4.

Table 4: Perceptions on librarians' roles and involvement in information literacy (IL) education

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Std. D
1. IL is not the responsibility of librarians	4(6.3%)	5(7.9%)	29(46.0%)	24(38.1%)	3.18	.840
2. Students are skilled in the use of ICT so they will not value IL training by librarians	1(1.6%)	2(3.2%)	35(55.6%)	23(36.5%)	3.31	.620
3. Students will not benefit from IL programs because they have the skills already	2(3.2%)	0	30(47.6%)	29(46.0%)	3.41	.668
4. Librarians have heavy work load, IL is added burden	1(1.6%)	4(6.3%)	37(58.7%)	19(30.2%)	3.21	.636
5. Librarians do not have sufficient information literacy skills to undertake IL training	4(6.3%)	14(22.2%)	35(55.6%)	8(12.7%)	2.77	.761
6. Librarians do not have sufficient computer skills to undertake IL training	2(3.2%)	16(25.4%)	30(47.6%)	13(20.6%)	2.89	.777
7. Librarians do not have teaching skills so they will not handle IL training well	2(3.2%)	8(12.7%)	35(55.6%)	16(25.4%)	3.07	.727
8. IL training will be a distraction to the routine duties of the librarian	1(1.6%)	2(3.2%)	33(52.4%)	25(39.7%)	3.34	.629

N = 63

Table 4 shows negatively worded statements that elicited perceptions on librarians' roles and involvement in information literacy education. Analysis shows that majority strongly disagreed with the negative statements (> 2.50; Items 1 -8). They strongly believe that students will benefit from information literacy training (3.41; Item 3) and value information literacy training by librarians (3.31; Items 2). Result also indicates that librarians have positive perceptions of their roles in information literacy education. They strongly agreed that information literacy is the responsibility of librarians (3.18), information literacy is not an added burden (3.21) Librarians will not handle information literacy training well (3.07) and information literacy training will not be a distraction to the routine duties of the librarian (3.34)

Respondents' suggestions on how to embed effective information literacy programmes in the University System:

Excerpt of respondents' suggestions on how to embed effective information literacy programmes in the University System is shown in Table 5. 21(33.3%) responded to this question.

Table 5: How to embed effective information literacy programmes in the University System

	Suggestions	No of Respondents	Statements
1.	Make information literacy compulsory	5	"It should be made compulsory to students."
2.	University support, funding and provision of facilities	5	"Universities should recognize its importance to students and show much commitment to its teachings." "University should create an office for the coordinator and fund the programme sufficiently."
3.	Embed into curriculum	4	"Information literacy programme should be embedded in the curriculum."
4.	Develop a supporting policy and implement NUC Benchmark	3	"It has to be a policy programme initiated by the registration council and Association, enforced by NUC and implemented by the Universities."
5.	Create awareness	2	"Create awareness of the programme and importance in our University system."
6.	Train librarians	1	"Training of staff so as to have power and knowledge to train students and handle such work."
7.	Assign information literacy to Librarians	1	"Assigning IL to librarians in the library"

Table 5 shows that the highest number felt that making information literacy education compulsory and university support will help to develop a functional information literacy programme. Other areas pointed out by the respondents include: developing a supportive policy, creating awareness of the programme and its importance, training librarians in information skills and assigning the programme to librarians.

Discussion

Librarian's conceptions of information literacy were sought in this study. Result revealed that 31 (49.2%) attempted to define information literacy according to their own understanding. Eight major themes were gleaned from the definitions. They include:

Meta competence conception,

Information source conception

Search skills conception,

Information needs conceptions,

Information awareness conception,

Information technology conception,

Information environment conception

Use of library conception

However, only 15 respondents were able to conceptualize information literacy as Meta competence which include multiple abilities in information skills involving abilities to recognize information needs, locate, access, evaluate and use information to solve everyday problem. As noted by one of the respondents:

"It is the ability to identify what information is needed, understand how the information is organized, identify the best sources of information for a given need, locate those sources, evaluate the sources critically and share that information"

Meta competence in information skills is the highly accepted conceptualization of information literacy in the 21st century as reflected by the very popular definition of information literacy by The American Library Association (1989) as "a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." Some definition as quoted below are interesting and probably out of contest of available definitions:

'Being knowledgeable of happenings around you at a given time'

"Creating Awareness i.e. to educate people about a particular information"

It is important to note that majority of the definitions of information literacy by the respondents cannot be isolated from the major conceptions of information literacy in the literature. They could still fit into Boekhorst (2003) summarization of information literacy definition in three concepts: 1. The ICT concept: 2. the information (re)sources concept: and 3. the information process concept:

On the nature of information literacy programme, majority (87.3%) of the respondents were of the view that a formalized curriculum based information literacy education is needed in Nigerian

University academic system. Large majority of the respondents were also of the view that information literacy course content should be an all encompassing programme which include computer and digital literacy training (90.5%), internet search skills (88.9%), information sources and use skills (90.5%) and use of library skills (82.5%).

Librarians in the study also recognized the value of information literacy for students and placed the value in students' ability to access information, use library resources, improved academic performance, useful for research and competences in accessing information from ICT.

On perceptions of their roles in information literacy education, high mean score showed that librarians strongly felt that students will value and benefit from information literacy training. They also strongly felt that information literacy is the responsibility of librarians, not added burden. They agreed that librarians have teaching skills so they will handle information literacy training well, and information literacy training will not distraction to the routine duties of the librarian,

Implications for effective implementations of information literacy programmes in Universities in Nigeria

Library Associations in some countries have taken the initiatives to advocate and develop information literacy content for student's learning. This is not so for Nigeria where there is no set standard for the full implementation of formalized information literacy programme in Nigerian Universities. The findings of the study were quite positive. Many of the respondents were able to correctly conceptualize information literacy. Respondents also have positive perceptions of their roles in information literacy education and believed that students will gain from the programme in many ramifications. The positive response to information literacy training from the librarians is an indication that they may be willing and able to assume the responsibilities in a positive environment. This environment therefore needs to be developed in order that this programme will flourish. This underpins the need for Nigerian Library Association and Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria to use the NUC Benchmark as a working tool to develop standards that will support the full implementation of information literacy programmes in Nigerian universities. This will move information literacy education out of the General Studies curriculum into a standalone course taught and managed by librarians. A national standard is the prerequisite tool that is needed to make information literacy education a programme capable of meeting the information needs and knowledge acquisition of the 21st century student in Nigeria.

Summarily, the implication of the results of the research which show positive responses to information literacy education is that giving a measure of support through a national policy guided information literacy standard, librarians in Nigeria will perform their expected role in contributing to students' information skills development and lifelong learning.

Recommendations

The respondents suggested things that should be done to embed effective information literacy programmes in Nigerian University System. These are lofty suggestions which when implemented will go a long way in entrenching information literacy training in Nigerian academic institutions.

“It has to be a policy programme initiated by the Librarians’ Registration council of Nigeria (LRCN) and Nigerian Library Association, enforced by NUC and implemented by the Universities.”

“Inculcate IL in the curriculum, make IL a credit course, formulate IL policy, and internet access.”

‘Create awareness of the programme and importance in our University system.’

“Librarians should change their attitude toward the development of IL programme both in the library and University system and then sell the initiative to both the management and the government.”

Conclusion

The information environment of the 21st century requires that students are taught to wade through the ocean of information in order to locate, use and evaluate information for knowledge acquisition and for lifelong learning. Results show that many librarians in the study are aware of the concept and value of information literacy education for students in Nigerian Universities. They also strongly felt that they are capable of handling information literacy. What this group of professionals need is an enabling environment propelled by government approved standards and policy to join their colleagues in other parts of the globe to build citizens who are information literate needed for survival in the knowledge society.

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