

# Strengthening the Teaching of Information Literacy Skills: Case of University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The main aim of this paper is to find out what is been done to strengthen the teaching of Information Literacy Skills at University of Cape Coast.

**Methodology:** As a case study design, the random sampling technique was used to select lecturers and final year students of University of Cape Coast. The data collection instruments used were questionnaire and interview. Data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This was reinforced by qualitative inferences from interviews with lectures of the course.

**Findings:** The finding was that the teaching of Information Literacy Skills at University of Cape Coast can positively revolutionise the way students study. Secondly, the duration for the teaching of the course should be extended; thirdly, the teaching of information literacy has a positive impact on the usage of the library; fourthly, the course is taught by professional librarians who are also professional teachers as a result the right pedagogical skills are applied. **Implication:** Other universities yet to start with the teaching of Information Literacy may consider the structures laid down by University of Cape Coast

**Originality:** The advocacy role supposed to be played by the lecturers and students of the course will ensure that the duration of the course is extended so that the impact of the course will be deeply felt.

**Keywords:** Information literacy, Learner -centred, Curriculum, Pedagogy skills,

## Introduction

University of Cape Coast was established in October, 1962 as a University College and was affiliated to the University of Ghana, Legon. On October 1, 1971, the College attained the status of a full and independent university. This University was established by the government of Ghana to produce professional graduate teachers for first and second cycle schools in Ghana.

To ensure effective utilization of library materials, the University allowed the library of the University to offer a course called Information Retrieval (IRC 101) over twenty years ago. This course was later changed to Information Literacy Skills (ILT 101). Currently, the Information Literacy Skills is taught by the Information Literacy Skills Unit, under the Faculty of Arts.

The Information Literacy Skills course in University of Cape Coast is a one credit course for all undergraduate students. This is done in the first year by every fresh student. Students are taught how to search and evaluate information both manually and electronically. Students are also introduced to the various academic

databases that are subscribed by the University of Cape Coast, Library.

According to Peacock, Eisenberg, Lowe, and Spitzer as cited by Wang (2007) there are four (4) types of approaches use to teach information literacy, they are; intra –curricular, inter-curricular, extra –curricular and stand-alone curricular. University of Cape Coast uses the stand- alone type. Stand- alone in the sense that it is an independent course taught as part of the students' curricular.

The specific **objectives** are the following:

To get students to appreciate the role of the library in the academic community- and how the library supports teaching, learning, research and extension activities in the university.

To teach students, who lack basic knowledge of computers, to understand the essentials of the computer.

To make students aware of the resources and search tools of the library (the traditional and digital) and teach them how to use these.

To teach students how to access, retrieve and evaluate information from the Internet for their academic work, later working life, and personal development; and

To equip students with skills that will enable them manage and use online journals and other electronic resources.

In order to fulfill the above objectives, the course has been categorized into three aspects; namely libraries and sources of information, organization of knowledge and electronic resources. In the same vein, students have been grouped into sizeable classes and each group is being taught by three lecturers each handling one aspect of the course.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is;

1. To find out what students think about the Information Literacy Skills course.
2. To discover the extent at which Information Literacy Skills course has influence the abilities of searching for information by students.
3. Investigate how advocacy can popularize the Information Literacy Unit of the University of Cape Coast.
4. To find out what need to be done to strengthen the teaching of Information Literacy Skills

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study are as follows;

It will serve as a way of evaluating the impact of teaching Information Literacy Skills on students usage of the library. The findings of the study will enable stakeholders of Information Literacy to realize what need to be done to make the teaching of IL learner- centred and participatory. To make recommendations to the stakeholders of the University of Cape Coast as far as the teaching of Information Literacy Skills is concerned.

### **Problem Statement of the study**

It is expected that the teaching of Information Literacy Skills will equip students with the abilities to recognize when information is needed, locate information, retrieve information, evaluate, analyse , synthesized and use information appropriately to satisfy the need that prompted it (Thomas, 2004,). This means that the integration of the Information Literacy

course across the curriculum of an institution is the way through which these skills can be inculcated and sustained by students

Currently, the course is one credit bearing, which is taught within one semester, but due to the increase in students' intake each class is made up of a lot of students making it difficult for the right pedagogical skills to be applied. There is also the misconception by students that one can pass the course if one learns it or not. In addition, some students think that the course is library oriented and that it should be studied by those who want to be librarians. As an addendum, the advent of the internet also seems to have negatively affected the teaching of the course.

As a result of the above problems, some students and even some lecturers of other courses do not seem to understand why Information Literacy Skills should be taught that alone being made one of the requisites for graduation at University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

### **Methodology**

The case study design was used and the population for the study was lecturers and regular students of University of Cape Coast. The random sampling technique was used to select respondents for the questionnaire. Data for the study was obtained from both primary and secondary sources.

Two categories of people were sampled for the collection of data, namely lecturers of Information Literacy Skills and final year students of University of Cape Coast. The data collection instruments used are questionnaire and interview. These were designed on the basis of the research questions. The questionnaire for students comprised of three (3) sections with close-ended and open-ended questions as follows. Section A covered respondents' demographic data: Section B handled students' knowledge in information literacy and section C pointed out what should be done to make the course worth studying.

The interview and questionnaire for the lectures and students unearth the pedagogy skills and how appropriate the existing curriculum is. Data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This was reinforced by qualitative inferences from interviews with lectures of the course. Based on these, findings and conclusion were made.

## Literature review

### *What is Information Literacy?*

Information Literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner” CILIP (2004). Every human being need to be able to identify what is real and relevant not just for school, but for learning, life and work.

Information literacy is related to information technology, but has broader implication for the individual, the educational system and for society at large. Information Technology skills enable an individual to use computers, software applications, databases and other technologies to achieve a wide variety of academic work-related and personal goals.

We live in the information age, and “information” is increasing at a rapid pace. We have the internet, television, radio, newspapers and other information recourses available to use 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. However, just because so much information is so easily and quickly available does not mean that all of it is worthwhile or even true. Because of the resources, finding high quality information is now harder than ever. Finding the right information is not always quick.

### *How to be an information literacy person?*

Information literacy is a “way of being” and is a “process of becoming”. Without information literacy people are condemned to lack of information, over dependence upon others for access to knowledge and information and even to acute levels of information anxiety (Bushman and Warner 2001).

An information literate individual that has strongly analytical, critical thinking and problem solving skills can be expected to be adaptable, capable and valuable employee with much to contribute. The processes for gathering and managing information are now or more important to effective participation in work and education than at any time in history (Joshua and Weber 2003).

Making information technologies available to the world is not enough. Information professionals need to ensure that students are empowered to learn and take their place in the learning society. . Information literacy is central to the mission of any institution engaged in education or research, and not just a matter for

libraries alone (Bruce 1999), that is why at University of Cape Coast a course Information Literacy Skills is targeted as a vehicle for delivering the numerous components of Information Literacy. The classes’ assignments, quizzes, practical sessions and examinations help build students Information Literacy abilities, attitudes and competencies

A report from the Australian Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (2000) came out with an Education and Training Action Plan for the Information Economy. This report encouraged universities to ensure that their graduates enter the workforce with the competencies needed, including information literacy skills and lifelong learning skills. This is directly in line with one of the major objectives of the Information Literacy Skills course at University of Cape Coast which states; To teach students how to access, retrieve and evaluate information from both manual and online source for their academic work, later working life and personal development.

In sum, the American Library Association (ALA) Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1999) postulates that “To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information”

### *Teaching of information literacy*

In teaching information literacy by librarians, the Chairman of the International Federation of Libraries Association and institution, Jesus Lau recommended that “A librarian not only need to know what information literacy components to facilitate, but must be competent on how to facilitate knowledge (pedagogy)” and according to the American Library Association the teachers of information literacy should use the learner-centered approach.

Aronson (1978) recommended that for information literacy to be embraced by stakeholders of higher education, lecturers of the course also need to adopt a carefully planned collaborative pedagogical learning activities. The models under collaborative environment such as jigsaw, reciprocal and Collaborative Peer group models enable weaker ones to learn from the expertise group, by so doing the course is well understood and appealing.

Wang. L (2007) states that in teaching Information Literacy, books, journals or journals

articles, library catalogues online database, internet resources are used as learning tools to improve students' learning. This is exactly what happens at University of Cape Coast. Here, the students are also put in smaller group of not less than twenty for practicals as well as tutorial session. During these sessions, issues that could not be discussed during the normal lecture period are looked at and students are encouraged to do hands on practice with reference to assessing information on-line.

As another way of motivating every student to get involve, the facilitator or librarian then goes round the lecture room and guide the students. Just as the problem-based learning model of teaching has been adopted in information literacy teaching in many university libraries in the United States and Australia (Wang, 2007), the University of Cape Coast library also engage students in PBL model of teaching. Here the students are given assignments to work on individually. The idea is to encourage the students to explore with their existing knowledge and interact with research tools to solve the problems. They are to understand the process of retrieving relevant information before they can get access to the information. Steps are also taken to encourage students to patronize the library since it is considered to the heart beat of any institution (Aina, 2004). When this is effectively done, then the students can have their cognitive skills development.

Dove (1975) states that knowledge is absorbed through the five senses of man, assessed in the following proportion: sight 75%, hearing 13%, touch 6%, smell 3% and taste 3%. So using Resources Based Learning (RBL) will give librarians the opportunity facilitate learning since information resources can be used tools. However, in developing countries where technological resources are lacking facilitators are compelled to make do with the little resources available.

If learners are to reflect on and develop the attitude of information literacy skills then the duration for the imparting of the skills should be lengthy enough so that the learning outcomes can be achieved (Johnston, 2003). According to

Hepworth (2000) one challenge of delivery of this course is that, it is mostly taught by librarians who might have no idea of the pedagogies of teaching. This concern is buttressed by Bushman and Warner (2001) to them, there is a mismatch between the subject librarians teach and their profession, they continue by saying that the mode of teaching could be shallow or flawed.

#### ***Why is information literacy important?***

It promotes problem solving approaches and thinking skills- asking questions, evaluating sources and making decisions fostering successful learning, effective contributors, confident individuals and responsible citizens. Information Literacy is becoming an increasingly important component of not only literacy policies and strategies, but also for global policies to promote human development (UNESCO, 2003).

Information technology is the crux of the information society. Hence adequate information literacy skills make one part of the globalization. This is so because at this modern era, employees are looking for people with the ability of critical, analytical and decision making attitudes, and these skills can be developed through information literacy (Bruce, 1999).

International Associations like the Australian Library and Information Association (2001) is advocating for information literacy for all citizens. This Association is asking for equity for information literacy. This means that information literacy should be taught in all tertiary institutions in a way that learners would develop the skills that will make one information literate.

#### **Presentation and Discussion of Data of students**

The response rate for students was 90%; thus 54 out of 60 respondents completed the questionnaire. Thirty-six (36) were male students representing 66.7% and eighteen female students representing 33.7%. These students range between the ages of 21 – 40 and they are in final year.

**Table 1 Frequency of visit to the Library**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Once a week	15	27.8
Twice a week	7	13.0
Thrice a week	10	18.5
Often	20	37.0
Never	1	1.9
Not often	1	1.9
Total	54	100.00

Table 1 indicates that 37.8% of the respondents visit the library often. Fifteen of them representing 27.8% claimed that they use the library once a week. In the same way, ten (10) of the students representing 18.5% said that they use the library thrice in a week. On the contrary one (1) respondent indicated that he never used the library. On the whole, the majority of the students use the library.

In order to integrate the usage of the library into the teaching learning and research activities, lecturers of Information Literacy Skills course of the University of Cape Coast use the Problem- Based Learning model (PBL) as

indicated by (Wang, 2007), and that might have contributed to students developing and sustaining the habit of using the library.

In promoting the use of the library, librarians may volunteer to take the expected users of the library through courses like; information retrieval and information literacy so that the materials in the library can be used (Bruce, 1999). This is what pertains at the University of Cape Coast. Library orientation and library tour is organized for new users of the library. In addition, students are given handouts of the Main library of the university.

**Table 2 Reasons for using the library**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Top up what I have been taught	8	14.8
Read my notes	9	16.7
Borrow a book	1	1.9
To do research	16	29.6
All of the above	19	35.2
Don't use the library	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

The researchers wanted to know why students use the library. The table 2 indicated that about 29 % of them said that they visit the library to do research, nine (9) of them representing 16.7 % said they read their notes in the library, while eight (8) of them use the library to top up what they have been taught and to borrow books. On

the other hand the majority of them thus 19, representing about 35 % indicated that they visit the library to perform all the above tasks. This shows that the library is an indispensable part of any academic institution hence its usage must be encouraged (Aina, 2004).

**Table 3 Skills develop through Information Literacy Skills**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Developing skills of recognizing information	28	19.3
Developing skills of locating information	31	21.4
Developing skills of retrieving information	33	22.7
Developing skills of citing works	22	15.2
Developing skills of referencing	31	21.4
Total	145	100.0

The researchers wanted to know the kind of skills students develop after being taught Information Literacy skills. 22.7% of the

students pointed out that they develop the skills of retrieving information. 21.4%, 19.3% and 15.2% of the students said that the course

enabled them to develop the skills of referencing, recognizing information and citing works respectively. All the skills noted by respondents are what the course intends to help students internalize for lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2003). Also as noted by Joshua and Weber (2003), an information literate individual has strongly analytical, critical thinking and problem solving skills and this is evident by the responses of the respondents.

***Reasons for enjoying or not enjoying ILS***

Students were asked to show whether they enjoy studying information literacy or not. Those who answered in affirmative gave the following reasons; the course involves practicals, which is good and the course is informative and educative. On the other hand, those who indicated that they do not enjoy the course,

stated the following reasons; practical sections not enough, less time to grasp concepts and lastly, course being taught by different lecturers

The students therefore recommended the following

The course Should be practical oriented

Curriculum should be taught for more than two semesters

More attention should be paid on internet searching

Each group should have a lecturer teaching all the three aspects of the course.

The above recommendation made by students revealed that the course should be taught for more than one semester.

**Table 4 Students opinion on the teaching of Information Literacy Course**

STATEMENT	DISAGREE %	STRONGLY DISAGREE %	AGREE %	STRONGLY AGREE %
Information literacy skills has positive impact on library usage	6 (11.1%)	4 (7.4%)	32 (59.3%)	12 (22.2%)
Information literacy skills help me in citing references	4 (7.4%)	2 (3.7%)	35 (64.8%)	13 (24.1)
Information literacy skills help me in doing research	7 (13.0%)	1 (1.9%)	30 (55.6%)	13 (24.1%)
Information literacy skills curriculum is enough	25 (46.3%)	15 (27.8)	12 (22.2)	2 (3.7%)
Information literacy skills should be taught for two semesters	5 (9.3)	6 (11.1)	21 (38.9)	22 (40.7)
Information literacy skills should be at levels 100 and 200	7 (13.0)	14 (25.9)	12 (22.2)	21 (38.9)

The above table shows the opinions of students as to the importance of information literacy; with the first statement; information literacy has positive impact on library usage, 32 of the respondents representing about 59 % agreed to the statement, while twelve of the respondents (22.2%) strongly agreed to the statement. The majority of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed to all the following statements; Information literacy skills help me in citing references, Information literacy skills help me in doing research, Information literacy skills curriculum is enough, Information literacy skills should be taught for two semesters and Information literacy skills should be at levels 100 and 200

One can infer that the student respondents are very much aware of the impact of the information literacy course and that as indicated

by the International Associations like the Australian Library and Information Association (2001) information literacy should be studied by all students so that its positive impact can be realized by all citizens.

***Presentation and Discussions of Lecturers' Data***

Lecturers of Information Literacy Skills course were interviewed and their response rate was 100%. Five male and five female lecturers were interviewed. Four (4) of the respondents teach libraries and sources of information, three (3) handle organization of information or cataloguing and the remaining three (3) are facilitators of internet making the percentages as 40%, 30% and 30% respectively. All the lecturers interviewed have at least a certificate in Education; this means that the situation whereby information literacy is being taught by librarians

who have no have training in pedagogical skill as noted by Hepworth (2000), Buschman and Warner (2001), does not prevail at University of Cape Coast.

In a follow up question the researchers wanted to know if the period allotted for the teaching of the subject is enough, according to the respondents even though the course is only one credit hour, the time allotted for it should be increased so the lecturers will take their time to handle the various topics. This attest to what Johnston (2003) said, according to him if learners are to reflect on and develop the attitude of information literacy skills then the duration for the imparting of the skills should be lengthy enough so that the learning outcomes can be achieved

Lecturers were asked to point out their mode of delivery in response; all lecturers indicated that their style of teaching was learner- centred and participatory. Tutorials are held as well. Also in order to make the students fully part of the curriculum of the university, all the lecturers recommended that the intra- curricular type of approach of teaching of courses should be adopted as well, this is where the information literacy is integrated into learning outcomes and this will be the responsibility of all lectures teaching other courses and library staff as noted by Rockman and Associates (2004). This is also in support with what was recommended by Wang (2007)

Respondents were again asked to point out which advocacy activities should be undertaken to make stakeholders see the positive impact of the course, almost all the respondents suggested that workshops, seminars and symposia should be organized periodically to keep the university community informed of the indispensability of information literacy. Librarians who are members of Boards and Committees should stress at their meetings the importance of information literacy course.

### Findings and Conclusion

The study was an attempt to look at how the teaching of Information Literacy can be strengthened at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana; the following were the findings and conclusion:

Firstly, the study revealed that students want the duration for the teaching of the Information Literacy course should be extended;

Secondly, the teaching of information literacy has a positive impact on the usage of the library; thirdly, the Information Literacy course is taught by professional teachers and librarians as a result the right pedagogical skills are applied. The study further established that lecturers and students are satisfied with the curriculum of the course. Again, the study also revealed that students need to be motivated to take the course serious since some of them still believe that the course can be passed without much effort;

It emerged from the study that though the course is a credit bearing, advocacy activities like workshops, seminars and symposia should be organized periodically so that stakeholders would see the need for the Unit to be made a department; and

Finally, all things being equal the teaching of Information Literacy Skills at University of Cape Coast can positively revolutionalised the way students study on their own,

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