

Available at <http://pu.edu.pk/home/journal/8>

Pakistan Journal of Library & Information Science

ISSN 1680-4465



Teachers' conceptions about information literacy skills of school children

Syeda Hina Batool, Khalid Mahmood

Department of Library & Information Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Email: hina.dlis@pu.edu.pk, khalid.dlis@pu.edu.pk

Abstract

The paper presents results of a study conducted to measure perceptions of teachers about their 3rd grade students' information literacy (IL) skills. The IL standards given by the California School Library Association for 2nd graders were provided to 54 teachers from three private schools of Lahore city of Pakistan to get their opinion. Selected through purposive sampling methods, the respondents perceived their students to be good or adequate in various IL skills. The students were qualified in each of the eight standards of information literacy. The study concludes that information literacy activities can be practiced by schools by providing proper learning resources and infrastructure.

Keywords: Information literacy; School children; Lahore

Introduction

Today, information has become a strong catalyst in the development of a society. Information industries are becoming larger and larger in developed countries. One has to believe that, for a developed society, the generation, organization, evaluation and dissemination of information is very significant. It is important to say here that with the heavy flow of information, all must learn to find, organize and evaluate information for their educational and personal use. In the fast pace of life, we need to develop independent learners, those who can search correctly and find relevant information for themselves.

The term of information literacy (IL), very popularly used in the research in information studies, is concerned to develop independent learners on all levels, in professional and personal life. The older forms of the term IL were library orientation, bibliographic instruction, as well as user education. Bjorner (1991, as cited in Rader, 1995) characterized the following about information literacy:

- Anyone can become information literate;
- IL is action oriented, and it helps solve problems and make decisions;
- Information skills are transferable from one discipline to another, from one task to another;
- Information skills are needed for lifelong learning; and
- IL helps people handle information and new technology.

In the schools of developed countries, IL courses are compulsorily embedded into their curriculum even at the primary level. From the very beginning, students learn to search, organize and evaluate information for their educational and recreational purposes. They have developed IL standards and made strategies to meet those standards. They have recognized the value of IL skills and made their educational policies and curricula accordingly.

The status of IL is not very satisfactory in Pakistan. A few studies (Ameen & Gorman, 2009; Bhatti, 2010; Kousar, 2010) have been conducted to highlight the importance and challenges of teaching IL skills. Some information professionals are practicing IL instruction informally at their schools, colleges and universities. Private universities and colleges are good examples of this practice. Efforts have been made on graduate and undergraduate levels. Most of the public universities and schools lack proper staff,

infrastructure and resources to implement such initiatives.

The situation is better in private schools as they are equipped with resources and infrastructure. This study was designed to investigate the extent of IL skills of students at primary level as their teachers perceived. The purpose of the study was also to determine that schools with proper resources were offering IL skills to their students? Were these students able to be independent learners in future? These schools can only be affordable to the upper middle and elite economic classes in Pakistan. On the other hand, the public schools are short in number and provide low quality of education specifically at primary level. The infrastructure of public schools does not support IL activities. Therefore, it was decided to study private schools of Lahore city. The study explored the perceptions of teachers about their students' IL skills. The only research question formulated for this study was: Do 3rd grade students meet IL standards as perceived by their teachers?

Previous studies

Literature reported that measuring teachers' perceptions about the level of students' information literacy (IL) has been an important catalyst in the research on this topic. The best IL programs in schools are incorporated with faculty-librarian collaboration. A number of studies have been conducted on high school, graduate and university level. However, the researchers could not find any study measuring teachers' perceptions about their students at primary level. Many studies found views of faculty on the importance of information literacy, integration of IL into their courses and more specifically to assess the IL ability of their students of higher classes.

To know the IL skills of students, examining faculty perceptions through survey method has been popular in previous researches. In these studies questionnaires were based on international IL standards. DaCosta (2010) conducted two surveys in higher education institutions of England and United States. In Britain, it was asked from the faculty through a questionnaire to respond on seven skills taken from the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) to identify the importance of each skill for their students. In US, the questionnaire was based on ACRL information literacy competency standards for higher education. Faculty showed their full affirmation with the statement that students should acquire IL skills at the end of their courses.

Similarly, an online survey (Bury, 2011), conducted at the University of York, Canada, investigated the conceptions of faculty on undergraduate and graduate students' IL competencies and to what extent the faculty arranged IL as a part of their courses. The data were collected from ACRL standards based questionnaire with closed and open ended questions. The faculty was also provided with IL definition of ACRL at the beginning of the instrument. They had to rank students' abilities from 1 (not important) to 7 (extremely important). They believed that students' ability to find, use and evaluate information was weaker than their expectations at undergraduate levels. Majority of the faculty members showed their agreement on the importance of IL skills, although 47 percent conducted no IL instruction. The study corroborated the findings of earlier similar studies (e.g. Singh, 2005) in which faculty beliefs about the students' IL abilities were almost the same.

A review of literature with respect to Pakistan mentioned that very few baselines studies on IL were conducted in different periods. A few attempts were made to highlight IL practices at higher education level. These researchers observed some informal IL program in universities, however, no formal effort was observed. No study investigated perceptions of faculty or teachers on IL skills at primary education level. Bhatti (2010) reported a complete dearth of literature on IL with respect to Pakistan. Her purpose of the study was to highlight the importance and issues of IL at higher education in Pakistan. She suggested developing an integrated IL curriculum. Ameen and Gorman (2009) also indicated major issues of IL in Pakistan based on a literature review and survey results. They suggested making IL as integral part of the curricula at all levels.

Situation of user education programs at university libraries was examined by Bhatti (2010). The data were collected through questionnaire, observation and informal discussion with senior library staff. Results showed that IL instruction, practiced in university libraries in the shape of "library orientation for new students" and "bibliographic instruction," gave knowledge about library policies and their organization of information systems, and "advance bibliographic instruction" gave know how about library catalogs, indexes, abstract and bibliographies. Therefore, instead of these informal practices, integrated IL program in collaboration with faculty and administration was recommended to be offered.

There was only one study that examined the perceptions of faculty about their students' IL skills. Kousar (2010) surveyed engineering faculty about their MPhil and PhD students' IL skills. The ACRL

standards were used to assess IL skills. She found that the faculty perceived PhD students better than the MPhil students in information skills.

The literature supports the view that the perceptions of faculty/teachers have been very important measures in assessing their students' IL skills. However, a gap has been observed at primary level education. The current study was designed to fill this gap.

Methods

The study was survey based. The survey method facilitates a researcher getting many opinions in a short period of time and with less energy than personal interviews. A customized questionnaire based on California School Library Association's "Information literacy skills K-12 (2nd grade skills)" (copyright 2004) was used to collect the data. To get the perceptions of teachers about 3rd grade students' IL skills, skills necessary for the 2nd grade were asked. The second grade IL skills were asked because the students already passed their 2nd grade and just promoted to the 3rd grade. The California School Library Association made these skills compulsory to be introduced at 2nd grade level. The scrutiny of skills resulted in 26 IL skills covering standards of information literacy given by the American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology titled "*Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning.*" Each statement had a 4-point Likert type scale (i.e. 1=Poor, 2=Adequate, 3=Good, and 4=Excellent).

There are over 5000 private and 1300 government public primary schools in Lahore city ("*Private & govt. schools*", n.d.). The statistics are significant to note that enrolment rate in private primary schools is higher than that in public schools. The public schools don't charge any fee and offer free text books to children. The parents are compelled to send their children in private schools. It may be due to the low quality of education and shortage of public schools in the city. The population of the study was all of the 3rd grade teachers of selected private schools. Private schools were selected because these schools had proper resources and infrastructure to introduce IL activities. By using purposive sampling method, a sample of 54 3rd grade teachers from three private schools was taken for the study. The schools were selected considering their common infrastructure, curriculum and facilities and their willingness to participate in the study.

Findings and discussion

The responses of the participants have been presented in tables with discussion. Table 1 shows results on the first IL standard, i.e., the student accesses information efficiently and effectively. The teachers perceived their students good and adequate at this standard. They were of the view that students knew whom to ask for help in library and how to care library materials (Mean=2.79). They knew how to respect other library users. It may be assumed from these findings that students regularly visited their school libraries and were good in following library procedures. Their teachers perceived that students were good in identifying and using basic ICT tools (videocassette recorder (VCR), keyboard, mouse etc.) (Mean=2.64). It may be because these schools had proper computer labs and they offered courses on basic ICT tools. A basic IL skill is that student must be able to recognize his/her information need, the teachers believed that their students were good in recognizing their information needs (Mean=2.61). The students were also good in interpreting information from illustrations, charts, tables etc. (Mean=2.57). The findings show that these students were adequate in identifying parts of books, i.e., title page, author, spine (Mean=2.42), glossary, index, dedication (Mean=2.31), and table of contents, publisher, page numbers, copyright date (Mean=2.19). According to the California School Library Association IL skills should be introduced in students at second and third grade levels, the participants' responses are encouraging that their students were adequate in IL skills. The students were adequate (Mean=2.32) in using dictionary, encyclopedia, atlas and thesaurus. It may be assumed that their libraries had enough and varied information and reference resources to make students familiar with these sources. The teachers were also of the view (Mean=2.30) that the students were adequate in independently selecting their books for reading purposes. The students were also able to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction reading material (Mean=2.14). This standard was more in practice and reinforced at second and third grade levels than other standards of IL. The overall results are encouraging that the students were good and adequate in accessing information effectively and efficiently.

Table 2 shows the teachers' perception about how their students evaluate information critically and competently. They perceived that the students were adequate (Mean=2.25) individually or in groups to critique others' works respectfully and constructively. The students were able to distinguish between

right and wrong information and they could critique on each other's work for improvement. The result of this section is also encouraging and can compete with the international standard.

Table 1. Teachers' responses on how a student accesses information efficiently and effectively

Standard 1: The student who is information literate accesses information efficiently and effectively.			
Rank	My students know/can	Mean	SD
1-2	whom to ask for help at a library	2.79	0.67
1-2	how to care library material	2.79	0.79
3	how to respect other library users	2.75	0.87
4	can identify basic terminology and use of digital input/output devices (e.g., keyboard, mouse, VCR, remote control)	2.64	1.0
5	how to take books from library	2.62	0.69
6	identify a problem or question that needs information	2.61	0.84
7	how to follow procedures at library	2.59	0.67
8	obtain information from illustrations, photographs, charts, graphs, maps, and tables	2.57	0.83
9-10	identify parts of a book: cover, title, title page, author, illustrator and spine label	2.42	0.93
9-10	locate relevant information sources for class assignments and personal use independently	2.42	0.88
11	the general organization of a print dictionary, thesaurus, atlas, and encyclopedia	2.32	0.94
12	also identify other parts of a book: glossary, index, and dedication	2.31	0.85
13	use a variety of techniques to independently select books for reading	2.30	0.76
14	select and read familiar and unfamiliar information material independently	2.24	0.86
15	identify parts of a book: table of contents, publisher, page numbers, copyright date	2.19	0.92
16	understand the differences between fiction and nonfiction	2.14	0.97

Table 2. Teachers' responses on how a student evaluates information critically and competently

Standard 2: The student who is information literate evaluates information critically and competently.			
	My students can	Mean	SD
	evaluate individually and in groups, to critique one's own work and that of others in a respectful, cooperative, and constructive way	2.25	0.85

The participants' responses (table 3) showed that their students were good (Mean=3.08) in orally sharing information with teachers and other students. It may be assumed that the students were good and confident in their oral communication skills. As far as their written communication is concerned, the students were adequate in writing about any research topic and presenting information in essay, poetry, drama etc. (Mean=2.42, Mean=2.36). The teachers perceived that their students were good in oral communication rather adequate in writing any research topic.

Table 3. Teachers' responses on how a student uses information accurately and creatively

Standard 3: The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively.			
Rank	My students can	Mean	SD
1	orally share information with teachers and other students	3.08	0.86
2	use words/phrases to write 2 or 3 sentences about a research topic	2.42	0.91
3	present information in a variety of formats, such as narrative, essay, poetry, drama, charts and graphs	2.36	0.96

The students were also adequate for next IL standard as they could appreciate literature and other creative works. Third grade teachers believed (table 4) that their students were adequate (Mean=2.06) in describing the roles of authors and illustrators and their contribution to the literature and society. This shows that students read literature written by different authors. They were able to draw morals from what they read.

The faculty was also of the view that their students were adequate in independently selecting print, non-print and CDs etc. (Mean=2.12) according to their personal interests (table 5). The participants believed that their students were adequate for the sixth IL standard. They responded (Mean=2.00) that their students could understand that free flow of information was essential for a democratic society (table

6). The students were able to understand the importance of information seeking and knowledge generation. At primary level, these skills are very important to be introduced, children are very adaptive and they pick very quickly. Results showed that these schools were good in introducing IL skills to their students as they had resources and infrastructure needed to implement IL activities.

Table 4. Teachers' responses on how student appreciates literature and other creative expressions of information

Standard 4: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and appreciates literature and other creative expressions of information.		
My students can	Mean	SD
describe the roles of authors and illustrators and their contributions to literature and society	2.06	1.0

Table 5. Teachers' responses on students as informative literate and pursue information related to personal interests

Standard 5: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and pursues information related to personal interests.		
My students can	Mean	SD
independently select print, non-print, and digital resources (CD, Video Cassette) to satisfy recreational goals and pursuits	2.12	0.86

Table 6. Teachers' responses on how student strives for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation.

Standard 6: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and strives for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation.		
My students can	Mean	SD
understand that a free flow of information is essential for a democratic society	2.00	0.96

Table 7 shows results on IL standard as IL literature student should contribute positively to the learning community and to society and practice ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology. The teachers perceived that their students were adequately using works of others (Mean=2.06). They were able to give credit to authors and cite their names. Table 8 shows the responses of teachers on the last IL standard as students participate in groups for information generation. It shows that students were given group assignments to produce some piece of information. The teachers thought (Mean=2.29, Mean=2.28) that their students were adequate in respecting views of others in a group and can collaborate in formal or informal study and research groups.

Table 7. Teachers' responses on how student contributes positively to the learning community and to society and practices ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology

Standard 7: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and practices ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology.		
My students can	Mean	SD
cite information sources to give credit to others	2.06	0.85

Table 8. Teachers' responses on how student contributes positively to the learning community and to society and participates in groups to pursue and generate information.

Standard 8: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and participates in groups to pursue and generate information.			
Rank	My students can	M	SD
1	respect the views of others in study and research groups	2.29	.83
2	collaborate in formal and informal study and research groups	2.28	.88

The above results were very encouraging as the students of the selected schools were good or adequate on all IL standards introduced internationally by different schools and associations. Their teachers believed about them that they were independent learner, accessed information efficiently, evaluated information, accurately used information and appreciated knowledge contribution to the society. The statistics show that the students were not very good (excellent) or poor in these skills, as the California School Library Association standardized these IL skills to be introduced at 2nd and 3rd grade levels.

Conclusion

The study was designed to measure the conceptions of the teachers of 3rd grade about their students' IL skills. The overall results were positive due to the skew of the instrument used to access the results. According to these teachers, their students were up to the international standards of information literacy. They were good or adequate in all IL activities approved by the California School Library Association for their 2nd grade level. The selected schools were adequate in providing infrastructure for practicing IL skills. These schools were selected on the basis of common features and possible infrastructure and resources to practice IL activities. It may be concluded that if schools are provided proper resources and set up, they can start implementing and practicing IL skills. It may be ascertained from this study that 3rd grade children in selected private schools in Lahore, Pakistan were information literate. There is a need to know that the IL skills of the public sector school children to know the real challenges to implement IL activities in those schools. The present study concludes that children may be information literate with proper learning tools, resources and flexible infrastructure in schools.

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