

Integrating Information Literacy Subject into Universities' Curricular towards Achieving Life-Long Learning Habit among Students: A Case of Selected Universities in Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania

JAFFAR MSAFIRI PONERA¹

Directorate of Co-operative Library and Archives
Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU), Tanzania

PROSPER J. KIMARO

Lecturer (PhD Candidate)

Community and Rural Development Department,
Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU), Tanzania

Abstract:

Information literacy (IL) subject plays a significant role in imparting life-long reading habit among University students which also enables students to become skillful information users in problem solving. The current number of Universities in Tanzania is 68, where 25 are public universities and 43 private universities. Moshi district is among the areas in Tanzania where some of these Universities are located. Since information is an essential commodity in academic and socio-economic development, integrating information literacy subject in the Universities curricular becomes of great important. The main objective was to assess if Universities in Kilimanjaro region have integrated information literacy subject in their curricular. Specifically, the study intended; to examine how information literacy have been integrated at Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU), Mwenge Catholic University (MWECAU) and Stefano Moshi Memorial University College (SMMUCo), to identify the role that has been played by Universities librarians in imparting information literacy skills to

¹ Corresponding author: msafirijaffar@yahoo.com

students and to assess challenges facing the integration of information literacy subject in the Universities curricular. The design of the study is multiple-case study which MoCU, MWECAU and SMMUCo were used. The study found out that all three Universities have not integrated IL subject in their curricular. With regard to the challenges towards integrating IL subject, study found that, the current Tanzania Education Policy has not stated whether or not it is mandatory for all Universities in Tanzania to integrate IL subject in their curricular. There are no institutional policies which provide guidelines of integrating IL subject in their curricular and lack of librarian's involvement in curriculum development creates more difficulties. The study has also recommended that, Tanzania Education Policy of 1995 has to be revised to accommodate this important aspect, there should be involvement of librarians in curriculum development and institutional top management should support the efforts of integrating IL in their curricular

Key words: Information Literacy, Curricular, IT, Universities, Tanzania

1. INTRODUCTION

Information literacy is a life-long learning process that starts at the younger age and proceeds until post work stage where each individual requires different kinds of information in different phases of life. At a younger stage, individuals acquire knowledge through secondary and higher education. In this stage teachers and library professionals impart information literacy competency through various academic programs (Singh and Klingenberg, 2008).

Moore, (2002) identified that information literacy standards and rubrics provide behavioural descriptors to guide curriculum design and evaluation of student learning. These activities are further informed by a variety of models used to

describe information problem solving in inquiry, discovery and problem-based learning activities. Models usually describe this process in terms of six to ten steps and have been developed in many countries, among them the UK, USA, Canada, Scotland, Australia, and New Zealand.

Pashaie, (2004) pointed out that, the beginnings of this responsibility go back to the later part of the 19th century and the dramatic growth of the academic community in the United States. Ever since the era of Melvil Dewey and the birth and rise of the *Library Journal* in 1876 a body of literature has been devoted to the role of a librarian as educator. The need for instruction in the efficient and effective use of library resources for research led to the concept of librarian as educator, a role that came to be well accepted by the end of the 19th century.

In Singapore the government is promoting the building of a knowledge-based society making it mandatory that people be prepared for work in the information environment, to have problem solving skills and to be information literate so they can be productive in developing the country's economy. In Singapore, information skills are taught in primary and secondary education as required by the Ministry of Education. This initiative begun in 1987 as a pilot program and resulted in the publication of Information Skills in 1991 (Rader, 2002).

Jager and Nassimbeni (2002:3) pointed out that the interest in information literacy has been spurred by systemic transformation of education at all levels and the increasing adoption of ICTs in South African society. The policy framework for information literacy in tertiary institutions is derived from three policy domains including Education policies, Information communication technology (ICT) policies, Library and information services policies.

In East African countries, such as in Kenya high enrolment in Universities coupled with diversification of courses against reduced funding have led to questions about the

quality of higher education. Therefore, adoption and implementation of Information Literacy programmes was supported with commensurate investment in the necessary human and other resources vital for effective teaching, learning and research will go a long way in helping Kenyan universities to positively contribute to the country's development as expected of any university all over the world.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Policy documents like ICT Policy, 2003 and Tanzania Development Vision 2025, outlined ICT as a powerful development facilitator in the fight against poverty, ignorance and disease. The government promotes ICT and encourages public and private sector to invest in ICT sector and development of appropriate skills among citizens for effective use of ICT (Chatama, 2014:1).

In achieving the goal of imparting information literacy and life-long learning habit among Universities students, the government has been installing National Fiber optic backbone in the Universities with the aim of making sure internet and wireless services are available to all higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

Despite the fact that government of Tanzania has been putting much effort in the importation of ICT infrastructures and devices including minimizing taxes, the pace of integrating information literacy subject among Universities curricular to enable students become skilful information users still negligible. This has been supported by Lwoga (2013:3) who pointed out that in Tanzania, the level of integrating IL in Universities' curricula is still low whereby only Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS) managed to integrate information literacy course through ICT course in the year 2011, however this course has been taught to first year undergraduate students only. This paper therefore, intends to

examine if Universities in Kilimanjaro region' have integrated information literacy subject in their curricular so as to enable students achieve life-long learning habit and become skilful information users.

1.2 General objective

The main objective of this paper was to assess if information literacy subject has been integrated into the Universities curricular in Tanzania so as to enable students achieve life-long reading habit. The reference is made using MoCU, SMMUCo and MWECAU. In achieving the main objective, the paper had the following specific objectives;

- (i) To examine how information literacy subject has been integrated into the universities curricular in order to enhance life-long reading habit among Universities students,
- (ii) To assess the role that has been played by librarians in imparting information literacy skills to the Universities students, and
- (iii) To identify factors that affect the integration of information literacy subject in the Universities curricular

Research questions

In order to answer the above research objectives this study was guided by the following research questions:

- (i) How Information literacy subject have been integrated in Universities curricular?
- (ii) What role has been played by librarians in imparting information literacy skills to students?, and
- (iii) What are the challenges in integrating information literacy subject in Universities curricular?

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This paper aims at investigating the impact of integrating information literacy subject in Universities curricular in Tanzania towards achieving life-long learning habit among students. The study will provide useful knowledge to policy makers in education sector and other stakeholders. The study can be used by policy makers in education sector to monitor plans, and improve the education systems among Universities students by using appropriate curricular that will have a positive impact on student's life-long learning habit and achievement of better academic performance. Study is in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 which intends to ensure inclusive equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all as well as Tanzania Development Vision 2025 target of achieving a well educated and learning society. The research is crucial because it is conducted during this era when the government is making some changes in education system hence integration of IL among University curricular becomes part and parcel of the changes. Moreover the research output shall be very important for implementing and planning other researches that are focusing on on information literacy and equitable quality education in Tanzania.

3. INFORMATION LITERACY INTEGRATION MODEL

The key elements of the information literacy integration model are shown in Figure 1 below. The model includes three key interconnected components: What, Who and How. The intended outcomes of the model is to enable students to be information literate. This model provides the guideline through which information literacy subject can be integrated into the Universities curricular.

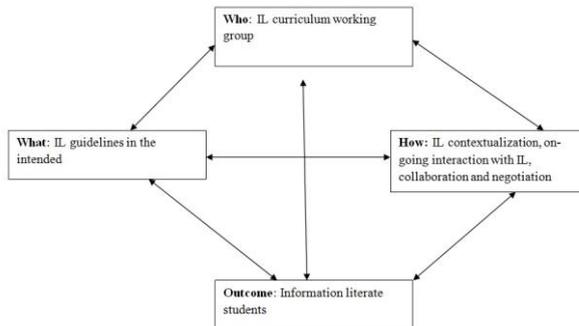


Figure 1: Key components of the IL integration model adopted from Li-Wang (2011).

The **What** element deals with the information literacy guidelines in the intended curriculum (i.e. what the University intends to teach). These guidelines include the institutional graduate information literacy attributes or profiles; the graduate information literacy required by an accrediting professional organization; and the institutional or national information literacy policies such as the institutionally endorsed information literacy standards, institutional information literacy policies, or related national information literacy strategies.

The **Who** element deals with the people who are involved in the information literacy curricular integration group by answering these questions such as who are the key stakeholders in information literacy integration? Who is involved in the information literacy curricular working group? How to collaborate? It also discusses how to analyze and understand academic curriculum in order to identify core courses and course coordinators and establish personal relationships between academic staff and librarians.

The **How** element explores the process of information literacy integration curricular development. It includes how information literacy can be integrated across the curriculum by

contextualizing information literacy in the curriculum; how to provide students with an ongoing interaction with information throughout a single course and across multiple courses and how to apply learning theories and pedagogy to the information literacy curricular design.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is written based on the experience which authors acquired from the various academic institutions in Moshi district councils. The multiple case study design was applied where the descriptions of various cases were done. The cases that were used in this study were MoCU, MWECAU and SMMUCo from Moshi district council. This paper has mostly applied the qualitative approach in describing various issues. In most cases, it has used secondary data and information. Secondary data were collected through desk review methods where references were made from various books, journals, reports and other online materials relating to the subject matter.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integration of IL subject into the Universities Curricular
Findings of the study revealed that all three Universities have not been able to integrate Information literacy (IL) subject in their curricular. Since all Universities offer introduction to computer courses hence Universities top management have been assuming that students will acquire IL skills from such a course. However, findings have revealed that introduction to computer course aims to equip students with necessary skills on the use of computer as a machine rather than imparting IL knowledge to enable students to become skillful information users and enhance their problem solving skills.

Knowing how to use computer is one part of information skills but students should be able to use searching strategies, understand different sources of information, be able to evaluate different sources of information, be able to synthesize information and understand ethics in using the information. Therefore, integration of information IL subject in Universities curricular is of great importance to the students and for the national development at large.

Lacks of information literacy skills among students have directly affected their independent learning behavior since they cannot search information for their academic works from various databases. This situation has necessitated students to depend much from class notes and handouts prepared by course facilitators. As a consequence affect students reading culture which in turn affect their academic performance.

Study also revealed that Universities top management have been expecting academic librarian to impart IL competency to newly enrolled students during the library orientation session. However, time allocated for library orientation has not been enough to impart all necessary IL skills to all students due to the fact that registration process in the three Universities is done manually hence consuming much time for students to finish the registration process and attend library orientation. Also study shows that some students have not been attending library orientation for several reasons including coming late to the Universities.

Study also found out that, as a result of not attending library orientation and lack of IL skills, some students have not been able to use library for their academic works, while others have decided to stop using library services at all. This situation has increased tendency of students to copy their colleagues' assignments, research plagiarism and violation of copy rights.

Role played by University librarian in imparting IL knowledge to students

Since Universities libraries aims at supporting its institutions in attaining its goals then librarians strive to ensure quality library services are provided to its patrons. In achieving the goal of offering quality library services including to ensure maximum resources utilization, librarians have been conducting user education to equip students with IL skills which aims at enabling them to become independent learners and skilful information users. Students have been taught on how to search various subject databases and how to access and use the information but this programme are done occasionally and not regularly.

Provision of Readers Advisory Services

Universities librarian have continue to play their role by offering readers advisory services to its students, this aims at giving opportunity to students to access information of their needs at a right time. At the readers advisory section students are trained on how to become skillful information users. This is done by reference librarians including instructing students how the library is organized and informing the users on the available finding tools which may be consulted to retrieve the required information.

Subscription of E-Resources

Librarians have been imparting IL competency to students; this has been done by subscribing to online publishers. MoCU and MWECAU are the members of Consortium of Tanzania Research Libraries (COTUL) which share information resources jointly. In order for students to access these multiple databases they must possess IL competency in searching the databases. Therefore, this has increased the demand for students to learn IL courses so as to equip them with required

skills of searching information from different databases subscribed by the Universities libraries.

Automation of Library Services

As a strategy to ensure students are becoming information literate and capable of accessing information from various databases, Universities librarian at MWECAU and MoCU have been able to utilize the advantages brought by the open source library management system. While at MoCU they are using ABCD and INMAGIC library software's parallel as a result of migrating from INMAGIC software to ABCD at MWECAU are using KOHA library software. To access information from these databases requires students to possess IL skills hence it has demanded students to learn on how they can use IL skills to access information of their needs. SMMUCo are yet to utilize the benefits offered by the open sources library management systems and therefore still operating manually.

Challenges of integrating IL subject in Universities Curricular

Weakness of Tanzania Education Policy

Tanzania education policy of 1995 which is currently in use has not stated anywhere that IL subject has to be integrated and should be taught to all Universities students, therefore old and new established Universities curricular have been developed depending on the requirement of the individual institution. This situation is posing a serious challenge towards integrating IL subject into Universities curricular including MoCU, MWECAU and SMMUCo. If it could be clearly stated in Tanzania education policy, then Universities could fulfill the obligation by integrating information literacy subject in their curricular.

Lack of librarian's involvement in curriculum development

Another serious challenge facing the integration of IL subject in Universities curricular for example at MoCU, MWECAU and SMMUCo is lack of involvement of librarians during curriculum development. Curriculum development team in most cases is composed of faculty members where a particular curriculum is prepared for and there has been no involvement of librarians in the process of curriculum development without any clear reasons. This has denied the chance for librarians to advice the curriculum team on how to integrate and why is it important to integrate IL subjects into the Universities curricular.

Lack of support from institutional top management

Integration of IL subject at MoCU, MWECAU and SMMUCo face a challenge from institutional top management because the available internal institutional policies do not state if it is mandatory to integrate information literacy subject in their curricular. This has affected the move to integrate IL subject within the three Universities. If the top management will set a rule that the IL subject to be incorporated in institutional policies then this will be a good beginning for integrating IL subject in Universities curricular.

Lack of lobbying and advocacy strategies from University librarians

Lack of lobbying and advocacy strategies among University librarians from MoCU, MWECAU and SMMUCo has been a challenge towards the integration of IL subject in Universities curricular. University librarians have failed to find means to convince curriculum developers, education stakeholders and top management of the institutions on why IL subject should be integrated in their curricular. Librarians as educators they are supposing to inform the management on the value of

information literacy to students and national development in particular.

CONCLUSION

This research examined the status of integrating information literacy subject in Tanzania Universities curricular with special reference to MoCU, MWECAU and SMMUCo from Kilimanjaro region. The literature review shows that MoCU, MWECAU and SMMUCo have not been able to integrate information literacy subject in their curricular, this has in turn affected the information searching skills of the students from the three Universities. However, University librarians from the three Universities have been playing their role in imparting IL skills to students through provision of user education under the departments of readers' advisory services, and subscription of e-resources through consortia as the way of encouraging students to learn IL skills so that they can access information of their needs. On challenges, study realized that, since Tanzania education policy does not explain clearly if every University in Tanzania is obliged to integrate IL subject in their curricular then it has been obstacle towards integration of IL subject in many Universities curricular. Other identified challenges towards integration of IL subject in Universities curricular include lack of librarians' involvement in curriculum development, lack of support from institutional top management and lack of lobbying and advocacy strategies from the librarians.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings identified the importance of integrating IL subject into the Universities curricular in Tanzania towards achieving

life-long reading habit among students. The study has come up with the following recommendations:

Review of Tanzania Education Policy

Tanzania education policy of 1995 has been in use for quite a long time and therefore, it has to be revised so that it can accommodate this important issues relating to integration of IL subject into the Universities curricular. The policy should state clearly that, every University in Tanzania is obliged to integrate information literacy subject into the curricular. Education policy has to set a benchmark for integration of IL subject into the Universities curricular in Tanzania which will result to life-long learning habit among students. Studying IL competency will empower problem solving skills of the students hence leading to national development because information is an important commodity for making informed decisions in all sphere of human life.

Involvement of University librarians in curricular development

Curriculum development teams should involve Universities' librarians during developing curriculum as information professional librarians understands at what level students need to be taught what aspects of information literacy. Involvement of Universities librarians will bring a sense of acknowledging the vital role that has been played by librarians as educators. This is in line with Li Wang IL integration model (2011) which suggested that librarians should be involved in curriculum development so that they build common understanding with other academic staff of the University on how IL subject will be integrated and taught at different levels.

Top management support

At the institutional level the Universities top management has the ability to support the integration of information literacy subject in their curricular. This can be done by incorporating such aspect in institutional policies. This should demand every curriculum developed by the University to integrate information literacy subject. As a result, it will help students to sharpen their information literacy competency which will also enable students to become life-long learners with high level of problem solving skills.

Commitment from Universities librarians

Librarians should commit themselves in creating awareness to different stakeholders such as University management and policy makers on the role of information literacy in achieving life-long reading habit to students. In this case librarians are expected to explain to different stakeholders on the importance of integrating information literacy subject in Universities curricular and in achieving better students' academic performance.

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