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EFFECTIVE AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR CULTIVATING INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS IN NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract
This paper critically examines effective strategies for teaching information literacy (IL) in Nigerian higher education institutions and explores pedagogical approaches that can enhance students' IL competencies. IL is essential for academic success, career readiness, and meaningful civic participation, yet studies show that many students in Nigeria lack adequate IL skills. To address this gap, the paper reviews best-practice instructional strategies, including active learning, curriculum integration, online tutorials, and standalone IL programmes. It also outlines practical classroom activities such as information search tasks, article and website evaluation, annotated bibliographies, and citation exercises, which foster critical thinking and ethical information use. The paper highlights the collaborative role of librarians and faculty in embedding IL into subject-specific curricula. It further provides a framework for assessing IL initiatives and explores future directions for sustainable IL integration in Nigerian higher education. By adopting these strategies, Nigerian universities can better prepare students to navigate the complex information landscape of the 21st century.
Keywords: Information Literacy Skills, Teaching Strategies, Nigerian Higher Education Students.

Introduction

Information literacy (IL) is widely regarded as a core competency that enables individuals to think critically, analyze information objectively, and make sound judgments about the information they encounter. It empowers learners to navigate today's complex information landscape with confidence and responsibility, thereby fostering informed decision-making and active participation in academic, professional, and social contexts. As a crucial element of lifelong learning, IL provides individuals with the ability to identify their information needs, locate relevant resources, evaluate their credibility, and apply them ethically. Beyond enhancing students' academic performance, IL also equips them with transferable skills essential for success in their future careers and for meaningful engagement in society. According to Tenebe, (2021) Information literacy (IL) is defined as "the ability to think critically and make balanced judgments about any information we find and use. It empowers us as citizens to develop informed views and engage fully with society" (CILIP, 2018). IL is a fundamental component of education at all levels, as it enhances students' academic performance and prepares them for their future careers. It equips individuals with the necessary skills to locate, retrieve, evaluate, and utilize information effectively and ethically. Additionally, IL enables individuals to make informed decisions about the information they encounter and to participate meaningfully in various societal contexts.

Studies conducted in Nigeria have shown that students in higher education institutions often lack IL skills (Igwe & Ndubuisi, 2016; Ukachi, 2015; Onwuchekwa, 2017). Consequently, there is a pressing need to embed IL competencies within the learning processes of Nigerian universities. The Nigerian tertiary education landscape with its growing student population, rapid expansion of digital resources, and high stakes for employability makes IL a critical component of learning. To ensure that students develop the necessary IL competencies required for their

academic and professional success, effective pedagogical methods and strategies must be implemented. Research indicates that best-practice teaching strategies can significantly enhance students' IL skills (Ajiboye et al., 2022; Onifade et al., 2024). Various scholars within the field of librarianship have proposed and implemented several strategies for teaching IL, as discussed in the subsequent sections.

Information Literacy Teaching Strategies

Active Learning Strategies: Active learning refers to instructional approaches that encourage students to take an active role in the learning process (Detlor et al., 2012). Instead of passively listening to lectures, students participate in activities that demand critical thinking, collaboration, and application of knowledge. This method involves engaging students in activities such as answering questions, solving problems, discussing course content, and teaching peers, either in groups or individually (Doolittle, Wojdak & Walters, 2023).

Practical Scenarios: A lecturer assigns students to evaluate a research article or thesis using established evaluation criteria. Students then present their findings in class and explain their reasoning.

Another scenario involves a debate on a controversial topic where students must gather credible sources, analyze them, and present arguments.

Librarians in a workshop setting may simulate a "fake news" newsroom, requiring students to identify misinformation and provide verification evidence. For example, Ajiboye et al. (2022) describe an IL programme at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, where students engaged in problem-based learning activities. They had to identify information gaps in agricultural research projects and source appropriate academic articles to fill those gaps. This model can be replicated in other Nigerian universities.

Active learning also strengthens students' confidence in presenting information, a skill vital for employability. Involving peer assessment and reflective journals helps them consolidate IL learning.

Integration of IL into the Curriculum: One effective strategy is the formal integration of IL into higher education curricula. This can be achieved through two primary approaches:

IL as an Accredited Course: IL should be formally accredited and introduced as a compulsory course in all universities. This ensures that students systematically acquire the skills necessary for handling information effectively. For example, Delta State University has piloted compulsory "Use of Library and Study Skills" modules which could be redesigned as fully accredited IL courses, graded with assessments that measure real search and evaluation skills.

IL Embedded within Existing Courses: IL concepts can be embedded within various courses across disciplines (Tshuma & Chigada, 2018). For instance, in a Mass Communication course, IL exercises could include evaluating media sources or analyzing the credibility of social media posts. In a Nursing programme, students might complete a search on medical databases and compare clinical evidence. Embedding IL into multiple semesters rather than a single one-off session fosters cumulative learning.

Scenario: At Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS), Ogbomoso, Onifade et al. (2024) reported improved IL skills after embedding citation and source evaluation exercises within theology courses. This embedded approach ensures students learn IL within their disciplinary context. In law schools, similar embedding could involve legal database searches and citation formats.

IL as a Stand alone Programme: An alternative approach is to offer IL as an independent, non-credit-bearing programme. Such programmes focus on key aspects of IL, including information searching and retrieval, source evaluation, ethical information use, and legal considerations. Standalone IL programmes can be delivered through workshops, seminars, or dedicated training sessions.

Scenarios: A university library organizes a one-week IL "boot camp" at the start of each academic year for all incoming students. This training covers essential IL topics and culminates in a practical assessment.

Weekend workshops for postgraduate students focus on advanced database searching, systematic review strategies, and research data management.

Such standalone initiatives are effective for orienting new students quickly and for offering remedial IL support.

Online IL Tutorials: Online IL tutorials provide an accessible and flexible way for students to acquire IL skills. These tutorials can cover various aspects of IL, including searching strategies, evaluation techniques, and citation practices. They may include interactive exercises, quizzes, and self-assessment tools to reinforce learning.

Scenario: The University of Lagos library could design a Moodle-based IL tutorial with modules such as "Searching Academic Databases," "Evaluating Websites," and "Avoiding Plagiarism." Students complete the modules asynchronously and receive certificates. Online tutorials can help bridge gaps for part-time students and those in distance learning programmes. Such platforms can also collect analytics to show which IL skills are most needed.

Practical Activities to Enhance Students' Information Literacy

Information Search Exercises: Students can be given tasks that require them to apply search techniques effectively.

***Keyword Identification*:** Students receive a research question and must extract key terms, then use Boolean operators to refine their search queries (Centre College Grace Doherty Library, 2025).

Synonym Search: To encourage diverse search strategies, students generate synonyms for key terms in their research topics and conduct multiple searches using different combinations of keywords.

Database Navigation: Students learn how to navigate OPACs (Online Public Access Catalogues) and institutional repositories to find theses and grey literature.

Scenario from Nigeria: During IL training at NBTS Ogbomoso, students were tasked to search ATLA Religion Database using three different keyword strategies and compare results (Onifade et

al., 2024). In another example, agricultural students at FUNAAB practiced advanced searches in CAB Abstracts to support project proposals.

Information Evaluation Tasks: Students should be trained to assess the credibility of information sources using standard evaluation criteria, such as authenticity, authority, timeliness, purpose, and bias.

Article Evaluation: Academics or librarians present students with two articles, one from a credible academic source and another from a questionable source. Students then analyze the articles based on evaluation criteria and discuss their findings.

Website Assessment: Students choose a website to evaluate and determine whether it is suitable for academic research, justifying their decision (Centre College Grace Doherty Library, 2025).

Annotated Bibliography: Students compile an annotated bibliography, critically assessing the sources they have retrieved and explaining their relevance and credibility.

Scenario: Ajiboye et al. (2022) describe a case where agricultural science students were asked to evaluate research bulletins from the Nigerian Ministry of Agriculture alongside journal articles from Scopus to distinguish grey literature from peer-reviewed studies. Mass Communication students at UNN could be tasked to analyze online news sources and rate their credibility.

Ethical Use of Information: Understanding ethical information use is crucial for academic integrity. One key area is referencing and citation.

Citation Practice: Assignments can be designed to require students to correctly cite and reference the sources they use. This reinforces proper citation habits and prevents plagiarism.

Anti-Plagiarism Training: Students practice using Turnitin or similar tools to identify citation gaps can be applied to ensure originality.

Scenario: At NBTS Ogbomoso, Onifade et al. (2024) introduced an online "Plagiarism Awareness and Citation Skills" module. Students practiced APA and Chicago styles using simulated assignments and saw a 30% reduction in plagiarism cases. Similar models could be adopted at Nigerian universities with high academic integrity violations.

Assessment and Evaluation of IL Programmes

An essential yet often overlooked part of IL instruction is ongoing assessment and evaluation. Without systematic assessment, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of IL interventions or identify areas for improvement.

Approaches to Assessment:
Pre- and Post-Tests: Conduct baseline and exit assessments to measure IL skill gains.

Embedded Assignments: Include IL learning outcomes in coursework and grade them.

Student Feedback: Collect student reflections to assess perceived usefulness and confidence in IL skills.

Faculty Collaboration: Encourage faculty to comment on improvements in students' research work overtime.

Collaborative Role of Librarians and Faculty

Librarians possess the technical expertise in information retrieval, while faculty members understand the disciplinary contexts of their students. Collaboration between the two groups is essential for designing effective IL instruction. Studies such as Ukachi (2015) and Onwuchekwa (2017) show that IL instruction is most successful when librarians co-teach or co-design curricula with faculty.

Scenario: In a joint initiative at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, faculty members from the Mass Communication Department worked with librarians to integrate "Fake News Detection" modules into reporting courses. Students learned to verify information before publication, combining IL with practical journalism training. This co-teaching model can also be extended to postgraduate thesis-writing seminars.

Future Directions and Challenges

While the strategies above show promise, implementing IL across Nigerian higher education faces several challenges:

- **Resource Constraints:** Many university libraries are underfunded, limiting their ability to run robust IL programmes.
- **Staff Capacity:** Librarians need ongoing professional development to keep up with digital tools and teaching methodologies.
- **Curriculum Rigidity:** Departments may resist adding IL content to already crowded curricula.
- **Technology Access:** Students from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds may lack devices or reliable internet for online IL tutorials.

Opportunities for the Future:

- **National Policy Support:** The National Universities Commission (NUC) could mandate IL competencies as part of accreditation standards.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborations with NGOs or international library associations can bring training and resources.
- **Research and Innovation:** Conducting longitudinal studies to track the impact of IL on graduate employability could strengthen its case institutionally.

Recommendations

1. Academic librarians should play a proactive role in promoting IL within their institutions, taking cues from successful programmes such as those at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta.
2. Collaboration between academic librarians, faculty members, and learner support teams is essential for identifying the specific IL needs of students across various disciplines.
3. Universities should develop subject-specific IL programmes tailored to the needs of

students in different fields. For example, Nursing students could receive training on PubMed, while Law students could learn LexisNexis searches.

4. Course learning outcomes should explicitly include IL competencies to ensure that students develop these skills throughout their academic journey.
5. University libraries should establish general IL programmes, either as online tutorials or standalone courses, to support students in acquiring IL skills.
6. Regular assessment and feedback loops should be built into IL instruction to track progress and improve delivery.
7. National-level guidelines should encourage IL integration, supported by funding and librarian training grants.

Conclusion

This paper has explored various effective and innovative strategies for teaching IL in Nigerian higher education institutions. Active learning, curriculum integration, standalone IL programmes, and online tutorials are key approaches that can enhance students' IL competencies. Additionally, practical exercises, such as information search tasks, evaluation activities, and citation practice, can reinforce these skills. The recommendations provided emphasize the need for systematic IL instruction across tertiary institutions. By implementing these strategies, higher education institutions in Nigeria can equip students with the critical information-handling skills necessary for academic success and lifelong learning. Furthermore, sustained investment in IL programmes will strengthen students' employability and civic participation in Nigeria's rapidly changing information society.

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