

Information Literacy and Information Skills Instruction: New Directions for School Librarian Professionals

Benjamin Kenekwukwu Nwobu

Federal College of Education (Technical) Akoka, Lagos

Abstract

The paper examines information literacy and information skills instruction in the digital era by school librarian professionals. This paper explores the concept of information literacy, delves into the changing role of school librarians, emphasizes the significance of information skills instruction, and highlights the new directions that school librarian professionals must take to meet the challenges of the digital age. Going further, the paper underscores the indispensable role of school librarians in shaping the information literacy of students and their crucial position in the ever-evolving landscape of education. The new directions for school librarian professionals not only involve continuous professional development but also active collaboration with educators, adept use of technology, and advocacy for information literacy. By embracing these new directions, school librarian professionals can equip students with the tools they need to thrive in the information age and become critical, discerning, and responsible consumers of information. The paper indicates that the challenges that school librarians face in implementing information skills instruction are substantial, but the importance of this endeavor cannot be overstated. However, the paper therefore recommends that school librarians should continue to advocate for the significance of information literacy in education, school librarians should invest in their own development to stay updated on the latest information literacy practices and educational technologies and school librarians should work closely with school administrations to secure the necessary resources for information skills instruction, including physical materials, digital resources, and technology.

Keywords: *Information literacy, information skills, instruction, digital age, school library, librarians.*

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the role of school librarians has undergone a remarkable transformation. Traditionally seen as guardians of books and repositories of knowledge, school librarians now find themselves at the forefront of fostering information literacy and delivering information skills instruction to students (American Association of School Librarians, 2018). This shift reflects the growing recognition of the critical importance of information literacy in the 21st century (Bruce, 2017).

This transformation in the role of school librarians is not merely a response to technological advancements; it is a response to the evolving educational needs of students in a digital age. It recognizes the profound impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), characterized by the convergence of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and automation. In this era, students must not only be consumers of information but also creators and evaluators. They must be equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in an information-rich, technology-driven world. As a result, school librarians have transitioned from being custodians of books and physical collections to becoming instructional leaders in the realm of information literacy. They now collaborate with teachers to seamlessly integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum. This evolution in their roles not only equips students with the ability to critically evaluate online sources and discern credible information from misinformation but also instills the value of proper citation and academic integrity.

This paper aims to explore the concept of information literacy, delve into the changing role of school librarians, emphasize the significance of information skills instruction, and highlight the new directions that school librarian professionals must take to meet the challenges of the digital age. It underscores the indispensable role of school librarians in shaping the information literacy of students and their crucial position in the ever-evolving landscape of education. The new directions for school librarian professionals not only involve continuous professional development but also active collaboration with educators, adept use of technology, and advocacy for information literacy. By embracing these new directions, school librarian professionals can equip students with the tools they need to thrive in the information age and become critical, discerning, and responsible consumers of information.

The Concept of Information Literacy

Information literacy is the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information from various sources (American Library Association, 2019). It encompasses a range of skills and competencies, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and the responsible use of information. In a world awash with information, information literacy is the compass that guides students in navigating this sea of knowledge. It empowers them to not only find information but also to assess its quality and relevance (Bruce, 2017). In essence, it is a skill set that enables individuals to navigate the complex information landscape, equipping them to make informed decisions, think critically, and engage with information responsibly. Information literacy encompasses several core components:

1. **Recognizing the Need for Information:** The first step in information literacy is recognizing when information is needed. This involves identifying gaps

in knowledge and understanding that can be addressed through information retrieval.

2. **Locating Information:** Once the need for information is identified, individuals must be able to locate relevant information efficiently. This often involves the use of various search tools, libraries, databases, and digital resources.
3. **Evaluating Information:** Critical evaluation is a central component of information literacy. Users must assess the credibility, reliability, and relevance of information sources. This includes considering the authority of the author, the publication date, and the objectivity of the information.
4. **Effectively Using Information:** Information literacy goes beyond locating and evaluating information; it also involves the ability to use that information effectively. This includes synthesizing information from various sources, applying it to solve problems, and creating new knowledge.
5. **Ethical and Legal Use of Information:** Information literacy also encompasses an understanding of the ethical and legal use of information. Users must know how to appropriately cite sources, avoid plagiarism, and respect copyright and intellectual property rights.

Information literacy is indispensable in contemporary society for several reasons:

1. **Critical Thinking:** Information literacy nurtures critical thinking skills. It empowers individuals to question and analyze information, enabling them to distinguish fact from opinion and make well-informed decisions.
2. **Lifelong Learning:** In a world where information is continually changing and expanding, information literacy is the foundation of lifelong learning. It equips individuals with the skills to adapt to new information and technologies.
3. **Academic Success:** Information literacy is crucial for academic success. It enables students to conduct research, critically evaluate sources, and cite information properly. This is essential for academic integrity.
4. **Workplace Competence:** In a knowledge-based economy, information literacy is a valuable skill in the workplace. It allows employees to stay up-to-date, solve problems, and make informed decisions.
5. **Citizenship and Democracy:** In an era of information overload, information literacy is vital for responsible citizenship. It helps individuals engage critically with media, evaluate the credibility of news sources, and participate effectively in democratic processes.

The Changing Role of School Librarians

Traditionally, school librarians were associated with managing physical collections and assisting students in locating books. However, the advent of the digital age and the proliferation of information online have necessitated a shift in the role of school librarians (Loertscher, 2017). They have transitioned from being mere custodians of books to becoming instructional leaders in the realm of

information literacy (American Association of School Librarians, 2018). School librarians now collaborate with teachers to integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2017). They design and deliver lessons that teach students how to critically evaluate online sources, discern credible information from misinformation, and cite sources properly. This transition underscores the indispensable role of school librarians in shaping the information literacy of students.

The role of school librarians has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past few decades. Traditionally viewed as guardians of books and physical collections, school librarians have evolved into instructional leaders, playing a pivotal role in fostering information literacy and delivering information skills instruction to students. This transformation reflects the shifting educational landscape and the growing recognition of the vital role school librarians play in preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century. Consequently, school librarians transitioned from being mere keepers of books to becoming instructional leaders. Given the foregoing, NAMLE (2019) outlined the following features embedded in the new era:

1. **Collaboration with Teachers:** School librarians now actively collaborate with teachers to integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum. This collaborative approach ensures that information literacy becomes an integral part of students' educational experience. They work closely with educators to design and deliver lessons that teach students how to critically evaluate online sources, discern credible information from misinformation, and cite sources properly.
2. **Information Skills Instruction:** School librarians are instrumental in providing information skills instruction. They guide students in developing the skills necessary to navigate, comprehend, and utilize information effectively. This includes critical thinking, media literacy, and digital citizenship, which are essential in the digital age.
3. **Digital Resources Management:** While traditional collections remain important, school librarians have expanded their roles to include the management of digital resources. They curate online databases, e-books, and other digital materials, ensuring that students have access to a wide range of resources.

Many schools and districts have recognized the importance of integrating information literacy into the curriculum. For example, in the Guided Inquiry Design (GID) framework developed by Carol Kuhlthau, Leslie K. Maniotes, and Ann K. Caspari, school librarians play a central role in guiding students through the inquiry process, which involves developing research questions, locating resources, critically evaluating sources, and presenting findings (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2017). Moreover, in districts like Fairfax County Public

Schools in Virginia, the library program is aligned with the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) National School Library Standards. School librarians there work closely with teachers to ensure that students acquire essential information literacy skills at each grade level, preparing them for the demands of the 21st century (American Association of School Librarians, 2018).

The changing role of school librarians is not merely a response to technological advancements; it is a response to the evolving educational needs of students in a digital age. School librarians have evolved from being custodians of books to becoming instructional leaders, guiding students in the acquisition of critical information literacy skills. By actively collaborating with teachers, providing information skills instruction, and managing digital resources, they ensure that students are equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in an information-rich, technology-driven world. The new direction for school librarian professionals involves continuous adaptation and professional growth to meet the ever-evolving needs of education in the 21st century.

Information Skills Instruction in the 21st Century

The importance of information skills instruction in the 21st century cannot be overstated. In an era where information is readily available through digital devices, students must be equipped with the skills necessary to navigate, comprehend, and utilize this information effectively. Information skills instruction is not just about searching the internet; it's about critical thinking, media literacy, and digital citizenship (Kuhlthau et al., 2017). It is through information skills instruction that students learn to be discerning consumers of information. They understand that not all sources are equal, and they acquire the skills to evaluate the credibility and relevance of sources. Furthermore, they learn to cite sources properly, which is crucial for academic integrity (American Library Association, 1989). In the digital age, NAMLE (2019) states that information skills instruction plays a pivotal role for several reasons:

- ✓ **Digital Overload:** We live in an era of digital overload, where an immense amount of information is available at our fingertips. However, the sheer volume of data can be overwhelming, and information skills instruction is necessary to help individuals filter, process, and make sense of this information.
- ✓ **Critical Thinking:** Information skills instruction nurtures critical thinking. It equips individuals with the ability to analyze and evaluate sources critically, enabling them to distinguish fact from opinion, detect bias, and make informed decisions.
- ✓ **Problem Solving:** The ability to locate, analyze, and apply information is essential for effective problem-solving. Information skills instruction teaches

- individuals how to approach complex issues, find relevant information, and make decisions based on evidence.
- ✓ **Academic Success:** Information skills are fundamental for academic success. Students need to conduct research, evaluate sources, and properly cite information in academic work. Without these skills, academic integrity is compromised.
 - ✓ **Workplace Competence:** In the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century, information skills are highly valuable in the workplace. Employees who can access, evaluate, and utilize information efficiently are better equipped to stay up-to-date, solve problems, and make informed decisions.
 - ✓ **Media Literacy:** Information skills instruction incorporates media literacy, enabling individuals to engage critically with media and recognize the potential for misinformation, bias, and manipulation (World Economic Forum, 2020).

In educational settings, information skills instruction is a vital component of preparing students for the challenges they will face in the 21st century. It equips students with the skills necessary to succeed academically, engage in critical thinking, and become responsible digital citizens. Bruce (2017) identified several areas where information literacy aids in students' education:

- ✓ **Research Skills:** Information skills instruction teaches students how to conduct effective research. This involves locating relevant sources, evaluating their credibility, and synthesizing information to create new knowledge.
- ✓ **Digital Citizenship:** As students grow up in a digital world, information skills instruction also includes teaching digital citizenship. This encompasses responsible online behavior, ethical use of information, and an understanding of the risks and opportunities presented by digital technology.
- ✓ **Media Literacy:** Students are exposed to an abundance of media content, and information skills instruction helps them discern credible sources, recognize media bias, and critically evaluate information from various media outlets.

Information skills instruction is not just about searching the internet; it is a multifaceted skill set that equips individuals to navigate the complex information landscape. In the 21st century, where information is abundant, digital technology is pervasive, and critical thinking is vital, these skills are indispensable. They are essential for academic success, workplace competence, and responsible citizenship in a world inundated with information.

New Directions for School Librarian Professionals

In the ever-evolving field of education, the role of school librarian professionals has experienced significant transformation. Traditionally viewed as custodians of books and physical collections, school librarians have now emerged as

instructional leaders, actively engaged in fostering information literacy and delivering information skills instruction to students. Bruce (2017) observes that the digital age has ushered in profound changes in how information is accessed, consumed, and created. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), characterized by the convergence of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and automation, has revolutionized not only the world of work but also the educational landscape. In this era, the role of school librarian professionals must adapt to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities presented by these transformations. For school librarian professionals, embracing new directions means recognizing the evolving role of the school librarian in an increasingly digital and information-rich world. It involves:

- ✓ **Continuous Professional Development:** School librarian professionals must engage in continuous learning to stay updated on the latest information technologies, educational trends, and information literacy practices (American Association of School Librarians, 2018). This may include pursuing advanced degrees or certifications in the field.
- ✓ **Collaboration and Integration:** Collaborating with teachers and other educational professionals to seamlessly integrate information literacy into the curriculum is essential (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2017). School librarians should work closely with educators to create lessons that incorporate information literacy skills.
- ✓ **Technology Adoption:** Embracing and effectively using digital tools and platforms for instruction is a critical aspect of new directions. School librarians should be proficient in educational technology to enhance information skills instruction (Loertscher, 2017).
- ✓ **Advocacy and Leadership:** School librarian professionals should actively advocate for the importance of information literacy and the role they play in fostering it. By assuming leadership positions in their schools and districts, they can champion the cause of information literacy (American Association of School Librarians, 2018).

The changing role of school librarian professionals reflects the evolving needs of education in the 21st century. They have transitioned from being custodians of books to becoming instructional leaders, guiding students in the acquisition of critical information literacy skills. By actively collaborating with teachers, providing information skills instruction, and managing digital resources, school librarian professionals ensure that students are equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in an information-rich, technology-driven world. The new direction for school librarian professionals involves continuous adaptation and professional growth to meet the ever-evolving needs of education in the 21st century.

Challenges associated with information skills instruction by school librarians

Information skills instruction equips students with essential abilities to navigate, evaluate, and use information effectively in an era marked by an abundance of digital resources and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). This instruction fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy, ensuring that students become discerning consumers and producers of information (Bruce, 2017). However, studies have revealed that there are outlined several challenges associated with the implementation of information skills instruction by school librarians:

- ✓ **Limited Time:** School librarians often face constraints related to the limited time available for instruction. With the pressure to accommodate numerous other responsibilities, including managing physical and digital resources, finding time for information skills instruction can be challenging (Johnson, 2016).
- ✓ **Collaboration Barriers:** Effective integration of information skills instruction relies on collaboration with teachers and educators. However, school librarians may encounter barriers to collaboration, such as resistance from teaching staff or a lack of clear communication channels (Todd, Kuhlthau, & Heinstrom, 2015).
- ✓ **Resource Limitations:** Inadequate resources, both physical and digital, can hinder school librarians' efforts to provide comprehensive information skills instruction. A lack of access to up-to-date databases, educational technology, and diverse learning materials can be a significant barrier (Hughes-Hassell, 2016).
- ✓ **Professional Development Needs:** Staying updated on information literacy practices and educational technology is essential for school librarians. However, there may be insufficient professional development opportunities and resources available to help librarians acquire and maintain the necessary expertise (Stripling, 2019).
- ✓ **Diverse Student Needs:** Students come from diverse backgrounds and have varying levels of information literacy skills. Addressing the individual needs of students and differentiating instruction to ensure all students benefit can be a considerable challenge (Eisenberg & Berkowitz, 2015).
- ✓ **Standardized Testing Pressure:** The emphasis on standardized testing can sometimes overshadow information skills instruction, as educators and schools may prioritize test preparation over other educational goals. School librarians must navigate this pressure while advocating for the importance of information literacy (Harris & Agosto, 2016).

Addressing the Challenges

To effectively implement information skills instruction, school librarians must take several steps to address these challenges:

- ✓ **Advocacy:** School librarians should actively advocate for the importance of information skills instruction. Making the case for its value in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving can help garner support from educators and administrators.
- ✓ **Professional Development:** School librarians must invest in their professional development, staying updated on the latest information literacy practices and educational technologies. Pursuing additional training and attending relevant conferences can be beneficial.
- ✓ **Collaboration:** While collaboration may face barriers, persistent efforts to establish effective communication and partnerships with teachers and educators can break down these barriers. Demonstrating the positive impact of collaboration on student outcomes is key.
- ✓ **Resource Allocation:** School librarians should work with school administrations to secure necessary resources for information skills instruction, be it physical materials, digital resources, or technology.
- ✓ **Differentiation:** Recognizing the diverse needs of students and providing differentiated instruction is essential. Tailoring information skills instruction to meet individual student needs can lead to more effective learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Information literacy and information skills instruction are the new frontiers for school librarian professionals. In a world inundated with information, the ability to navigate, evaluate, and use information effectively is a skill of paramount importance. School librarians have evolved from being custodians of books to becoming instructional leaders, guiding students in the acquisition of these vital skills. The new directions for school librarian professionals involve continuous professional development, collaboration with educators, adept use of technology, and active advocacy for information literacy. By embracing these new directions, school librarian professionals can equip students with the tools they need to thrive in the information age and become critical, discerning, and responsible consumers of information. The challenges that school librarians face in implementing information skills instruction are substantial, but the importance of this endeavor cannot be overstated. In a world awash with information, the role of school librarian professionals as champions of information skills instruction remains indispensable. They are the guides who empower students to thrive in an information-rich, technology-driven world, and they are instrumental in fostering the critical skills needed to navigate the dynamic landscape of the information age.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School librarians should continue to advocate for the significance of information literacy in education. By articulating the value of information skills instruction, they can garner support from educators, administrators, and policymakers.
2. Continuous professional growth is essential. School librarians should invest in their own development to stay updated on the latest information literacy practices and educational technologies. Pursuing advanced degrees or certifications and attending relevant conferences are ways to accomplish this.
3. School librarians should work closely with school administrations to secure the necessary resources for information skills instruction, including physical materials, digital resources, and technology.

References

- American Association of School Librarians. (2018). *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. American Library Association.
- American Library Association. (1989). *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/standards/informatio%20nliteracycompetency.pdf>
- Bruce, C. (2017). *The Seven Faces of Information Literacy*. Adelaide: Auslib Press.
- Eisenberg, M. B., and Berkowitz, R. E. (2015). *Information Literacy: Essential Skills for the Information Age*. Libraries Unlimited.
- Harris, C., and Agosto, D. (2016). It's Not Your English Teacher's School Library Media Program: A Cautionary Note on the National Survey of School Media Centers. *School Library Media Research*, 9.
- Hughes-Hassell, S. (2016). *School Librarians as Literacy Leaders: Preparing Pre-service Teachers to Lead*. In *School Libraries and Student Learning: A Guide for School Leaders* (103-120). American Association of School Librarians.
- Johnson, D. (2016). *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*. American Association of School Librarians.

Kuhlthau, C., Maniotes, L. K., and Caspari, A. K. (2017). *Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century*. Libraries Unlimited.

Loertscher, D. V. (2017). *Librarian as Learning Specialist: Meeting the Learning Imperative for the 21st Century*. Hi Willow Research & Publishing.

National Association for Media Literacy Education. (2019). *Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States*.
<https://namle.net/publications/core-principles/>

Stripling, B. (2019). Teaching for inquiry: Engaging the new generation of learners. *School Library Monthly*, 26(5), 13-16.

Todd, R. J., Kuhlthau, C. C., and Heinström, J. (2015). *Guided inquiry in practice: Middle school*. Libraries Unlimited.

World Economic Forum. (2020). *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*.
<https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020>