

## INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS AS DETERMINANT OF USE OF REFERENCE MATERIALS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN KWARA STATE

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated information literacy skills as determinants of use of reference materials among undergraduate students in university libraries in Kwara State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was employed, and a questionnaire was administered to 398 respondents from three universities: University of Ilorin, Kwara State University, and Al-Hikmah University. The findings revealed that students possess basic information literacy skills, except for research strategies, citation, and referencing, and ethical use of information. The study also showed that dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks, and yearbooks are the most commonly used reference materials, primarily for assignment preparation and research. The results indicate that information literacy skills is one of the factors that affect the use of reference materials. The study recommends that library management offer workshops to enhance students' skills in research strategies, citation, and referencing, and encourage exploration of a wider range of reference materials.*

**Keywords:** Information literacy skills, Library users, Reference materials, Undergraduate

### **Introduction**

In today's digital age, information emanates from different angles, the ability to evaluate and use information effectively is important. To achieve this, individuals, especially students in the society, are expected to know how to use the library and the available tools to retrieve required information. Being able to do this will aid their teaching and learning process. Though, this has not been the case as many of them lack the requisite skills and knowledge to use the library and the available tools to retrieve information. This is because many students,

especially in Nigeria do not have the information literacy skills needed to perform this exercise.

Ding and Jin (2018) expressed the concept of information literacy as first proposed by Paul Zurkowski, president of the American Information Industry Association in 1974. Zurkowski (1974) defined Information Literacy as “people trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literate”. Information literacy is the basic literacy and comprehensive ability formed by the different educational channels to meet the needs of the information society for learning, work, and life. Information literacy is increasingly important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferation of information resources. Information is available through libraries, community resources, special interest organizations, media, and the Internet. For an individual to become an information literate person, such an individual must possess the attributes of information literacy. An individual is said to possess literacy skills when he or she has the attributes of information literacy and can put them into practice.

Reference materials are materials that are consulted within the library alone. Ifeka et al. (2013) agrees with this by stating that, a reference source is an information bearing material that can be used within the library building or environment where information is disseminated. Reference materials are made available and accessible by indexing and abstracting services in print and electronic media (Abubakar, 2020). Reference materials are “information materials in the library, regardless of their format whether print or electronic, that can be used to provide relevant answers to divergent information needs of library users”. They are documents that contain miscellaneous information on any topic be it an event or individual. This means that these materials cannot be read from cover to cover but instead they are consulted for specific information or facts.

Information literacy skills play a crucial role in navigating and utilising reference materials effectively. Users with strong information literacy skills possess the ability to identify, evaluate, and ethically use information. Students must show a tendency for lifelong learning by acquiring information literacy skills to contend with the rapid information growth in the information society and advance themselves. This is because students’ efforts to complement their work with electronic information resources may be limited due to lack of information literacy skills (Ekenna & Iyabo, 2013:6). These skills enhance the overall user experience when interacting with reference materials.

This research is pivotal in addressing contemporary challenges in information access and utilisation. As the digital landscape evolves, the role of

information literacy skills becomes increasingly vital in navigating the vast sea of reference materials. Understanding how these factors interplay can inform the design of more user-centric reference systems, ultimately enhancing the efficacy of information retrieval processes. The outcomes can contribute to the improvement of information systems, educational strategies, and user interfaces, fostering a more adept and informed society in the digital age.

### **Statement of the problem**

University Libraries offer a vast array of reference materials to support undergraduate students' academic research, yet these resources remain underutilized. This underutilization can hinder students' research capabilities, ultimately impacting their academic success and professional growth (Khalid et al., 2021; Chigbu et al., 2023). Several factors contribute to this issue, including students' lack of awareness about available resources, lack of information literacy skills to effectively use and evaluate these materials, and the challenges posed by the evolving nature of information technology.

Thus, the issue that has to be solved in this study is how to improve information literacy skills to assist students in higher education institutions use reference materials more effectively. Potential solutions and strategies to improve information literacy skills can be developed by identifying and understanding the obstacles and challenges that students face when accessing and using reference materials. This will ultimately result in more efficient use of reference materials in higher education.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study was to examine the information literacy skills as determinants of use of reference materials in university libraries in Kwara state. The specific objectives were to:

1. ascertain the information literacy skills possessed by library users in universities in Kwara State.
2. identify the reference materials used by library users in university in Kwara state.
3. examine the purpose of use of reference resources by library users in universities in Kwara State.
4. identify the factors affecting students in accessing and utilising reference materials in university libraries in Kwara State.

## **Literature review**

The proliferation of information in various formats in the 20th century gave an impetus to the birth of the concept of information literacy (kanori , 2019). Information Literacy (IL) skills are directly linked with lifelong learning, critical thinking, and learning to learn concepts of education. Information Literacy skills are the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyse, and use information. The twenty-first century has been named the information era, owing to the explosion of information and the information resources. One cannot achieve study targets without practical information literacy skills. In other words, information literacy skills empower the people with the critical skills which will help them to become independent lifelong learners. These skills will enable people to apply their knowledge from the familiar environment to the unfamiliar.

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning. According to California University Information literacy fact sheet, (2000); an information literate individual is able to: Determine the extent of information needed, Access the needed information effectively and efficiently, Evaluate information and its sources critically, Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base, Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose, Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally.

Information literacy skills are essential skills for college students to master for success academically and for professional and personal success (Campbell, 2008; Cooper, 2019). Due to the conventional structure of information literacy instruction, student motivation is lacking (Bell, 2007; Latham, Gross, & Julien, 2019). Mandatory one-shot instruction sessions initiated by the instructor, where students and librarians only meet once, are an excellent example of instructional practices that do not enhance motivation and can be detrimental to students. The lack of repeated contact with students to build information literacy skills is problematic as one-shot instruction is often the typical way students receive information literacy instruction from librarians at the collegiate level. Information literacy instruction (ILI) requires a shift in focus from teaching specific information resources to a set of critical thinking skills involving the use of information. It is difficult to determine if the instruction is effective on a broad or

more localized scale without measuring information literacy instruction. Researchers are concerned with the efficacy of information literacy instruction in a general sense and in regard to more specialized practices, such as online instruction (Shaffer, 2011). Further, without an understanding of students' skill levels, it can be challenging to ensure that the instructor is meeting students' needs.

Reference sources are the goldmine of the reference section; their value is inestimable to users who need them to obtain relevant information Abdullahi and Manze (2014). They are very important tools needed for proper functioning of academic libraries. Libraries acquire information resources, organise the resources for easy retrieval and dissemination of information. The provision of reference services seeks to fulfil the greater mission of the library by helping users to convincingly access and use information through reference sources in the library. Analysing, interpreting and presenting information for use in any environment is an essential skill users of information resources should possess if they are to be relevant. Hence, being information literate is fundamental to the use of information resources in the knowledge society (Braaksma, 2004). Information literacy skills brought effective use of library resources to develop "critical thinking skills. In a study by Issa, Amusan and Dauda (2009) the study revealed that the University of Ilorin library has provisions for students to use e-library resources which most students are aware of but do not use because they lack the skills. They have not been formally taught the use of e-resources that are information literacy skills.

Onifade and Sowole (2011) conducted a study on the use of reference sources by undergraduates, the study revealed that encyclopaedias and dictionaries are mostly used by students. Elmer (2009) opined that reference sources such as dictionaries, encyclopaedia, almanac, atlases, are research tools that can help in writing paper and project. Ogbuiyi (2015) examined a study on availability and use of reference sources and services in Babcock University Library. The study revealed that reference sources are highly available, accessible and adequate, except yearbooks, bibliographies and biographies that are not available, accessible and adequate. Ogunniyi, Efosa and Sheyi (2013) studied the use of reference sources by students in Adeyemi College of Education. The study found out that the majority of library users have a good understanding of what reference sources are and that encyclopaedias and dictionaries have higher rates of usage than other reference sources in the library. The scholars also assert that

patrons use such reference sources for their assignment and research work. Razaq and Olaleye (2017) conducted a study on availability and use of reference sources and services. The study revealed that the majority of the respondents indicate that reference sources are highly available, accessible and adequate, except geographical sources and biographical sources that are not available, accessible and adequate.

Abdulgani et al., (2016) undertaken to determine usage patterns and hurdles in use of the information resources and library services in a Medical College. The results of the study were that the main purpose of students visiting the library was reference purpose (78.6%). Most of the respondents were not satisfied with library facilities and services. Mahwasane & Mudzielwana, (2016) surveyed the various challenges faced by students in accessing information in the library. The findings of the study reveal that there are challenges such as lack of skills on how to retrieve information, insufficient user education, lack of computer knowledge and lack of information communication technology (ICT) in accessing information in the library.

## **Methodology**

The researcher adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study is 77,500 students of the three selected universities. The simple random sampling under the category of the probability sampling approach was utilised. The sample size under simple random sampling was calculated using slovin's formula. Slovin's formula is used to determine the sample size for simple random sampling. A total number of 398 were sampled for this study. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data was gathered personally by the researcher by administering copies of the questionnaire to the respondent and retrieving them back immediately. Data was analysed using Statistical Products and Service Solution (SPSS).

## **Result and Discussion**

**Research Question One: What are the information literacy skills possessed by library users in universities in Kwara State?**

**Table 4.1: Mean and standard deviation of Information literacy skills possessed by library users**

SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
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Information organization and management	173 43.5%	173 43.5%	35 8.7%	17 4.3%	3.26	0.79
Evaluating information sources	156 39.2%	225 56.5%	17 4.3%	0 0%	3.35	0.56
Information searching	156 39.2%	190 47.7%	17 4.3%	35 8.8%	3.17	0.87
Digital literacy	156 39.2%	225 56.5%	0 0%	17 4.3%	3.31	0.69
Research Strategies	104 26.1%	225 56.5%	17 4.3%	52 13.1%	2.96	0.83
Citation and referencing	104 26.1%	173 43.5%	52 13.1%	69 17.3%	2.78	1.02
Ethical Use of Information	138 34.7%	139 34.9%	52 13.1%	69 17.3%	2.87	1.08
Identifying information needs	139 35%	190 47.7%	0 0%	69 17.3%	3.00	1.02
<b>Overall mean/SD</b>					<b>3.09</b>	<b>0.86</b>

**Decision level: agreed at mean score >3.0, disagree at mean score <3.0**

Table 4.1 revealed the descriptive analysis of research questions for information literacy skills possessed by library users, the table shows the means response to each of the variable used to answer the question. The table revealed that the respondent agreed that; library users possessed information literacy skills on information organization and management (Mean=3.26, SD=0.79), evaluating information sources (Mean=3.35, SD=0.56), information searching (Mean=3.17, SD=0.87), Digital literacy (Mean=3.31, SD=0.69) and identifying information needs (Mean=3.00, SD=1.02). Moreover they disagree that; library users possess information literacy skills on research strategies (Mean=2.96, SD=0.83), citation and Referencing (Mean=2.78, SD=1.02) and ethical use of information (Mean=2.87, SD=1.08).

This imply that students could organize information and evaluate information sources. However, they could not carry out research strategically, cite and reference information sources properly. This finding is in line with that of Anunobi and Udem (2015) who measured the literacy skills of students based on the resources they could retrieve and use.

**Research Question Two: What are the reference materials used by library users in university libraries in Kwara State?**

**Table 4.2 Mean and standard deviation of Reference materials used by library users**

	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
Dictionary	312 78.4%	86 21.6%	0 0%	0 0%	3.78	0.41
Encyclopedia	174 43.7%	190 47.7%	17 4.3%	17 4.3%	3.31	0.75
Directory	68 17.1%	191 48%	35 8.8%	104 26.1%	2.56	1.05
Bibliography	121 30.4%	173 43.5%	35 8.8%	69 17.3	2.87	1.04
Yearbook	138 34.7%	173 43.5%	35 8.7%	52 13.1%	3.00	0.98
Map	104 26.1	138 34.7	52 13.1	104 26.1	2.61	1.13
Gazetteer	18 4.5%	173 43.5%	69 17.3	138 34.7%	2.18	0.97
Handbook	191 48%	138 34.7%	0 0%	69 17.3%	3.13	1.08
Atlas	105	103	69	121	2.48	1.18

	26.4%	25.9%	17.3%	30.4%		
<b>Overall mean/SD</b>					<b>2.88</b>	<b>0.95</b>

**Decision level: agreed at mean score >3.0, disagree at mean score <3.0**

Table 4.2 revealed that majority of the respondent disagree with all the item at overall (mean=2.88, SD=0.95), the following are disagree to by the respondent; library user use Directory (mean=2.56, SD=1.05), Bibliography (mean=2.87, SD=1.04), Map (mean=2.61, SD=1.13), Gazetteer (mean=2.18, SD=0.97), and Atlas (mean=2.48, SD=1.18). Moreover, they agreed with the following; library users use Dictionary (mean=3.78, SD=0.41), Encyclopedia (mean=3.31, SD=0.75) and Handbook (mean=3.13, SD=1.08). However, the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that library users use Yearbook (mean=3.00, SD=0.98).

The reference materials that the students consulted include dictionary, encyclopedia and handbook. However, they never consulted directories, bibliographies and maps.

**Research Question Three: What is the purpose of use of reference resources by library users of universities in Kwara State?.**

**Table 4.3 Mean and standard deviation of Purpose of use of Reference materials by library users**

	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
For assignment preparation	260 65.3%	121 30.4%	0 0%	17 4.3%	3.57	0.71
For Research and Study	312 78.4%	86 21.6%	0 0%	0 0%	3.78	0.41
For Essay Writing	145 36.4%	156 39.2%	17 4.3%	80 20.1%	2.92	1.10
For Exam Preparation	208 52.3%	190 47.7%	0 0%	0 0%	3.52	0.50
For Verification of Information	208	190	0	0	3.52	0.50

	52.3%	47.7%	0%	0%		
For Language Learning	170	86	52	90	2.84	1.20
	42.7%	21.6	13.1%	22.6%		
For Quick answers and fact-checking	200	190	4	4	3.47	0.57
	50.3%	47.7%	1.0%	1.0%		
For Career guidance and professional development	225	156	0%	17	3.48	0.71
	56.5%	39.2%	0%	4.3%		
<b>Overall mean/SD</b>					<b>3.39</b>	<b>0.72</b>

**Decision level: agreed at mean score >3.0, disagree at mean score <3.0**

Table 4.3 revealed that the respondent agreed that library users use Reference materials for the following; For assignment preparation (mean=3.57, SD=0.71), For research and study (mean=3.78, SD=0.41), For exam preparation (mean=3.52, SD=0.50), For verification of information (mean=3.52, SD=0.50), For quick answer and fact checking (mean=3.47, SD=0.57), and For career guidance and professional development (mean=3.48, SD=0.71). However, the respondent disagrees that library users use Reference materials For essay writing (mean=2.92, SD=1.10), and For language learning (mean=2.84, SD=1.20).

This indicates that research and study was the major purpose of using reference resources by the students. However, they also used reference resources for fact checking, preparation for examination and verification of information.

**4.2.4 Research Question Four: Which of the following would you agree with as factors affecting your use of reference materials at university libraries in Kwara State?**

**Table 4.5 Mean and Standard deviation of Factors affecting use of Reference materials**

S/N	Factors	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
1	Availability and Accessibility of reference materials.	277	121	0	0	3.69	0.46
		69.6%	30.4%	0%	0%		

2	Promotion and Awareness of Reference materials.	277 69.6%	104 26.1%	17 4.3%	0 0%	3.65	0.56
3	Adequate Staff Support.	156 39.2%	138 34.7%	35 8.8%	69 17.3%	2.96	1.08
4	User Education and Training on use of reference materials.	156 39.2%	208 52.3%	20 5.0%	14 3.5%	3.27	0.71
5	Technological Infrastructure.	188 47.2%	138 34.7%	17 4.3%	55 13.8%	3.15	1.02
6	Organisation and Cataloging of Reference materials.	225 56.5%	173 43.5%	0 0%	0 0%	3.57	0.50
7	Funding and Acquisition Policies.	121 30.4%	173 43.5%	35 8.8%	69 17.3%	2.87	1.04

**Overall mean/SD= 3.31/0.77**

### **Decision level: agreed at mean score >3.0, disagree at mean score <3.0**

Table 4.5 revealed that the respondent agreed that the factor affecting their use of Reference materials in the library are the following; availability and accessibility of Reference materials ( $\bar{x}$ =3.69, SD=0.46), Promotion and awareness of Reference materials ( $\bar{x}$ =3.65, SD=0.56), User education and training on use of reference materials ( $\bar{x}$ =3.27, SD=0.71), Technological infrastructure ( $\bar{x}$ =3.15, SD=1.02), and Organisation and cataloguing of reference materials ( $\bar{x}$ =3.57, SD=0.50). Moreover, the respondent disagrees with Adequate staff support ( $\bar{x}$ =2.96, SD=1.08) and Funding and Acquisition policies ( $\bar{x}$ =2.87, SD=1.04) as factors influencing their use of Reference materials in the library.

Factors such as availability and accessibility, promotion and awareness and training on the use of reference resources affected the use of reference sources by students. This is in line with the submission of Ajani et.al(2021), who submitted that awareness and lack of accessibility were some of the factors that affected the use of reference sources.

### **Conclusion**

The study shows that the library users of University of Ilorin, Kwara State University and Al-Hikmah University Ilorin are of diverse demographic profiles in terms of gender, age differences, and knowledge of the information literacy skills as determinants of use of reference materials. The findings from the respondents' data analysis on the research questions reveal the information literacy skills of library users as determinants of use of reference materials in university libraries in Kwara state.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings from this study, the researcher has made the following recommendations:

1. The researcher recommends that library management should offer workshops or tutorials to enhance library users' skills in research strategies, citation, and referencing, as well as ethical use of information.
2. Librarians should encourage library users to explore a wider range of reference materials beyond dictionaries, encyclopaedias, handbooks, and yearbooks.
3. Library management ensures that reference materials are easily accessible and available in various formats (print, digital, online) to accommodate different learning styles and needs.
4. Library management should collaborate with faculty members to integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum or offer standalone courses to equip library users with the skills to effectively use reference materials.

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