

INTER-SECTORAL APPROACH TO INFORMATION LITERACY IN UGANDA

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Abstract

The paper presents the background to Information Literacy, defines what Information Literacy (IL) is, and discusses its importance to individuals, Business and Citizenship. It further discusses the inter-sectoral approach to IL right from the informal sector to the formal sectors of Higher Education and challenges faced in the process of becoming information literate. Conclusions are drawn highlighting the basic types of literacy that Uganda needs in the 21st Century. Additionally, recommendations of what should be done in order to make Ugandan citizens information literate in order to reap the benefits of an information literate society are presented.

Introduction

While addressing oneself to Information literacy, there are several assumptions to be handled. Firstly, that Information is the “oxygen” for development whether individual, national, or global (Kigongo-Bukenya, 2004:22). Secondly, there is so much proliferation of information and that information seekers are simply overwhelmed. Thirdly, that in order to cope, the individual must have the skills to identify, retrieve, utilize and evaluate that information. Fourthly, that there is a need for inter-sectoral approach if there is to be a holistic development of the community (Districts, regions and centers).

Background to Information Literacy

In a print society, literacy has been the ability to read and write, and through this one could become a fully participating member of a democratic society. The need to acquire this literacy led to the development of a compulsory public education system and a network of local municipal public libraries. This has been synonymous with formal education as a "front-end" investment from the kindergarten to year 12, and then some form of higher education or vocational training. In the global knowledge society and its technological infrastructure of computers and multimedia society, education is life-long and literacy is being extended beyond reading print and writing with a pen (Bruce, 1999:33-47).

Bruce (ibid) lists the three broad types of Literacy as:

- Basic literacy: reading and writing everyday texts
- Critical Literacy: being able to evaluate the value of and motivation for various texts
- Technical or specialist literacy: being able to use words, concepts or communication methods that relate to specific cultures or environments, e.g. the workplace

From her broad categories, it is seen that they encompass the new emerging technologies that have formed a new era of Information what is termed as the Information Age. And, increasingly, in the new Information Age, the ability to use computers and mobile phones is becoming a 'basic' requirement for communication and for accessing opportunities and information.

Doyle (1992) observes that, Information is no longer a scarce resource. We are awash in information and every day its volume grows exponentially. The critical new skill is not just how to get information relevant to a task, but how to do this within time constraints, and how to extract meaning from all the "noise" of competing voices. The knowledge economy creates value by going up the hierarchy of knowledge. This demands a progression from simple cognition to meta-cognition to epistemic cognition, and finally to wisdom cognition.

Information Literacy (IL) Defined

Isbell and Carol (1993: 325-327) define IL within the context of lifelong learning and the broad information continuum, which ranges from data to knowledge to wisdom, and say that Information Literacy competency focuses on five broad abilities: to recognize the need for information; to know how to access information; to understand how to evaluate information; to know how to synthesize information; to be able to communicate information.

From the above definition, therefore, an information literate person recognizes the different levels, types and formats of information and their appropriate uses.

Doyle (1992) describes an information literate person as one who: recognizes that accurate and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision making; recognizes the need for information; formulates questions based on information needs; identifies potential sources of information; develops successful search strategies; accesses sources of information including computer-based and other technologies;

evaluates information; organizes information for practical application; integrates new information into an existing body of knowledge; uses information in critical thinking and problem solving.

There are many definitions of what Information Literacy is but what stands out is that of Bawden (2001:218) which states that

"Information literacy is the adoption of appropriate information behaviour to identify, through whatever channel or medium, information well fitted to information needs, leading to wise and ethical use of information in society."

The Importance of Information Literacy to Individuals, Business, and Citizenship

Ugandans, have traditionally valued quality of life and the pursuit of happiness. However, these goals are increasingly becoming difficult to achieve because of the complexities of life in today's Information and Technology dependent society. People who lack the ability to keep informed of such activities, for example, often miss the cultural and educational opportunities available in an average community, and lives of information illiterates are more likely than others to be narrowly focused on second-hand experiences of life through television if at all this exposure exists. On the other hand, life is more interesting when one knows what is going on, what opportunities exist, and where alternatives to current practices can be discovered.

On a daily basis, problems are more difficult to solve when people lack access to meaningful information vital to good decision-making. Patricia (1987: 44-52) observes that many people are vulnerable to poorly informed people or opportunists when selecting nursing care for a parent or facing a major expense such as purchasing, financing, or insuring a new home or car. Other information-dependent decisions can affect one's entire lifetime. She asks, for example, what information do young people have available to them when they consider which college to attend or whether to become sexually active? Even in areas where one can achieve an expertise, constantly changing and expanding information bases necessitate an ongoing struggle for individuals to keep up-to-date and in control of their daily information environment as well as with information from other fields, which can affect the outcomes of their decisions.

In an attempt to reduce information to easily manageable segments, most people have become dependent on others for their information. Information prepackaging in schools and through broadcast and print news media, in fact, encourages people to accept the opinions of others without

much thought, which am sure at times is dangerous especially if the consumed information is incorrect

According to Patricia (1987: 44-52), when opinions are biased, negative, or inadequate for the needs at hand, many people are left helpless to improve the situation confronting them. Imagine, for example, a family, which is being evicted by a landlord who claims s/he is within his/her legal rights. Usually they will have to accept the landlord's "expert" opinion, because they do not know how to seek information to confirm or disprove his/her claim.

Information literacy, therefore, is a means of personal empowerment. It allows people to verify or refute expert opinion and to become independent seekers of truth. It provides them with the ability to build their own arguments and to experience the excitement of the search for knowledge. It not only prepares them for lifelong learning but, by experiencing the excitement of their own successful quests for knowledge, it also creates in young people the motivation for pursuing learning throughout their lives. Moreover, the process of searching and interacting with the ideas and values of their own and others' cultures deepens people's capacities to understand and position themselves within larger communities of time and place. By drawing on the arts, history, and literature of previous generations, individuals and communities can affirm the best in their cultures and determine future goals.

It is unfortunate that the very people who most need the empowerment inherent in being information literate are the least likely to have learning experiences, which will promote these abilities. Majority in Uganda are at-risk, school going students, illiterate adults, people with vernacular as a second language, and economically disadvantaged people, those working in the countryside of Uganda are among those most likely to lack access to the information that can improve their situations. Most are not even aware of the potential help that is available to them. Take examples of Patrick Kasulu¹ of the Property Masters how he took advantage of people's ignorance about land and land titles, 'Sugar daddies' who take advantage of the young school going children (below the age of 18) by giving them money and infect them with HIV-AIDs. Libraries, which provide the best access point to information for most Ugandan citizens, are left untapped by those who most need help to improve their quality of life.

¹ Patrick Kasulu was a Ugandan property agent who defrauded his clients of their properties and money. His clients lacked information about the ownership and existence of the properties being sold.

In this Age, there is too much information, which needs to be filtered for use. From the same view, Shenk (1987) coined a term Data Smog that refers to the idea that too much information, which can create a barrier in our lives. Data smog is commonly referred to as Information overload. This data smog is produced by the amount of information, the speed at which it comes to us from all directions, the need to make fast decisions, and the feeling of anxiety that we are making decisions without having all the information that is available or that we need.

In such a situation, Information literacy is the solution. It allows us to cope by giving us the skills to know when we need information and where to locate it effectively and efficiently. It includes the technological skills needed to use the modern library as a gateway to information. It enables us to analyze and evaluate the information we find, thus giving us confidence in using that information to make a decision or create a product.

Having discussed Information Literacy background and its importance to individuals, business, and citizenship, I now embark on to define the term inter-sectoral approach and its approach to information literacy.

Inter-Sectoral Approach to ILL

The working definition of the inter-sectoral approach throughout the discussion is dealing with a task (in this case Information Literacy) that is affecting a group of individuals at either local/village, regional or at the national level.

IL and the Informal Sector/ the Rural Community

In Uganda, Information skills and knowledge transfer takes place through both formal and informal channels. The oral tradition is still strong in rural areas for information transition. Skills and knowledge are transferred by “know-how”, “show-how” and “do how” processes. Community Libraries have been established to meet limited information requirements of the newly literate, as well as school and college students. A series of new initiatives have been taken like the establishment of literacy centers/multipurpose community Tele-centres in Kasangati, Nabweru, Nakasongola, Mukono and Buwama. The Uganda’s Digital Mobile, which started making books for each of the dozen schools in Mukono District in May 2004, is an integrated community library system where information needs of community people and community schools are partly met.

In agreement, The American Library Association (2002) reiterates that,

"Libraries are places for people of all ages and abilities who want to read and learn." "Libraries...are permanent institutions in local communities that have many resources to support adult learning--for instance, accessible facilities, extensive referral systems and collections of books, technology, and access to a large group of potential tutors, including retirees and casual library users."

To emphasize the need and the roles of multi-purpose community Information centers in all rural areas in Uganda, Kigongo-Bukenya (2004:21) observes that literacy is still a problem particularly in rural areas where the illiteracy rate is about 45%. The cause of illiteracy is basically poverty because most people cannot afford to send their children to school. He adds; the situation is compounded by cultural attitude towards girl child as a source of richness to the family, therefore, the boy child should have priority to education. He, however, appreciates the positive developments by the Universal Primary Education (UPE), which according to him, will reduce illiteracy.

Further, he strongly feels that illiteracy is one of the scourges terrorizing majority of the rural people and keeps them in utter darkness of ignorance, poverty and disease. He cites one incident whereby being illiterate to him, is ranked position one amongst societal problems. He laments,

"... My great grand mother was illiterate. She would not count so if given wrong change she would not know, till late! She would wait for a bus to Ssakabusolo but would not know the correct bus because she could not read the destination displayed in the display window! May be she had romance letter from her husband based in Kampala but she would have to take it to a friend to read for her! She was getting fewer yields from her land. She used to suffer from malaria, dysentery or typhoid. Yet all the information was in pamphlets safely tucked in the house!" (Kigongo-Bukenya, 2004: 24)

In an attempt to help her citizens by curbing down on the Information Illiteracy problem, Mukono district has set up a Telecentre. However, this cannot serve all her population. As a solution to this urgent pressing need, Nakifuma village in found in Mukono District for example, has a community radio for information support service. Through this community radio, important information on Agriculture, health and market opportunities are broadcast. There are more than five community radio stations in Mukono District operating and meeting the needs of the listeners. And recently a village phone has been put in place for which users have to pay for its services.

IL in the Higher Education Sector

Library based information use by students in higher education has gradually increased due to various requirements of meeting course/curriculum assignments and research work to prepare Theses and Dissertations to meet partial requirements for the different levels of awards be it Diplomas, Degrees, Masters and Ph Ds. Librarians have been encouraged to familiarize students with the system of searching for information. Some initiatives have been taken to promote the concept of Information Literacy at higher levels of Education, for example in the Uganda Christian University Mukono, IL is a taught, compulsory and examined course done by all year one students at the University. In Makerere University, attempts have been made by the Main Library staff to conduct end user programmes. However, it appears that no systematic study has been carried out to determine the level and effectiveness of these information literacy programmes among students and staff in these Universities.

Nirmala (2003:3) from Nepal University with a similar view like the Ugandan Universities says that their students were oriented and trained on how to use information, how to prepare village/ district development profiles. She adds, with the introduction of Ph D programmes, special courses are offered under research methodology to orient students on library use, information search, survey methods and information analysis work. To meet specific information needs trained librarians, documentalists, and information specialists have been posted in four research centers to promote information literacy among researchers and also meet their specific needs. I wish Uganda could emulate this wonderful arrangement in improving upon the IL skills of her students who are her tomorrows' leaders, who will be making decisions that will affect all her citizens.

IL and Health Sector

According to the American Medical Association –AMA (1999), Health Literacy is the ability to understand, evaluate, and act on oral, written, and visual health information to mitigate risk and live healthier lives. It adds, Health Literacy is more than the ability to read health information. Health literacy encompasses understanding the health care system, having enough information to make informed decisions and to advocate for yourself and your community, and ultimately leads to improved health and quality of life. Dary (1996) notes that, studies estimate that almost half of American adults do not have the skills to meet their needs for health care information. The Health Education and Adult Literacy (2000), observes

that the Health & Literacy Special Collection is a Web-based resource for adult educators and health educators who are trying to bring clear and easy-to-read health information to low literate populations. It contains health curricula for literacy or classes, links to health information in plain English and languages other than English, and information about health literacy.

One would imagine that the Americans do not experience such problems in their health sector because they are a developed nation. However, this does not seem to be the situation.

Having seen that health information illiteracy also affects the giants- the Americans; the health status in Northern Uganda is discussed to have a good comparison between the developed and developing nations.

The Health Status in the Northern Uganda

The 1995 Burden of Disease Study in Uganda (which used mortality data only) found that 75% of life years lost to premature death are due to ten preventable diseases. The following accounted for 60% of the burden: perinatal and maternal related conditions (20.4%), malaria (15.4%), acute lower respiratory infections (10.5%), AIDS (9.1%) and diarrhea (8.4%). There is significant regional variation. HIV/AIDS, and TB rates are major concerns. HIV/AIDS is the leading specific cause of death in adults followed by TB and malaria.

From its findings, the 1995 Burden of Disease Study discovered that the majority of displaced persons live in open places without shelter and blankets, with increased vulnerability and exposure to risk factors for Respiratory Tract Infection and malaria, especially during the rainy seasons. During this season, pregnant women have limited access to qualified assistance for delivery. Of the total displaced population approximately 12.4% (124,000) are children under five, about 69% (686,000) persons comprise the sexually active group and an estimated 2.4% (24,000) are pregnant women.

Water provisions are not adequate and per capita daily usage of water is far less than the minimum recommended 20 litres. In most areas water source per population ratio is over 1,500 persons per source of water compared with the standard of 1 source per 200 persons. The lack of availability of potable water causes increase rates of water born diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, cholera, hepatitis and typhoid.

Malnutrition is also on the rise, because rebels loot and burn food of the affected population who lack secure and adequate land to grow their own food. Recent assessments in the IDP camps of Gulu and Kitgum reveal under-five global malnutrition rate of 31.6% in Anaka camp (Gulu) and 12.5 % in Agoro camp (Kitgum). There are currently eleven Therapeutic Feeding Centres (TFCs) in Northern Uganda and these have, on average, doubled their intake during the last 12 months. There is a clear need to increase the number of TFCs, especially in the IDP camps. At the moment, all TFCs are in hospitals but additional TFCs will have to be established in health centres to allow out-patient treatment of severely malnourished children, while ensuring that mothers who cannot leave their homes can still access TFCs. With overcrowding turning out to be a growing problem, there is also an urgent need to take pressure off existing TFCs. One way of taking off the pressure to the existing TFCs is by educating the mothers who visit these clinics how to feed properly their children and also encourage them to educate fellow mothers how to feed their children such that they do not all have to visit the clinics for the information which can be passed to them by their peers.

Decentralization in Uganda is part of the national policy, but is still in its early stages. Therefore, there are issues like ownership of the programmes, planning cycles and accountability, which still need to be improved upon. The health care delivery system in the areas of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Katakwi, Apac, Lira, Kaberamaido, and Soroti has continued to break down with the closure of many peripheral health units and the migration of health workers to safer areas. Access to the affected districts is a problem and the health workers in the affected district have inadequate information skills in emergency health care provision. In-addition, these health services are dependant upon humanitarian foreign assistance (drugs and other supplies).

According to the 1995 Burden of Disease Study, it was observed that although data from the health information system in the affected district, may not be very accurate, the available data show that the highest incidence of diseases is caused by poor sanitation. For example, Gulu district with a reporting rate of 46% in the months of February 2003, recorded 1,389 cases of dysentery compared with Ssembabule and Ntungamo districts with 100% reporting rates recorded 17 and 25 cases of dysentery, respectively during the same time.

The background information status in the Northern Uganda, though attributed to the constant war, one could feel it is also as a result of being victims of information illiteracy especially in cases where diseases could be treated using the basic primary care. In other parts of the country that

are not affected by wars, illiteracy is also a serious problem-affecting women mostly in this sector who are the care takers of the family. Many cannot read the prescriptions or directions as prescribed by the health personnel. From observations made, many either give over dosage to family or under dosage, which is in itself dangerous.

From the same line of thought, Whitsed (2003: 57-60) notes that, Information literacy has been a live issue for health care professionals for a while, because of the increasing concern with evidence-based practice, and increasing use of problem-based learning at medical schools. She adds,

“...I must say that I find it reassuring that my local doctor seems willing to look things up, and consult with other doctors in some cases (rather than pretend he knows everything). I would see this as evidence of him being able to recognize an information need and choose an appropriate source to answer it”

IL and the Information Technology Sector

In today's world literacy and lifelong learning are becoming increasingly important. The globalization of markets and explosion of technology creates a need for developing a highly literate, skilled, trained and versatile labour force. The Information Technology (IT) sector is at the very forefront of the economy, creating enormous employment opportunities and driving national economic prosperity. Increasingly academic, professional and employer-led education and training initiatives strive to facilitate the acquisition of suitable skills that meet industry challenges.

There is a need, however, for greater sector-wide awareness and acceptance of the relevance of literacy skill development within the sector, or what in IT terms is better recognized as knowledge agility. There could be little understanding in some quarters that literacy constitutes just the acquisition of rudimentary reading, writing and counting skills.

Scholars have clearly demonstrated that literacy is complex. It involves many levels of proficiency and constitutes a commitment to lifelong learning, not only for industry, but also for society at large. When speaking of literacy today, the minimal threshold of competency is that for “digital literacy”, and not even “computer literacy” or simple “basic literacy”. The Ugandan government has produced an ICT policy which necessitates ICT to be part of the school and college curriculum.

Information Literacy (IL) and Small Business

IL is becoming more important in business because the nature of business is changing from the self-contained business to the globally connected enterprise. Large multi-national corporations have long been involved in the global market place, but now small business as well. The Internet has made it possible for the small business to have global reach. This new global networked environment demands increased information literacy (Bruce, 1999: 33).

The need for increased information literacy is magnified for employees of small business because small or medium sized businesses typically do not have the resources to compartmentalize the information gathering and use functions, nor do they have the resources to construct the infrastructure necessary to access and use the information. So the need for information literacy in small and medium sized enterprises is arguably higher for most employees than in larger corporations or organizations.

Bruce (1999:33-47) asserts that the conventional definition of Information literacy is the ability to know when information is needed and then having the skill to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively use the information. Therefore, in the modern business world, even for very small businesses, the needs in this regard are very complicated. It is often difficult to know when information is needed, or what information is needed. Even if the need can be ascertained, it is difficult to find the information and to use it effectively. For example, in many cases having Information can cause the business to grow, but that is not always obvious in advance. In small businesses, situations arise when information is needed quickly or perhaps an order comes in from a country where you have never sold before. To fill the order, it is essential to know the customs regulations and shipping options that must be used. Business opportunities often require marketing materials to be translated into other languages. In some countries, it is important to know cultural mores before venturing into the market. In Uganda for example, one cannot do business without a license from Uganda Revenue Authority (URA). But one wonders, how many people are knowledgeable about it! Yet once URA discovers that a trader is operating without a clearance, whether ignorantly or deliberate, one pays heavily because it is always said ignorance is no excuse. To those who violate it, it becomes a serious offense. But all these require the effective gathering and processing of information.

Information Literacy and e-commerce

E-commerce has been the name applied to conducting business on the Internet. Rosenberg (2002) defines e-commerce as buying and selling products, whether to individuals or the business, by using the Internet. She adds; e-commerce is doing business in a networked environment and this is the environment that most businesses, large and small, are finding themselves in.

For buyers, the world is a new market place. It is possible to find the lowest cost product with new ease. This necessitates the purchasing agent to certainly be information literate. S/he has to know how to find information on sources of product. Ugandans have also involved themselves in e-commerce most especially with the buying of cars through the Internet, which to them they think it is cheaper as compared to buying it locally at home from a colleague and so many other businesses have been transacted over the net.

Information Literacy in the New Economy

Information Literacy is seen by some to be tightly bound to libraries and their patrons, but in the context of small businesses, Information Literacy takes on a much broader meaning. The Business and Internet Survey (1999:17) looks at it (Information Literacy –IL) as the skills needed to find the best price for raw materials used in manufacturing and as often the same skills to do research in a new scientific discovery. It cautions: Information literacy is not to be confused with computer literacy although it bears a close affinity since so much reference information is available on the Internet using the computer. Certainly, employees of small businesses need to be somewhat computer literate, but sophisticated computer literacy can be confined to those who support the computing function of the organization. Information literacy on the other hand must be part of the skill set of almost every employee who works with information in a small business.

This new environment where business now find them-selves requiring employees who are information literate. Businesses now even need employees who are information literate in several languages because more and more businesses are developing Websites in several languages. This means that the employee of the new global small businesses must understand the value of information and must be able to acquire and use the information.

Information Literacy and the Informal economy

The 88th Session in Uganda of the International Labour Conference (June 2000) adopted several conclusions on human resources development. It underscored two points relevant for the informal economy: that education and training are major instruments to improve socio-economic conditions and prevent social exclusion; and that training in the informal sector should aim at improving not only enterprise performance but also workers' employability and transform survival activities into decent work.

The development of skills and knowledge is a major instrument for promoting decent work in the informal economy. Better, less work-intensive and safer technologies can raise productivity and incomes, reduce work drudgery and occupational risks to health and safety, and improve products. New skills and knowledge can open doors to more economically and socially rewarding jobs. Basic life skills, such as numeracy and literacy, problem solving and management, communication and negotiation skills, improve one's confidence and capacity to explore and try new income-earning opportunities.

Information Literacy and the Family Sector

Throughout history, the family has been the primary source for learning. Before the advent of schools, parents, older siblings, grandparents, and/or other relatives taught children at home. With the introduction of formal schooling, the teaching of values, cultural practices, and skills such as cooking, sewing, farming, and trapping continued to originate in the home. Auerbach (1989) expresses her feelings by saying that; "Today, in spite of the vast public and private educational systems, some parents are choosing to teach their children at home, confident in their belief that teaching in the context of family is the best way to ensure the learning they desire" (Auerbach, 1989: 165- 185)

Bhola (1996) argues that, because the family exists in a network of community, its members are continually communicating, negotiating, and otherwise interacting with schools and business institutions in the workplace, within the context of their cultural and community orientations. Therefore, the social aspect of these relationships suggests that the development of programs and curriculum must focus on the family unit as a whole, building upon the cultural and knowledge capital of the entire family, and acknowledging gender and age power relationships within the family.

Teaching literacy within the context of the family and in ways that are meaningful to family members is an approach described by Auerbach (1989), who contends that the cultural and social practices of a family are key considerations in the development of family literacy programs. Auerbach's "socio-contextual model" is congruent with the contextual teaching and learning approach to knowledge development. This approach is based on the proposition that students learn best when the learning is meaningful to them and situated in the context of their social environments. This model acknowledges that there are family-relevant, as well as school-relevant, ways of bringing literacy into the home. It acknowledges the positive contributions of family members and takes into account the influence those cultural values and practices have on literacy development.

Drawing an example from the Ganda family whereby the Kiganda culture necessitated children in a home especially at night to sit near the fire place and they were taught through stories, proverbs, songs and idioms how to count, treat certain disease, discipline in society, how to be polite in case they wanted to talk about someone who is around but didn't want him/her to know and others.

Information Literacy and the Adult Sector

Auerbach (1989:165-185) observes that, illiteracy is a barrier to information, participation and well-being. Illiteracy rates are highest in Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and South-Central Asia, with women significantly more likely to be illiterate than men. The greatest differential is in Northern Africa, where twice as many women as men are illiterate (40 percent for women, 20 percent for men).

Additionally, people who are unable to read not only have fewer opportunities, but their children suffer the burden of ignorance. When parents are trapped by their own lack of education, they are unable to provide strong stimulating environments that set the stage for the healthy social and emotional development of their children. Educating women is one of the wisest investments a society can make.

This situation fits very well with the English adage that goes "Train a woman, a nation is trained" Maybe the illiteracy rates for women should be changed to read for men!

When discussing the literacy programmes for Africa at the community level, Auerbach listed number of issues that their Adult Literacy programs focus on and are hereby listed:

- Providing literacy and numeracy opportunities for adults and out-of-school youth. At community centers or at home, groups gather during times that are convenient to daily work schedules to learn skills that will benefit them and their children.
- Developing or adapting materials that are culturally appropriate and convey relevant information on health, hygiene, nutrition, parenting and economic opportunities. In this way, parents become literate through gaining information crucial to improving the status of their families.
- An integrated and intergenerational approach to literacy that creates a foundation for personal growth, family strengthening and community development. What the parents know, they can teach, providing new opportunities for their children and community members.

Information Literacy and the Education Sector

Breivik (1998) captured the essence of the changes required to educational systems in order to realize the potential of information literacy education for life long learning. Her argument centers around the need to move away from the dominant paradigm of prepackaging information for students in the form of textbooks, lectures and even artificially constrained multimedia resources to facilitating active learning using real world information resources. Such learning processes, she concludes would necessarily involve the information processes, practices and experiences described as information literacy.

The effects of prepackaging of information are most obvious in the school and academic settings. Students, for example, receive predigested information from lectures and textbooks, and little in their environment fosters active thinking or problem solving. What problem solving does occur is (often) within artificially constructed and limited information environments... Such exercise bears little resemblance to problem solving in the real world where multiple information sources such as online databases, videotapes, government documents, and journals.

Education needs a new model of learning that is to say, learning that is based on the information resources of the real world and learning that is active and integrated, not passive and fragmented.

... what is called for is not a new information studies curriculum, but a restructuring of the learning process. Textbooks, workbooks and lectures must yield to a learning process based on information resources available for learning and problem solving throughout people's life time (Brevik, 1998:127-128)..

In East Africa for example, efforts have been made by the Aga Khan Education services to impart information literacy skills to all students right from pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary levels. They insist on learner centred approach of education, set up modern libraries with qualified staff who impart information retrieval skills.

Having discussed IL in a number of sectors, there is a need to look at the challenges of IL.

Challenges

Information Literacy in Rural Areas

The rapid changes in the communication systems have brought new challenges and opportunities. A series of consultations have taken place to ensure continuity and change. However, the following questions are being debated upon

- a) How to establish a link between the community library/information centre and the Tele-centre.
- b) How to prepare human resources to meet new requirements of community library cum Telecentre.
- c) What changes are required in the curriculum to meet the changing needs of information professionals?
- d) How to introduce an information literacy program to the formal education system?
- e) How to introduce Information literacy at the community level where a majority of community members are still illiterate and acquire information through interpersonal communication?

The Use of the Internet

The use of the Internet at a majority of libraries, documentation and research centers is still limited. At times this is associated with lack of skills, poor connectivity or users still prefer to use the traditional informational resources. Therefore, majority users do not access information on the Web. However, the availability of information in CD-ROM etc is gradually increasing.

Reading Materials

Books are rare. When available, their costs are unaffordable for most people. The book trade is not economical for any but the wealthy. Homes generally have few books. This could partly be because they are not bought and secondly because people lack the skills to read them. Classrooms are

often bare of books and schools with well-used general libraries are generally rare. Even schools with adequate sets of class readers are hard to find. Parents, teachers in general do not know the roles they can play in promoting reading (Maseko, 2001:1-2)

Women's Unique Challenge

In every country of the world, many women have less access to education and economic resources than men do. Moreover, they face both overt and subtle discrimination in the workplace, at home, and in other areas of society. They bear a disproportionate burden of caring for families and must overcome the added barriers of lack of transportation, lack of childcare, and violence against women. Yet despite these inequities, women struggle hard to maintain the health and welfare of their families, to develop their talents, and to work for a safe environment for themselves, their children, and their neighbors.

Accessing ICT Infrastructure

With the advent of the Information age, ICTs are mainly in the urban areas with those who can afford to pay for them. These people with the ability to pay are the ones who even have the skills to use them hence causing a gap between those with Information and those without.

Conclusion

The call for more attention to information literacy comes at a time when many other learning deficiencies are being expressed by educators, business leaders, and parents. Many workers, for example, appear unprepared to deal effectively with the challenges of high-tech equipment. There exists a need for better thinkers, problem solvers, and inquirers. There are calls for computer literacy, civic literacy, global literacy, and cultural literacy. Because we have been hit by a tidal wave of information, what used to suffice as literacy no longer suffices; what used to count, as effective knowledge no longer meets our needs; what used to pass, as a good education no longer is adequate.

The one common ingredient in all of these concerns is an awareness of the rapidly changing requirements for a productive, healthy, and satisfying life. To respond effectively to an ever-changing environment, people need more than just a knowledge base, they also need techniques for exploring it, connecting it to other knowledge bases, and making practical use of it. In other words, the landscape upon which we used to stand has been

transformed, and we are being forced to establish a new foundation called information literacy.

Recommendations

To reap the benefits accrued from accessing information, I recommend the following to Uganda:

Information Organization and role

There is a need to reconsider the ways in which we as librarians have organized information for access, and define information's role in our lives, at home in the community, and in the work place.

A need to develop responsible and better library citizen/ users

There is a need to develop in each citizen a sense of his or her responsibility to acquire knowledge and deepen insight through better use of information and related technologies; to instill a love of learning, a thrill in searching, and a joy in discovering; and to teach young and old alike how to know when they have an information need and how to gather, synthesize, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the information around them. All of these abilities are equally important for the enhancement of life experiences and for business pursuits.

Schools/Colleges/ Communities to pay attention to the potential roles of Libraries/community Information centres

Colleges, schools, and businesses should pay special attention to the potential role of their libraries or information centers/Multipurpose community Centres. These should be central, not peripheral; organizational redesigns should seek to empower students and adults through new kinds of access to information and new ways of creating, discovering, and sharing it.

Related research to Information should be undertaken

There is a need for research and demonstration projects related to information and its user needs to be undertaken. To date, remarkably little research has been done to understand how information can be more effectively managed to meet educational and societal objectives or to explore how information management skills impact on overall school and academic performance. What research does exist appears primarily in

library literature, which is seldom read by educators or state decision makers.

For future efforts to be successful, a national research agenda should be developed and implemented. The numbers of issues needing to be addressed are significant and should include the following:

- What are the social effects of reading?
- With electronic media eclipsing reading for many people, what will be the new place of the printed word?
- How do the characteristics of information resources (format, length, age) affect their usefulness?
- How does the use of information vary by discipline? 0 How does access to information impact on the effectiveness of citizen action groups?
- How do information management skills affect student performance and retention?
- What role can information management skills play in the economic and social advancement of minorities?

Government to ensure conducive climate for becoming Information Literate

The Uganda National Council for Higher Education, and Academic Governing Boards in both Public and Private sectors should be responsible to ensure that a climate conducive to students' becoming information literate exists in their states and on their campuses. Of importance are two complementary issues: the development of an information literate citizenry and the move from textbook and lecture style learning to resource-based learning. The latter is, in fact, the means to the former as well as to producing lifelong, independent, and self-directed learners.

Teachers as facilitators should be living examples to others

To encourage the development of teachers who are facilitators of learning, the following recommendations are made to schools of teacher education. Those responsible for in-service teacher training should also evaluate current capabilities of teaching professionals and incorporate the following recommendations into their programs as needed:

- i. New knowledge from cognitive research on thinking skills should be incorporated into pedagogical skills development.
- ii. Integral to all programs should be instruction in managing the classroom, individualizing instruction, setting problems, questioning,

promoting cooperative learning-all of which should rely on case studies and information resources of the entire school and community.

- iii. Instruction within the disciplines needs to emphasize a problem-solving approach and the development of a sophisticated level of information management skills appropriate to the individual disciplines.
- iv. School library media specialists need to view the instructional goals of their schools as an integral part of their own concern and responsibilities and should actively contribute toward the ongoing professional development of teachers and principals. They should be members of curriculum and instructional teams and provide leadership in integrating appropriate information and educational technologies into school programming.
- v. Exit requirements from teacher education programs should include each candidate's ability to use selected databases, networks, reference materials, administrative and instructional software packages, and new forms of learning technologies.
- vi. A portion of the practicum or teaching experience of beginning teachers should be spent with library media specialists. These opportunities should be based in the school library media center to promote an understanding of resources available in both that facility and other community libraries and to emphasize the concepts and skills necessary to become a learning facilitator.
- vii. Cooperative, or supervising, teachers who can demonstrate their commitment to thinking skills instruction and information literacy should be matched with student teachers, and teachers who see themselves as learning facilitators should be relied upon to serve as role models. Student teachers should also have the opportunity to observe and practice with a variety of models for the teaching of critical thinking.

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