



Enhancing Information Literacy in Public Universities through Policy Frameworks

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ABSTRACT

Information literacy is evolving as a basic human right in the digital world, which promotes the social inclusion of all nations. The study sought to explore the role policies play in the delivery of information literacy in public university libraries. Using a semi-structured interview, the study sought to elicit the views of librarians in Ghana's top-most universities on their knowledge about instructional services and availability of policy frameworks that guide the delivery of information literacy in academic libraries. It was revealed that different models of information literacy exist in academic libraries but librarians lacked a definite policy framework to prosecute the information literacy agenda. The study fills the gap in available literature on the role policy plays in information literacy, especially in developing countries. Universities and other higher educational institutions will find the results of this study useful in considering policies to guide the delivery of information literacy in their libraries.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of information literacy skills in society is critical to lifelong learning. Today, the consequences of reaching adulthood with limited information literacy skills are becoming increasingly severe. Individuals who are unprepared to participate in information-rich society are at an increasing disadvantage. This means that it is crucial to integrate information literacy skills education into basic and higher education effectively if students were to be full participants in tomorrow's workforce. Library users, especially students, need to achieve a level of information literacy that will allow them to find, access and use information to succeed in school, workplace, and in their personal lives (Fauziah & Lestari, 2018; Pangestika, 2018; Purwanti, Putra, & Hawa., 2018).

Instruction in information literacy could be given in many and varied forms. The overarching aim is to equip students and researchers with skills needed to enhance the quality of research and expand career opportunities in the information economy. It can vary from search strategies to locating and accessing relevant information, use of the Boolean logic operators, skills to identify the legal and ethical issues relating to the use of information, and knowledge of citation and referencing, thus acknowledging other people's work (Dewi, 2018; Rohmatin, 2014; Sumartini, 2016). Above all, information literacy is evolving as a basic human right in the digital world, which promotes the social inclusion of all nations. It is therefore imperative to research into what constitutes information literacy instruction in Ghanaian universities and further to this, the policies that guide instructions.

Information literacy training equips students and researchers with knowledge and skills to identify, retrieve, evaluate, ethically use and communicate information from various information resources. Librarians and other academics in the educational institutions of various countries have introduced information literacy programmes intended to impart the needed skills that would enable students to become effective and efficient information users. However, in many African countries, information literacy interventions have not yet been seriously considered or implemented (Oyewo & Asiyebi, 2020). In their study on review of factors influencing integration of information literacy education in Nigerian universities, the major factor militating against promoting higher levels of information literacy is the lack of concerted efforts by academic libraries in the pursuit of information literacy programmes (Shuaib et al., 2020). Reasons given for this on the library's part are lack of training, funding bottlenecks and disruption in the academic calendar, as well as lack of support and policy direction from parent institutions.

A policy may be defined as written guidelines for actions and decisions of the library. It is a governing principle formally adopted by a library's academic board. A library's policy should be consistent with its mission. Written policies improve communication with the public, give the librarian clear direction from the board and provide consistency among board members, staff and the public (Tshuma & Chigada 2018). Policy plays a critical role in a technologically driven and media-saturated world. Citizens need competencies to effectively engage with media and other information providers, including those on the internet. Media and Information Literacy (MIL) policy and strategy enhance the creation of knowledge-driven, inclusive, pluralistic, democratic, and open societies (Abu-Fadil, 2018; Grizzle & Singh, 2016; Oyewo & Asiyebi, 2020). Policy and strategy are crucial for the survival of modern governance and global citizenship in the digital world.

University libraries are perceived to be mainly providing instructions in areas such as library tours during orientation sessions; introductory information skills; advanced search skills; research skills; and referencing styles (Öncül, 2021; Mackey & Jacobson, 2011). Their

study revealed that delivery of information literacy methods in university libraries in the UK and the US are both face-to-face (in library training rooms) and online, unlike in Nigeria and other parts of Africa where it is mainly face-to-face. Policy guidelines are therefore crucial in this regard.

Without library policy and strategy, disparities are likely to increase between those who have and those who do not have access to information (Baro & Seimode, 2013). Further disparities will emerge between those who are able and those who are unable to analyse and critically evaluate and apply information and media content for decision-making. New media and information technologies offer greater opportunities for new types of citizens' engagement. It promotes freedom and eradication of inequalities, and also gives rise to issues of safety, security and privacy. They further create a tension between the need to empower or to protect citizens.

Scientific information management policies and information literacy schemes in Greek higher education institutions and libraries (Capsopoulos et al., 2014; Martzoukou et al., 2020). The study found that the availability of policies for information literacy was critical for the progress of the library. Policies shape and direct library staff to use the right programmes and skills to organize information literacy programmes for patrons (Baro & Seimode, 2013). The absence of information literacy policies could greatly contribute to ineffective library services irrespective of location and the type of library.

Based on the explanation above, the main goals of this study are to determine the form of instructional services librarians offer users through Information Literacy and to find out the role policies play in the delivery of Information Literacy.

2. METHODS

This study adopted the qualitative research approach. It focused on the librarians of Kwame Nkrumah University Science and Technology (KNUST) and University of Ghana (UG) library systems. The rationale behind this focus was the fact that the two universities are the oldest and their main campuses contain the largest number of librarians. In addition, proximity and convenience were factors for the researchers in the selection of these public universities. Another reason for the choice of this selection was that the researchers wanted to do in-depth research about the problem and so libraries, which offer instructional services to their clients, were fit to be part of the study.

The researchers employed the interview as the research instrument. A semi-structured interview guide was used to solicit information from the respondents. The interview sought to elicit the views of interviewees on their knowledge of instructional services and availability of policy frameworks that guide the delivery of Information literacy.

The researchers conducted the interview personally in all cases at the various libraries during working hours. Some interviewees had their interview guide sent to them by email ahead of the interviews that were conducted by telephone. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Themes and patterns were developed from the data to make the analysis easier.

An interview lasted 25 minutes on the average. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed into Microsoft Word before the analysis. The interviews followed a guide with the intention of not deviating from the core objectives of the study. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity of interviewees, the researchers identified and represented the interviewees from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology as 'KNUST 1', 'KNUST 2', 'KNUST 3', etc. while interviewees from University of Ghana were referred to as 'UG 1', 'UG 2', 'UG 3', etc.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were fourteen (14) males; five (5) of them were interviewees from KNUST library system and nine (9) from UG library system. Three (3) participants were females from KNUST while the remaining five (5) females were from UG. Therefore, more males participated in the study than females.

Two (2) interviewees held the position of Deputy Librarian, both of them from KNUST. Two participants also held the position of Principal Librarian from the University of Ghana. Four (4) were Senior Assistant Librarians - two (2) each from KNUST and UG. Thirteen interviewees were in the position of Assistant Librarian. Only one (1) Junior Assistant Librarian participated in the study. It can, therefore, be deduced that respondents were experienced enough to give responses on services and policy formulations.

Provision of instructional services

Respondents from the participating university libraries were asked to indicate the instructional services on offer.

Listing some of the instructional services provided by librarians, the majority of respondents indicated training on how to use library resources such as OPAC, institutional repository (IR), E-books and academic databases. In support of this assertion, UG 5 explicitly said:

"We provide services such as; Video instructions on how to access the OPAC,, guide to the research process, how to access institutional repository (IR), training on how to use e-books and academic databases"

Similarly, UG 2 added that:

"So for instance in a particular session we may take users through the e-portal and then step by step on how to download e-books, how long can someone download a book, etc...,we may also take students through how they can access the academic databases...citing and referencing software, We also teach the students how they can access library resources via the off-campus platform... and how to access our chat system (chat with the librarian)..., also we teach them how to use our article request (A.R) past questions platforms etc..."

UG 10 corroborated:

"We give instructions on how to access the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), training on how to access academic databases, referencing and plagiarism software (Turnitin)."

In comparing the responses from UG and KNUST, most responses were similar except for a few such as screen display instructions, flyers and brochures containing instructions which were given to the users during library tours. As evidence, KNUST 3 said:

"Instructions are put on the library's website and other social media handles, flyers ... brochures containing instructions are given to the user during library tours...and others such as instructions on literature search and accessing relevant databases based on research need; techniques in developing search queries, accessing online resources, and accessing subject-specific resources."

Policy for teaching information literacy

Information was solicited concerning the existence of policy frameworks in academic libraries to enhance the teaching of information literacy. Some Interviewees from the University of Ghana (UG 8, UG 10, UG 7, and UG 11) were of the view that they did not have any formal policy in that regard, though a few were not sure.

UG 4 stated that:

“No... not really... it is not stated explicitly as a policy anywhere that we have information literacy policy...”

One interviewee (UG1) supported the response of UG 4 by saying that some colleges like the Health Sciences are regulated by policies, which capture information literacy but the library as a whole does not have a specific policy.

UG 14 said:

“I can say there is no policy guiding the teaching of information literacy. Because the only place this is done formally is the College of Health Sciences. The course outline is guided by the University of Ghana Medical School where we offer the course, but as a library, I don’t think we have a policy for teaching information literacy...”

Another interviewee (UG 2) also revealed that they were in the process of developing a policy for the library but it is not ready for use.

Again, UG 13 emphasized:

“For a policy, I’ll say it’s unwritten because I’ve not seen a physical copy, however, we have a coordinator who is in charge of the teaching of medical literacy and other literacies in the library. The coordinator is mandated to liaise with the students and come out with schedules of topics to be treated by librarians...”

However, UG 5 held a different view:

“We had a team to look into the designing of policy but as of now I don’t know whether it’s ready. I may have to check. Yes, we have a policy for teaching medical literacy...”

From the KNUST Library, all the eight (8) interviewees made it clear that the teaching of information literacy is captured in their library’s strategic plan but it is not explicitly written as a policy.

KNUST 2 indicated:

“There are statements in the library’s strategic plan that have got to do with information literacy for students and staff, you can’t call it a policy”

Contribution of policies to information literacy programmes

Participants were further asked to share their views on the contribution of policies to the success of Information literacy delivery where they were available. The responses were those of mixed reactions.

UG 11 stated:

“I can say that though not formal, policy has contributed to the betterment of the programme because it guides the librarian as to what resources to provide to the clientele and also serves as an evaluation tool ...”

KNUST 3 asserted:

“For me policy has not got much influence...because sometimes in our system there may be one but things may not work...so for me, if it is there it only gives you weight...the most important thing is to catch the eye of the users...”

Another interviewee (UG 4) also opined that even though they do not have a well-structured policy for information literacy programmes, there are similar policies, which contribute enormously to shape the success of information literacy training.

UG 8 further opined:

“There are other policies, such as plagiarism policy, orientation policy, etc. but for information literacy, there’s none...however, we’re developing a policy for formalized information literacy courses to be compulsorily taken by students. I think policy helps because from our evaluation, the statistics show that there was a continuous rise in the use of our databases by our users. So yes, I can say that based on this assessment the Information literacy programmes are successful.”

Instructional services available to users

Both UG and KNUST libraries provide instructional services. These include video instructions on how to access the OPAC, Institutional Repository (IR), E-books, and academic databases. Others are guides to the research process, screen display of instructions on how to use other available library services. Alternatively, instructions are delivered on the library websites and other social media handles. Flyers and brochures containing instructions are given to the user during library tours among others.

Academic libraries provide instructional services in areas such as library tours/orientation, advanced search skills, research skills, and reference management (Mackey and Jacobson, 2011). It is further consistent with the works of Obasuyi & Fredrick (2015) and Oyewo & Asiyani (2020). It was revealed in their study that the library was unable to provide instructional programmes due to lack of concerted efforts by academic librarians (Alakpodia, 2010; Moonasar & Underwood, 2018; Obasuyi & Fredrick, 2015; Oyewo & Asiyani, 2020; Shuaib et al., 2020). Other factors that contributed to this unfortunate circumstance were inadequate funding, staffing, training, as well as disruptions in the academic calendar and lack of support from the parent institution.

It can be deduced that even where libraries are ready to provide instructional programmes to patrons, they are confronted with challenges and frustrations. The focus of service needs to be prioritized through the different variables of instruction. Competencies and information skills as well as information fluency will be obtained by patrons and the library staff themselves.

Information literacy policy

The study found that academic libraries in Ghana do not have explicit policies for information literacy programmes. Mentions of information literacy policy are rather captured in sections of other library policies and strategic plans. These captures, however, contribute tremendously towards the effectiveness and efficiency of the information literacy programmes. The findings are in tandem with the works of Kovalik, et al. (2010), Tshuma et al. (2018) and O’Brien & Russell (2012). From the analysis, it can further be deduced that academic libraries have recognized the need to have well-structured information literacy

policy, the reason they have planned to have some. Even in their current form where they appear as minute captures, the policies have contributed to the betterment of the programmes because they guide the librarian as to what resources to provide for the clientele, and they serve as evaluation tools. In effect, information literacy policy directs the focus of delivery, helping librarians to consider what is important for patrons. Though the policies are not well structured, they have helped to improve the teaching of information literacy thus accounting for a continuous rise in the use of databases by library users. Based on this revelation, Information literacy programmes in the universities are deemed to have been successful. These findings are also consistent with the works of Capsopoulos, et al. (2014) and Lumande, et al. (2014), which concluded that information literacy programmes were somewhat successful even with unstructured policies and they suggested that, in future, libraries should endeavour to develop explicit policies to shape the delivery of information literacy (Capsopoulos, et al., 2014; Lumande, et al., 2014).

Further, the findings are fairly in agreement with the works of Capsopoulos, et al. (2014) in a study that explored scientific information management policies and information literacy schemes in Greek higher education institutions and libraries (Capsopoulos, et al., 2014). Their findings brought to bear that the availability of policies for information literacy was critical for the progress of the library. The study findings are also in agreement with the result of the study by Baro & Seimode (2013) which revealed that policies shape and direct librarians to organize information literacy programmes for patrons. In effect, they help the library to organize a well-structured information literacy programme that has the propensity to attract new customers, maintain the interest of the existing, and win back the lost (Baro & Seimode, 2013).

The findings again confirm the works of Oyewo & Asiyebi (2020) where lack of policy direction resulted in the library's inability to achieve the desired goals of information literacy (Oyewo & Asiyebi, 2020). Similarly, in the case of Momanyi, et al. (2018), it was observed that due to scattered efforts emanating from lack of formalized information literacy policies, students were not able to master the information retrieval skills, as there was no central focus for the library (Momanyi, et al., 2018). And in the case of Baro, et al. (2013) the critical mitigating factors against the progress of the library included lack of information literacy policies. Others were lack of interest on the part of students, teachers, and management. In all these studies, the absence of information literacy policy greatly contributed to ineffective information literacy and subsequent poor library services (Baro, et al., 2013).

It is moreover, deduced from the findings of this study that values of an organization help managers and staff to prioritize services. Policies establish standards for services that can be understood by both users of the service and providers. Policies ensure equitable treatment for all, as it provides a framework for delivery of services. When policies have been adopted by a library's management in a formal process and are consistent, they are enforceable. Academic libraries should begin focusing on policies that positively impact information literacy because it is the foundation for information service delivery.

4. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that different forms of instructional services are employed by academic libraries in order to enhance information literacy of library users. Instructional services include library tours/orientation, advanced search skills, research skills, and reference management, etc. It was also revealed that these instructions are better delivered when they are supported by policies that dictate the focus of the delivery roles of librarians.

The paradox however is, while librarians are aware of the importance of information literacy and see it as a new role of enhancing access, policies to enable them integrate information literacy into the university's teaching and learning business continue to elude them. The earlier these are addressed the better for information literacy delivery.

It is recommended that academic libraries develop well-structured policies to guide the teaching of information literacy. Such policies will not only help libraries to achieve their strategic goals, but patrons will also be able to acquire skills that promote long-life learning. Further studies could focus on the teaching of information literacy by other types of libraries such as school, special and public libraries for their contributions and challenges.

5. AUTHOR'S NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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