# INFORMATION LITERACY AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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## ABSTRACT
*This paper is based on the experience gained from working in academic libraries in Nigeria and an examination of the literature on information skills of library users and information service providers. It discusses the concept of capacity building, information literacy and various challenges facing academic libraries. It highlights capacity building for the libraries as service providers and for the users of the libraries. It is posited that users of library facilities seek information in many more ways than the traditional manual search for books and journals. Inability to get or provide needed information is often a cause for anxiety. Library anxiety and library user anxiety is discussed as well as the role of capacity building, through Information Literacy programmes in reducing or eliminating the anxiety. The need for libraries to provide not only access to the materials, but also to equip library users with skills that will propel them to greater excellence in research is discussed. Recommendations on capacity building for library service providers and library users are also proffered.*

**KEYWORDS:** Academic libraries, Capacity Building, Information Literacy, Information Retrieval, Information use, Library Anxiety

## INTRODUCTION

Information literacy is a concept that has been much debated over the years by scholars. Many see it in different ways defining and categorising it in different modes. Information literacy research has brought up definitions like "Information literacy is the ability to recognize when information is needed and...[to] have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information,"(AASL, 1988) and "information literacy encompasses knowledge of one's information concerns and needs, and the ability to identify locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems on hand" (UNISIST, 2003). It is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the information world. Information literacy embraces all kinds of information: electronic, non-electronic and verbal, Longdale, Fleming and Leonard (2002). The learning of it is therefore a lifelong one. University libraries in Australia (public, school and tertiary) are concerned about information literacy for lifelong learning and are developing programs that will enable the community to integrate IT and information literacy skills into daily lives. Horn (2003).

Research has shown that information users often seek for information in libraries and through library databases without getting what they need. (Shoki and Oyelude, 2006; Yusuf and Iwu, 2010). This inability to get what is needed is often not as a result of the information being unavailable, but oftentimes because there is too much information, a situation described variously as 'information deluge' or 'information overload'. Many times, library databases bring up hundreds or thousands of materials when search terms are keyed in and the researcher is then confused as to where to start from and what information exactly to use.

### Information Literacy and Capacity Building

In the era of competitive research, the researcher patronizes libraries to retrieve accurate and current information in electronic resources for learning and research activities. The patronage however may depend on information retrieval skills of the researcher, the ease of use of the information provision tools experienced and the level of cooperation or connect between the researcher and the information service provider (the library and the library staff). It actually depends mostly on the information literacy skills possessed by the researcher. Without information literacy, people are condemned to lack of information, dependence upon others for

access to knowledge and information, and even to acute levels of information anxiety. Wurman (2001).  How does the researcher or library user acquire information literacy skills (ILS), how does the library impart these skills? What can be done to reduce or eliminate library anxiety for library users?

To attain information literacy it is necessary for one to remember to ask for assistance with an information need. The search for the information is what will bring the results. Librarians, as information professionals, are happy and poised to help with any questions library users may have. This desire to serve the user however may sometimes be hampered by lack of adequate skills to deliver excellent service. How can the necessary skills be acquired? What can be done to eliminate library anxiety for library staff or library information service providers? The purpose of this study is to determine the level of information literacy of library users and library information service providers in academic libraries, and highlight the importance of capacity building for both. The main objective is to identify and analyze information literacy programmes in academic libraries and see how the existing programmes can be improved to favor library users and library service providers in order to reduce or eliminate library anxiety in particular and address the larger problem of library disuse or under-utilization especially at the tertiary education level.

Capacity building (CB) in a broad development context implies a dynamic process which enables individuals and agencies to develop the critical social/technical capabilities to identify and analyze problems and proffer solutions to them. (Oni n.d.). Universities have distinguishing roles which are teaching, research, human resources development, storage and dissemination of knowledge and contribution to national, regional and international co-operation and understanding, that is, capacity building. (Oni, n.d).  Capacity building is a strategy that can be used in bringing about information literacy more effectively. The individual's capacity to imbibe knowledge being transferred in many ways is capitalized upon in this wise. A person able and willing can be mobilized to acquire different skills if the opportunity and the right motivation and enabling environment are provided.  In development parlance, capacity building encompasses all the skills required, and methods of bringing about a change for the better. Academic communities need to map out systematic ways of bringing about the desired literacy. User education programmes, computer literacy classes, exercises (mental and physical in terms of moving around the library) need to be conducted to bring about this state of enhanced capacity to use the library facilities and achieve maximum benefit. How are libraries in the academic communities faring in building capacity for their users and staff?

## LITERATURE REVIEW
### Information Retrieval in Academic Libraries
Fordjour, Badu and Adjei (2010), attributed the poor performance of students in various universities to students' inability to effectively retrieve information for academic work. The informational retrieval skills which the university students need include those skills "needed to navigate, select, evaluate and re-use information" and entails being able to handle the changing contents of computer and information sources and knowing where and how to look for the resources. Gui (2007).   A study of the users of Covenant University library in Nigeria by Yusuf and Iwu (2010), revealed that 88% of the students sampled visited the library to read for examination while most faculties visited the library to read journals, electronic or print and that students used the library OPAC more than faculty. Don (2006), noted that both undergraduates and faculty members in universities appeared to be confident about finding needed print materials and accessing electronic resources at their institutions' libraries, and that faculty used inter- library loans more than the undergraduates while they used computer resources more.

Many skills are needed for informal retrieval. Students for instance need to learn to operate the computer, that is, be computer literate and to understand how the information systems are organized by learning the basic skills such as use of keyboard, mouse, and disk management. For retrieval of information, it is necessary to learn the standard software (word processing, databases

and others) and network applications such as Internet, electronic mail and others. Students also need to have strategic skills for retrieving information from electronic resources. These strategic retrieval skills are defined by Gui (2007), as the ability to use computer and network sources as the means of achieving particular and general goals of improving one's position in society. These skills entail the ability to plan, create appropriate queries and search terms which would enable the students to retrieve information.

In automated libraries, the Online Public Access catalogue is a search tool whose use has to be learnt by the information user to be able to retrieve information. Chisenga (2006), opined that it is easy for library users to learn and use the OPAC from different library systems because the users only have to know how to use a Web browser if the OPAC is web-based. The issue of whether the information user is proficient in use of the information source is dependent on various factors. Some theories have been propounded in this wise. The Cognitive/Behavioural Theory on skills states that biases, memories and individual beliefs may influence the development of proficiency skills. The theory states further that behaviour can facilitate the gaining of knowledge in certain environments and some behaviour may offer a greater potential for the acquisition of knowledge. The acquisition of information literacy skills thus is an important part of the cognitive behavioural part of the individual.

**Information Provision and Library Anxiety**

Libraries strive to meet the information needs of their clientele, often trying to do this with the lean resources at their disposal. They use human and material resources to achieve this aim, but do not always succeed in this bid. The synergy between availability, access and adequate use is not exactly guaranteed hence dissatisfaction, anxiety, stress, work or research burnout for information user and provider sets in. Librarians and other service providers instrumental to making the library functional have a great role to play more so in the electronic age. Mason (2010), posits that librarians must be sympathetic and helpful to all students on the one hand and that on the other hand, students must be aware that librarians and faculty members are there to instruct and encourage their intellectual odyssey and should be seen as facilitators. Gbaje (2009), listed some duties expected of librarians or library information providers some of which are:

".... Teaching novices how to find resources, libraries can also teach specialists how to locate relevant resources outside their own disciplines and even within their own fields.

• Teaching critical evaluation skills, which include assessing the authenticity and quality of what is found and determine whether an identified document is worth downloading.

• Functioning as a bridge between system designers and users, by having sufficient credibility with programmers and by understanding users' needs, librarians can serve as the user's advocate with the system designer while also interpreting to the user what may or may not be technically feasible".

As facilitators, librarians should be flexible and adapt to the changing technologies themselves otherwise they will be unable to contribute their quota in the information delivery process. Many librarians have shown anxiety at not being able to cope with technology. Anxiety is a state of being uneasy with fear and desire about something doubtful. It generally brings about a state of confusion and insecurity. Students experience fear and unease when confronted with a school assignment that necessitates a trip to the library according to Donahue and Gamtso (20), citing librarian and researcher Constance Mellon's work in the 80s. Mellon is noted to have called the phenomenon "library anxiety," a condition akin to math or test phobia, with which many students were so overwhelmed by apprehension in the face of library research that they lost the ability to think rationally about the task at hand. Barret (2005), stated that undergraduates in general cope with considerable anxiety at the initial stages of their project development and they often have difficulty in framing questions and focusing their research questions. According to Battle (2004), library anxiety among international students begins with certain barriers that cause anxiety (i.e., language/communication barriers, adjusting to a new education/library system and general cultural adjustments).

The anxiety expressed by library users however is mostly more apparent than that experienced by the library information service providers. These users often complain to library staff, their colleagues, peers, lecturers and sometimes even visit their frustrations as graffiti on library walls, library toilet walls, and general notices on library notice boards or tables. This fact, gathered from experience working in the Women's Research and Documentation Centre Library (WORDOC) and the University of Ibadan Library system reveals that lots of work needs to be done to make library users and staff information literate. Oyelude and Fabunmi (2010), discovered that library users preferred the use of newer technologies to the traditional manual search for information but had problems of access, poor infrastructure and inadequate training in the use of the technologies in their information sourcing. Negative emotions including, ruminations, tension, fear and mental disorganization are expressed. Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1999). This often occurs when a student contemplates conducting research in a library and is due to any number of perceived inabilities about using the library. In order for students to become successful in their information seeking behavior this anxiety needs to be reduced. A model for coping with anxiety is hereunder developed.

**Developing a Model for Capacity Building in Libraries to eliminate Anxiety for Staff and Users**
It is here posited that the capacity of library users and information providers can be built through Information Literacy programs that will help both to eliminate anxiety and thus bring about user and information service provider satisfaction.

**Fig. 1. Model for Capacity Building through Information Literacy Programme**
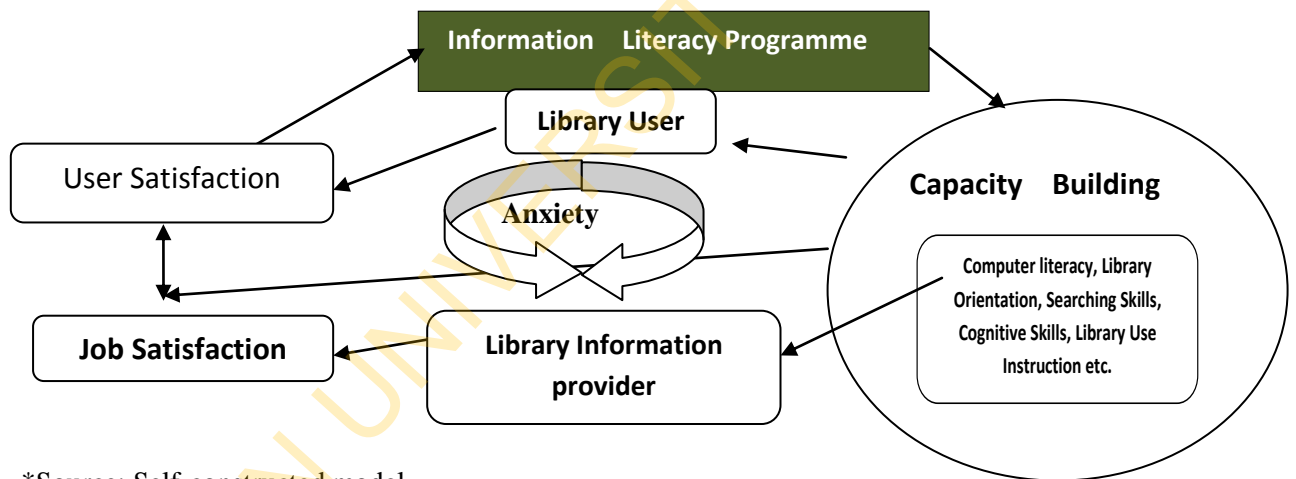


*Source: Self-constructed model.

**Challenges to Information Literacy Programmes**
Information Literacy Programmes have been set up in many Institutions successfully but in developing countries the challenges are many. The challenge of skilled personnel to do the teaching is a challenge faced. There are other pedagogical challenges of teaching information literacy which call for institution-wide approaches. In other words, the library cannot deal with the issues alone, the parent Institutions have to cooperate for the programme to succeed. For example, one problem often identified by librarians who are tasked with teaching information literacy is that most librarians do not come to their employment positions with teaching backgrounds, yet those formally charged with teaching (professors and lecturers) do not have a mandate to teach information literacy. Botha (2010). Another challenge is that of poor library facilities. Many academic libraries do not have the necessary infrastructure to run the library properly, not to talk of organising space, personnel and training facilities for staff and students.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**
To help library users in academic settings it is recommended that faculty give reading assignments that will require students to consult journals and other resources in the library, not

just for examination purposes and that the library organize a "library week" each semester to showcase the various resources available in the library and also organize a quarterly training for both faculty and students on the use of library materials and services. Martin (2001) described how social media was used to teach information literacy skills and the collaboration between faculty and librarians/technologists to implement social media use in a private college.

Software developers could be challenged to develop user friendly programmes in game form, to teach information literacy. The modules would be designed to simulate the search- research strategy bearing the library use instruction in mind. Thus at start, there would be a query, assignment or task, at each step of which the user takes decisions that could help until the goal is achieved. Also, pod-casts, of library use or library instruction need to be designed and broadcast periodically or archived for demand on request on the libraries' website' for easy reference.
Institution need to devote funds for Library Literacy programmes which will be run periodically for library users and for staff as the need arises. Newly employed library staff, and newly admitted students especially should be the focus.

Finally, the Capacity building efforts of the libraries should be well advertised and the achievements broadcast. Continuous evaluation of the Information Literacy Programme is mandatory as the constancy of change cannot be ignored. The satisfaction and contentment of the library users therein become the grand achievement of the library and above all, the lifelong learning of individuals is assured.

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