The Impact of Information Literacy Skills on the Performance of Past Students at their Workplaces: The Case of University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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Abstract

Purpose: The study focused on the impact of information literacy studied at the University of Cape Coast on the work people do at their workplaces. Specifically it points out how lecturers may be involved in developing the skills of students to enable them maximise the use of informational resources to meet the requirements of the work they do.

Methodology: The study embraced old students of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, and Head of ten Departments at where the majority of the respondents worked. Survey method was used for the study with questionnaires and interview as the instruments of data collection for the past students and Head of Departments of old students respectively.

Findings The study revealed that the benefits of information literacy are enormous; thus information literacy is a contributory factor to performance of workers and employability of job seekers. Employers are now embanking on numerous trainings to make employees information literates.

Implication: More need to be done by lecturers of the Information Literacy Skills Unit of the University of Cape Coast to make the course more transferrable

Originality: UNESCO's assertion that information literacy is a process for lifelong learning and an attribute of employability is a cause for concern, hence looking at how the transition from academic work to workplace calls for study.

Keywords: Human capital, information literacy, socio-economic development, knowledge, workplace

Introduction

Apart from University of Cape Coast, where the teaching of information literacy skills; formerly information retrieval started in the late 1980's as a compulsory subject (Afful-Arthur & Filson, 2015), some Ghanaian universities have just recognised the importance of students being information literate, hence have decided to integrate information literacy into their curriculum. The teaching of information literacy may be understood to be the body of knowledge, skills, competencies and understanding required by an individual to find information effectively and use it appropriately to meet the need that prompted its acquisition. In other words it is an intellectual framework for recognising, identifying and finding information. It also has to do with understanding, evaluating and using information appropriately and effectively (Thomas, 2004). Teaching of information literacy skills has become necessary because of the proliferation of information sources and its attendant consequences of information overload.

The environment is full of information of which some of these could be relevant or irrelevant; some may be current, reliable and authoritative or otherwise. The information literate person is able to identify the differences and therefore makes him or her on effective citizenry, and can positively affect the lives of others. One's ability to use information effectively and ethically is one of the hallmarks of someone who is information literate.

It must be noted that with the advent of the Internet, getting access to relevant and accurate information is now a big problem since there are a lot to select from. To make matters worse, information technology today has

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even made things more confusing than ever before. That is why employers are looking for those who can sieve the relevant, reliable and accurate information from the irrelevant ones (Dadzie, 2008).

Information literacy equips students for lifelong learning, because someone who is information literate has the ability to locate, retrieve, evaluate, and use information appropriately. Students of universities are considered to be people who should learn independently, hence teaching them how to seek for information will go a long way to enhance self-tuition. As noted by the Association of African Universities (AAU), the critical challenge confronting higher education institutions in Africa is to ensure quality and relevance of programmes and programme delivery, while making higher education more widely accessible.

Information literate person develops strong analytical, critical thinking and problem solving skills (Heichman, 2008). These characteristics of an information literate person make him or her relatively more adaptable, capable and valuable employee. They are prepared for independent exercises and programmes since such characteristics are inculcated in the students as they are being taught information literacy skills (Johnston & Webber 2003).   However, as noted by Lloyd, (2011) information literacy is more appropriately discussed within a framework of 'practice' rather than 'skills' and that its impact is not easily noted.

The goals of acquiring information literacy are noted as; communities enjoy a high quality of life because literates make good decisions based on sound information they get, workers are able to develop the skills and knowledge they need to work effectively, learners also develop the skills and competences they need to be appreciated at their work places, information centres are patronised by people of all caliber and people have the skills to search for information.

Human resources are considered to be a framework for the expansion of human capital within an organisation and an individual to achieve performance improvement must be of a great concern to the academic institutions. In other words, human resource development is the integrated use of training, organisation and career development effort to improve individuals, groups and organisations effectiveness. The universities have a role to play in lifelong learning and the teaching of information literacy in this era is one of the antidotes.

Can we then say that the teaching of information literacy should continue at work places as noted by Lave and

Wenger (2002). They argue that, in a community of practice, the curriculum is the daily round of tasks that has to be undertaken to sustain the community. Hence learning is best embedded in the environment where the task is performed, and the possibility of knowledge transfer either inwards or outwards is marginalised. Guile and Young (2002, 153) are however, of the view that people must learn to develop an ability to 'think beyond the immediate situation they find themselves in.

Since information literacy exists at different levels in different organisations and that some staff may forget the rudiments of the information literacy, a 'laddered' approach to information literacy skills training may be possible at the workplace (Crawford   & Irving 2009). 'Laddering' is a concept of information literacy frameworks, based on staff skills levels and task levels (Kirkton and Barham, 2005).

Rader (2005) believe people's ability to exhibit good characteristic of information literacy at their workplaces depends greatly on the pedagogical skills used by the educator or the librarian who taught the course; in view of this he thinks that in teaching information literacy lecturers should ensure the following: the teaching should be more interactive, diversify the learning style, handle information as a valuable commodity, keep current with the latest information technologies, base information literacy programmes on needs and include achieveable goals and measurable outcomes and work with employers of businesses amongst others.

It is sad to note that most industries, companies, departments amongst others in Africa and for that matter Ghana do not have libraries where staff can access information to update themselves.. Noticing the link between what is taught and what needs to be done to ensure smooth transition to the workplace calls for the provision of information literacy programmes that take care of employability needs of the learners (Costa, 2009).

Problem Statement

University education is characterised with the teaching of students how to learn independently, thus, it is where students learn how to learn so that they can supplement the lecture notes. It is expected that an information literate student should know how to identify, locate, access, evaluate and make effective use of information. This means that information literacy skills would enable people to make effective use of information sources (ALA 1989).

Despite the benefits of information literacy skills, certain group of students and scholars seem not to realise the impact of teaching information literacy skills due to the advent of the Internet. Others argue that the duration for the course is too short (Afful-Arthr & Filson, 2015). In the same vain, the development of workplace information literacy in the corporate setting also requires a recognition of how to embed these literacies.

Due to the above reasons some students do not approach the course with the seriousness it deserves; consequently most students go through the course without achieving the expected impact of information literacy.

Objective

The main objective of this study was to find out the performance of past students at their workplaces based on what they studied in information literacy skills some years ago. It also looked at how the teaching of this subject has equipped old students to be fit for socio-economic development. Thus, it dealt with the transition from school to the workplace as far as information literacy is concerned.

Methodology

The population of the study embraced old students of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, and heads of ten departments at where the majority of the respondents work. The research examined the alumni expectations from the broader perspective and sampled the views of the respondents on the impact of studying information literacy skills. The heads of the departments were interviewed, whilst past students completed a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics in the form of simple percentages, frequencies, scores, tables and fiqurers were analysed. Based on the findings, the authors made some recommendations.

Accidental random sampling was used to select four hundred and fifty past students of University of Cape Coast, representing 10% of registered alumni of the institution. The researchers decided to sample only 10% of the alumni because according to Gay (1987), 10% selection for a larger population is appropriate.

Responses from Past Students Respondents

Year of Completion

The response rate for the past students was 405 representing 90.0% of the past students selected for the

exercise. The past student respondents were asked to indicated when they completed their university education at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Table 1 indicates that 9.9% of the respondents completed between 1-5 years ago, 56.3 % completed between 6-10 years ago, 26.4% finished between 11-15 years ago, whilst the remaining 7.4% finished their undergraduate education at the University of Cape Coast over sixteen years ago.

Table 1: When did you Complete University of Cape Coast?

Years	Respondents (405) Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-5 years	40	9.9
6-10 years	228	56.3
11-15years	107	26.4
Over 16 years	30	7.4
Total	405	100

Source: field data 2016

Number of Years Past Student Respondents have been Working

The study sought to find out the number of years old students have been working. Table 2 revealed that 6.9% of alumni respondents had worked between 1-5 years, 48.1% started working 6-10 years ago, and 29.6% of the respondents have been working between 11-15 years ago. The remaining old student respondents, 15.2% had been working over sixteen years. The finding shows that some alumni were not employed immediately they completed their education.

**Table 2: Working Experience of Old Students of University of Cape Coast, Ghana**

Years	Respondents Frequency	Percentage Frequency (%)
1-5 years	28	6.9
6-10 years	195	48.1
11-15years	120	29.6
Over 16 years	62	15.3
Total	405	100

Source: field data 2016

Integration of library usage into the curriculum of the university

Apart from the teaching of information literacy as a course at tertiary institutions, respondents were asked to suggest other ways by which the usage of the library could be integrated into the curriculum of the universities. In Fig 1, the majority of the respondents suggested that the libraries should provide relevant resources needed for users of the library. The component of this percentage was that 55.7%.

In a decreasing order, other suggestions made by respondents were; library staff should promote library usage (30%), users of the library must take active part in the selection process (8%); provide online access to resources (7%), library should operate 24 hours (2%).
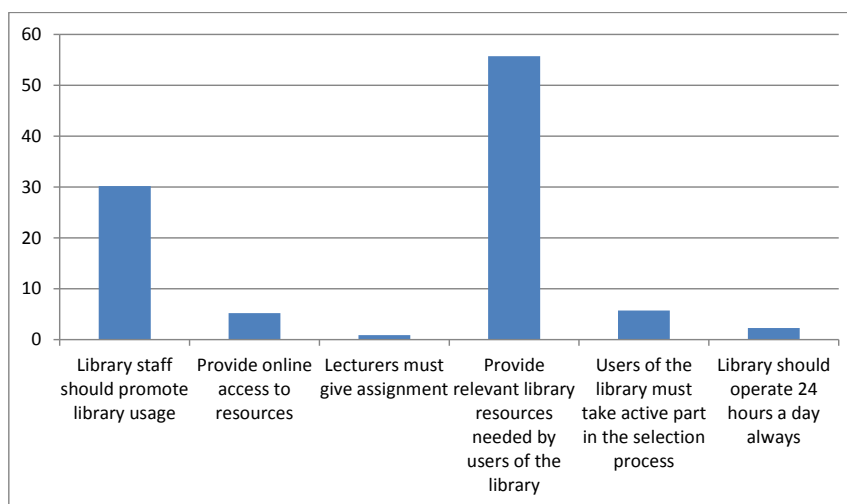

Fig 1: **How to integrate library into the curriculum**

Source: field data 2016

Why Information Literacy is Taught

It is believed that the teaching of information literacy has some benefits so respondents were asked to give their reasons for this assertion. In Figure 2; 24.7% of the respondents said that information literacy helps one develop the skills of lifelong learning. Secondly, 22.9%

of respondents indicated that, information literacy teaches one how resources are arranged in a library. Furthermore, 22.4% of them said that information literacy is about how to use the library effectively and finally, 30.0 % of the respondents indicated that information literacy helps one to use the library effectively.
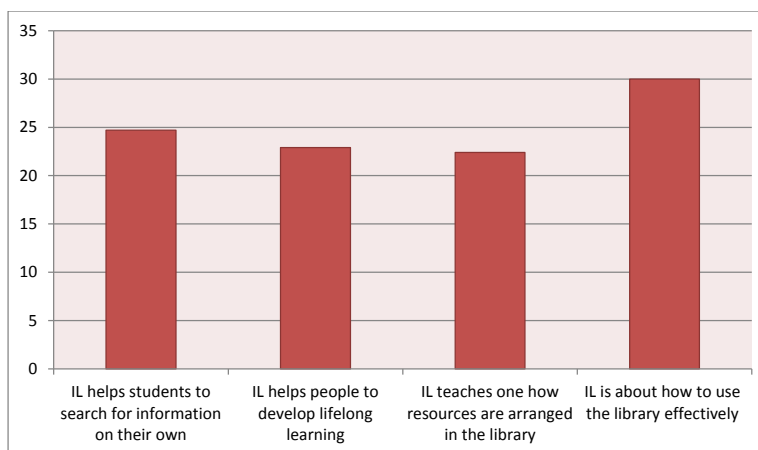
Figure 2: **Why do you Think that Information Literacy should be Taught?**

Source: field data 2016

Do you think that your Knowledge in Information Literacy Played a Role in your Appointment?

In an open- ended question, respondents were asked to sate if their training in information literacy skills paved the way for them to be employed, in response, 65.7 % of them thought that information literacy had an impact on their appointments whilst, the remaining 34.3% stated the following; "*I cannot tell; I do not know; I never thought of it; and How would I know.*

Awareness of Information Literacy Programmes at Workplace

This question sought to find out whether workers were aware of information literacy programmes organised at their workplaces. Ninety-two percent of both respondents (past students and head of Departments) noted that they were aware, whilst the remaining 8% said they were not aware. Those who stated that they were aware indicated the following in Table 3; as some of the programmes they go through.

Table 3: What are Some Information Literacy Skills Programmes Organised at your Workplace?

Aware of information literacy programmes at workplace	% Percentage	programmes
Aware	90%	Internet training Selective dissemination of information by the public relations officers Talks by head of departments on how staff could acquire Information on the work they do. Evaluation of information in books and non –book materials
Not aware	8%	

Source: field data 2016

Types of Technologies Used for Training

The researcher tried to find out the types of technologies used for training at workplaces. The respondents were given several options from which to tick as many responses found relevant. The results of their responses are shown in Table 4. The study revealed that a lot of workers have had hands on training in modern technologies which is one of the components of the information literacy curriculum. The usage of the Internet and its facilities as shown was very high (96.%), whilst the usage of the graphics was the lowest (39%).

Table 4: Types of Technologies Used and for Training

S/N	Types Technologies Used	Percentage (%)
1	Computer and its accessories	83%
2	Internet and its facilities	96%
3	Mobile /portable devices	52%
4	Video Conferencing	39%
5	Television	48%
6	Radio	57%
7	Projector	87%
8	Graphics	39%
9	Slide/PowerPoint Presentation facilities	91%
10	Social network	91%

Source: field data 2016

The Impact of Information Literacy on Performance at Work

As noted by Zurkowski (1974:6) "*people trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literates. They have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information solutions to their problems*" In view of this, old students of the University were asked to point out if the information literacy they have studied had any impact on the work they do. The majority of them 89.5% answered in the affirmative. In a follow up question the remaining 10.5 % who indicated that information literacy had no positive impact on the work they do were asked to explain why In response they claim that;

"*With the advent of the internet I could do better without information literacy skills*,

Workers who did not study information literacy skills are also efficient as we are, our performance cannot be based on information literacy skills course we studied.

How different are you from staff of other universities where information literacy was not taught?

Comparatively, in an open- ended question, respondents were asked to indicate how efficient they were from their colleague staff from other universities where Information Literacy Skills was not taught. About sixty percent of the respondents stated they were mere efficient than their colleagues staff. Their submission was buttressed with the following;

I know which information resources I should use to obtain the accurate information,

I can evaluate information accessed,

I know the ethical and the legal ways of using information,

I know that not all information on the net are accurate,

Interview with Head of Departments

Performance of University of Cape Coast Old Students at their work places

On the part of the Head of Departments, the response rate was 100%, but to avoid repetition of responses of Heads and past students, some of the information given by Head of Departments as in the case of; *the importance of information, why information literacy should be taught and information literacy programmes organised* (Table 3, 4) had already been captured.

The researchers sought to find out from Head of Departments whether University of Cape Coast past students really excel, the responses from Head of Departments (40%) where teaching was the major task performed stated that comparatively, Cape Coast past student perform better than products of other institutions, however, they were quick to add that there could be other contributory factors to their performance. Those interviewed from non educational intuitions (40%), also stated that University of Cape Coast past students were resourceful and hardworking, and some added that they performance was due to what they learnt at school.

Two Chief Executive Officers of some non-governmental organisations (20%) were also interviewed on the bases of the performance of their staff who were old students of the institution under study. Their responses were affirmative, however, like the earlier interviewees, they reaffirmed

that such performances were relative since other factors could contribute to their performances.

Usage of Technology

Departmental heads respondents were asked to point out the impact of the modern technology they use for training staff. Table 5 dully indicates the responses given by Head of Department as; it helps to make the workplace active; technological application makes the worker to explore; the emerging web technologies of this digital age can offer varieties of opportunities for training and research; enhances their creativity, innovativeness, collaboration, information sharing skills and teamwork in multidisciplinary perspectives rather than being independent workers. On the whole, the majority of them gave series of advantages hoping that if workers are information literates the level of productivity would increase.

Table 5: **The Uses/Benefits Derived from Use of Technologies at workplace**

S/N	Uses/benefits derived from Use of Technologies	Percentage
1	Ease of access to notes/presentation	70%
2	Ease of importing/exporting presentation	90%
3	Ease of updating of presentation	90%
4	Ease of retrieval of presentation	90%
5	Technologies bridges time and locations	100%
6	Ease of Playback	90%
7	Ease of Storage of presentation	90%
8	Ease of Security of presentation	90%
9	Ease of Review of presentation	90%
10	Ease of Duplication	80%
11	Ease of Adoption	70%
12	Ease of Adaption/Customisation	60%

Source: field data 2016

Discussions of Findings

On the issue of the number of years past students had been working, the study indicated that most of the respondents had enough working experience to point out the role that information literacy has played in the work they do. This assertion had been evident by a study conducted by Unal and Unal (2012) which posits that the number of years of one's experience contributes to his ability to ascertain issues dealing with performance.

On how the teaching of information literacy could be improved, respondents made six suggestions; four of which were directed to information professionals. Therefore as noted by Dadzie (2008), librarians have the custodial duties of collecting and providing access to information in different formats in a timely manner. Thus, it is the responsibility of the library staff to promote the library.

Assessing the reasons given by respondents as to why information literacy should be taught, one can infer that respondents had recognised the importance of information literacy. So as noted by Hosein (2006), when the University of West Indies St Augustine Campus recognised the importance of information literacy, they decided to produce a comprehensive programme in order that the goals of the parent institution would come into fruition. Similar institutions could adopt this strategy so that the transition from university education to workplace would be smooth.

The study also revealed that past students acknowledge the fact that information literacy had an impact on the work they do presently, this assertion has a link with what was noted by Crawford & Irving, (2012); that there is a link between information literacy and employability. However, those students (10.5 %) who claimed that the information literacy taught at school had no impact on the work they do at their workplaces may be in support of Herring (2011) who asserted that information literacy skills required at the workplace was different from the type of information literacy taught and that information literacy teachers "lack knowledge of these workplace information environments" Brage et al (2012), also buttressed this by asserting that although information literacy taught in universities is relevant to what students learn during the period of their studies that does not always translate into useful workplace skills.

On the question of how efficient staff are as a result of studying information literacy it can be noted that though the majority stated that information literacy skills enabled them to be efficient it can also be seen that most departments and workplaces have realized a need for the staff to be electronically skillful hence series of programmes were organised for staff to enhance their efficiency. As asserted by Chinery, (2001), in-service training enhances efficiency, however those who have already acquired the skills are always at advantage and that it is appropriate for staff to upgrade themselves academically.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the benefits of information literacy are enormous; thus information literacy is a contributory factor to performance of workers and employability of job seekers. Employers are now embanking on numerous trainings to make employees information literates. Library and information professionals may successfully contribute to the development of these practices in a meaningful way by embedding the information needs of the workplace into their pedagogical skills in order to make the teaching of information literacy more job-oriented.

Recommendations

1. It is suggested that interventions such as work experience or youth internship could address some of the issues on preparing young people for the workplace information setting.

2. Librarians should develop partnerships with workplace communities so as to understand the role that information plays in the knowledge economy;

3. Ghanaian universities should develop a new language that is relevant to workplace communities.

4. The pedagogical skills adopted by lecturers of information literacy should be more interactive and learning outcome based.

5. Periodically, resource persons from different organisations should be invited to give talks on their information needs.

6. The duration for the study of information literacy skills should be extended to cover three years.

7. Special libraries should be established at all workplaces since information is an ingredient for development.

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