

INFORMATION LITERACY MODELS IN ACTION
– MISSION IMMENSE

I. Introduction

As information literacy (IL) is a process for fostering independent learning, it lays solid foundations for the goals of the higher education institutions. This paper describes the information literacy learning models of two universities: the University of Helsinki, Finland (HU) and the University of Namibia (UNAM). The paper starts by briefly presenting the information literacy models commonly applied in the higher education institutions and which we consider the most relevant in this context. In the main part of the article we introduce the University of Helsinki “Pick’n Learn” Information Literacy Learning Menu and the University of Namibia Information Literacy work. The paper discusses how the particular models or policies were developed in the two universities and what kind of challenges were encountered in the practical work. The paper concludes with a discussion of how the practical models chosen in HU and UNAM relate to the existing information literacy definitions.

2. Background

There are many definitions for information literacy and the information literacy concept is related to many other literacy concepts (Bawden 2001). Although many authors have defined information literacy in their own way, the numerous definitions contribute little new to existing definitions.

The most widely adopted IL model in the higher education sector is the ACRL standards (Association of Colleges and Research Libraries 2000) which is a shopping list style listing of the skills required by a university student. The skills are the same ones which have traditionally been part of academic curricula and therefore the listing provides no totally new elements in the higher education teaching. The standards are practical and applicable and therefore they appeal the community of IL practitioners in the academic libraries. The value of the standards is that it reminds us of certain neglected but essential aspects of academic professional expertise, such as copyright issues. The IL models help to make visible the expertise and contribution of the librarians in the higher education institutions. The Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework (2004) is very similar to the ARCL standards but the framework elaborates the curriculum and learning implications.

In Britain, the Society of College, National and University Libraries, SCONUL, developed the seven pillars model initially in 1999 and it was updated in 2011. The SCONUL model includes the ability to identify a need for information, assess the scope of the current knowledge, plan strategies for locating information, gather and evaluate information, manage information professionally and ethically, and finally present information and create new knowledge. The model adopts the concepts already familiar in research processes. (SCONUL 2011.)

The Australian Christine Bruce developed the more learning oriented approach to IL even further. Her IL conceptualization evolved

from the seven faces of information literacy (Bruce 1997) to the six frames for information literacy education (Bruce & Edwards & Lupton 2006). The seven faces of information literacy model provides a progressive conceptualization of IL which consists of seven evolving faces or experiences: utilizing IT, using information sources, executing the information seeking process, information control, knowledge construction, knowledge extension, and wise use of information (Bruce 1997).

The six frames of information literacy education describe six different approaches to information or frames as Bruce et al. called them, namely content, competency, learning to learn, personal relevance, social impact, and relational frame, which views IL as a way of interacting with information (Bruce et al. 2006). The content frame which views IL as knowledge of the information world has been predominant in the academic community as it is viewed as measurable and transmittable. The learning to learn frame provides a more sustainable approach. The modelling of different approaches to IL education helps to understand and improve the faculty-library co-operation.

Thereafter Bruce turned even more to the learning aspects of information use and uses the term “informed learning” which she and her co-writers define like this: “The idea of informed learning represents and advances understandings of information literacy that incorporate the broader concept of using information to learn” (Bruce & Hughes & Somerville 2012).

The concept of information literacy has been criticized by many authors (e.g. Lloyd 2010; Huvila 2011; Nazari & Webber 2012) and as Andretta (2011) describes, some scholars and practitioners refuse to use the term. Nazari and Webber (2012) argue that IL is defined too narrowly and a more holistic view on IL would be appropriate in the e-environment.

Lloyd proposes a more holistic definition. She argues that information literacy research lacks theoretical framing and that the

concept has been too narrowly defined. Although higher education institutions believe that there are generic and transferable information skills which students can apply later in the workplaces, there is not enough evidence as to whether this really happens. Lloyd seeks to broaden information literacy beyond textual skills. Lloyd considers information literacy “not only the mastery of information skills but also the mastery of the information landscape”. (Lloyd 2011.)

As Lloyd broadens the definition of IL, she introduces a new concept, information literacy practice, which she defines as follows:

“Knowledge of information sources within an environment and an understanding of how these sources and the activities used to access them are constructed through discourse. Information literacy is constituted through the connections that exist between people, artifacts, texts and bodily experiences that enable individuals to develop both subjective and intersubjective positions. Information literacy is a way of knowing the many environments that constitute an individual being in the world.” (Lloyd 2010.)

Huvila (2011) argued that information use is the neglected part of IL. This criticism is not relevant in the sense that information use has been present in the IL definitions. However, the information use aspect has been neglected most likely because IL has been predominantly taught by librarians, whose strongest expertise lies in information retrieval and not in the use of information.

The practical applicability of the different models is arguable. No matter how narrowly or how broadly the IL concept is defined, those conceptual deliberations yield relatively little substance to the practical work of university teachers and librarians. Therefore in this paper we adopt a pragmatic approach and do not go further into the discussion about different definitions.

The definitions are broad and all-encompassing and in that sense they do cover the IL of Finnish and Namibian universities. Yet

information literacy is culture and context specific (Tuominen & Savolainen & Talja 2005) although in the higher education context globally approved scholarly quality standards are applied.

In the IL community there is a lively ongoing discussion on IL models and how to integrate information literacy teaching into the curriculum (Orr & Appleton, & Wallin 2001; Andretta & Pope & Walton 2008; Corrall 2008; Wang 2010). Wang (2010) developed an extensive model to ensure a cumulative integration of IL teaching into the curriculum. However, in practice the applicability of complicated models is questionable and there is still a need for a simple IL integration scheme.

In Finland there has been a national project which has made recommendations for the integration of information literacy into the curriculum (Juntunen & Lehto & Saarti & Tevaniemi 2008). The Finnish recommendations are based on the ACRL standards (Association of Colleges and Research Libraries 2000). The recommendations describe the minimum IL objectives for the first year, bachelor's level, and the master's level studies (Recommendation for universities for including information literacy competency in the new degree structures, 2004).

The Finnish recommendations set the goals for IL teaching but each university has created its own ways to organize the IL teaching. The outcomes of the national IL project were evaluated in 2009 and the results showed the IL model has proven useful and is widely applied in Finnish university libraries (Kivilahti & Saarti & Sinikara 2010).

Information studies scholars and library practitioners have provided a vast amount of both theoretical and practical literature on the definition of IL and how IL has been applied. This yields a solid background on which to base the IL work in Finland and in Namibia.

The paper is descriptive with a practical approach. It describes the current information literacy models or policies of HU and UNAM. The paper also discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the current

practice and discusses how the UNAM Library is going to implement an IL instruction programme.

3. Information literacy teaching at the University of Helsinki

The University of Helsinki “Pick’n Learn” Information Literacy Learning Menu (Figure 1) is based on the need for a variety of methods in IL education. Therefore, Helsinki University Library offers both curriculum integrated and extracurricular IL courses. One example of the curriculum integrated IL teaching is described by Kakkonen and Virrankoski (2010) and the whole model by Helminen and Ruhanen (2010).

In Finland, the master’s degree is considered as a basic degree and the students who enter the university are expected to accomplish the master’s degree. The basic model of the curriculum integrated IL teaching includes 1.5–4 hours of teaching three times during studies: during the first-year studies and during the processes of the bachelor’s and master’s theses. The content of teaching is loosely based on the ACRL standards (Association of Colleges and Research Libraries 2000). The curricular courses vary by faculty and they are tailored to the needs of each degree programme.

Hence there are both independent IL courses administered by the Library and IL instruction integrated into other courses offered by the faculties. The content of the courses is planned together with the teachers of the respective courses in the faculties. The responsibility for the teaching of IL is shared by the librarians and the teachers in the faculty. Information use is the responsibility of the teachers in the faculty and is not a neglected area as Huvila argued (2011). The curricula contain an extensive amount of learning goals which could be classified as information literacy skills, although they are not called or defined as information literacy skills in the curricula. Therefore

the authors of this article acknowledge that there is a need for discussion on whether the concept of IL is relevant in higher education (Andretta 2011).

As not all students are able to attend the curricular courses or they need refresher courses, extracurricular courses are offered on a regular basis. Students and staff attend the same courses although some courses are tailored to students' needs, such as the basic course in information seeking, and some to researchers' needs, such as the course on bibliometric analysis tools.

Self-study material is available on the web pages and in the Moodle virtual learning environment. However, more material has been requested by students and there is a definite need to provide more self-study material for different study levels and on various topics.

Individual or group counselling by appointment is also offered and tailored courses for staff and students on taught on request. Counselling for the teaching staff has been part of the IL menu for many years, but it is seldom used. The teaching staff would most likely benefit from cooperation with Library staff as they design assignments and plan teaching material and therefore the Library staff should offer their expertise more actively and trust in their own expertise.

This IL learning menu constitutes a complex entity. However, there is no alternative because the University is multidisciplinary and needs differ. One size does not fit all. The ultimate question to be asked in every situation is which IL elements and what kind teaching benefit the learner, be that learner a first-year student or an experienced researcher.

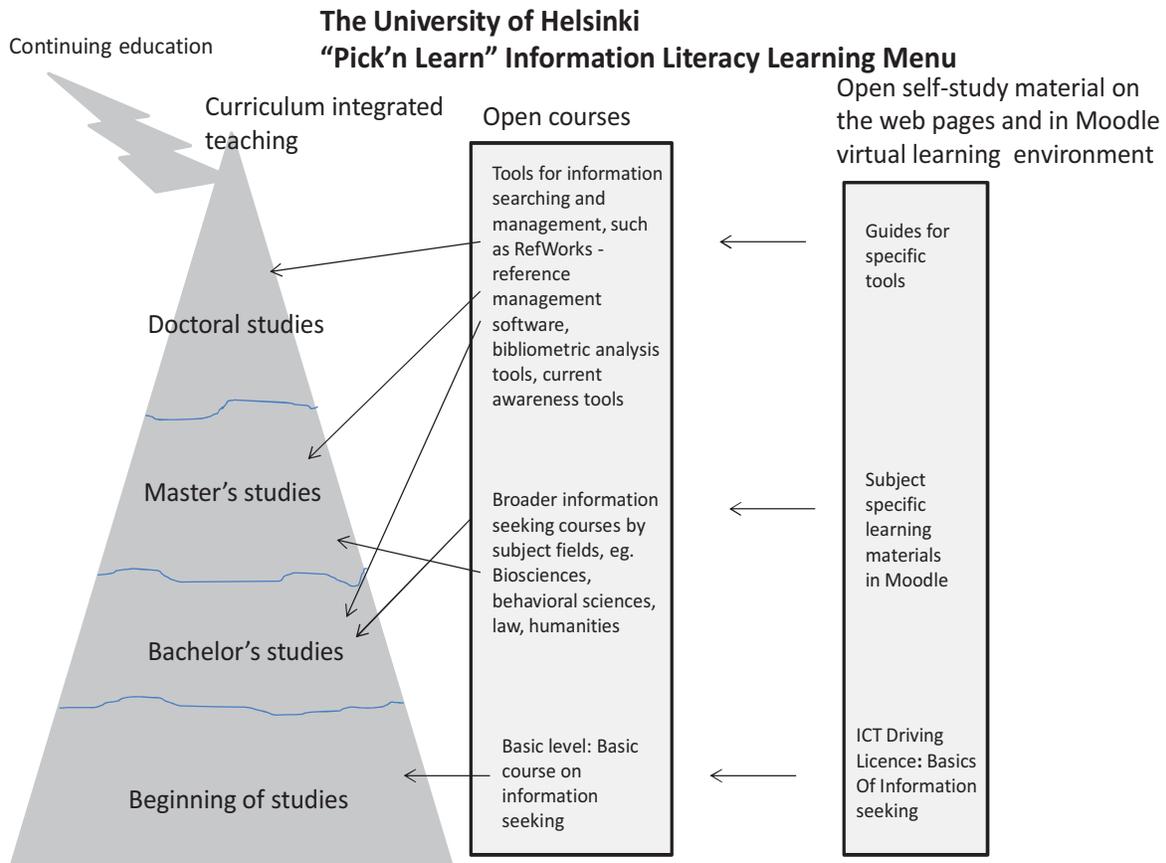


Figure 1. The University of Helsinki ‘Pick’n Learn’ Information Literacy Learning Menu.

Information literacy work is not limited to teaching the students. As, for example, Pierce (2009) has noted that the teaching of faculty members is an effective way of spreading information literacy know-how. IL work includes numerous activities which enable clients to use information effectively, such as metadata and the design of user interfaces.

An important aspect is also collaboration with academics and other teaching staff by participating in various committees and teams. Figure 2 illustrates the various collaborative levels which the IL teachers utilize, many of which have already been mentioned in this article. In addition to the cooperation partners at the University, there are important actors on the national and international level to be taken into

account. Such actors include the Ministry of Education and Culture, which is an important source of funding. Therefore it is important to communicate and illustrate the educational work done in the libraries. The national and international library networks provide peer support and opportunities to share best practices which help to develop the IL work in one's own university.

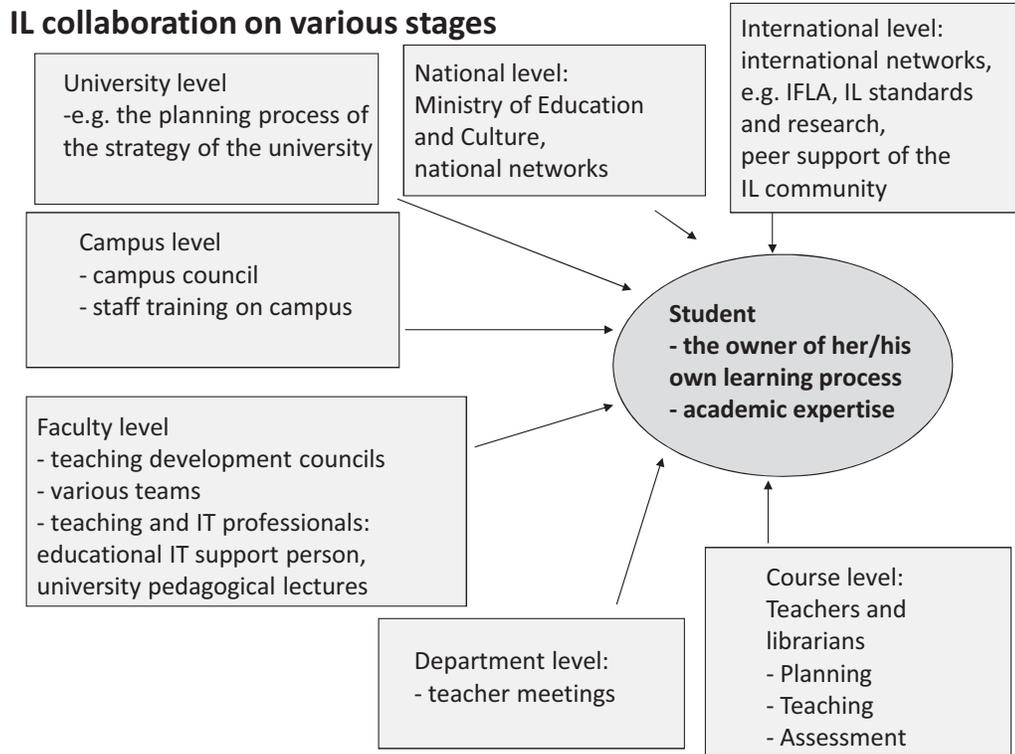


Figure 2. IL collaboration at various stages

4. Information literacy teaching at the University of Namibia

At the University of Namibia, information literacy teaching has been offered for a number of years in various ways on different campuses: some subject librarians teach information literacy to undergraduate and postgraduate students. The initiative for teaching often comes

from the lecturers. Students also request individual tutoring on the use of e-resources and the library catalogue. However, there is still room for improvement in the delivery of IL teaching, such as the even distribution and quality of the IL teaching on various faculties and campuses, the sharing of teaching materials and best practices and the assessment of learning outcomes.

At UNAM, the planning of information literacy teaching is still under consideration. IL is one of the themes of the cooperation project between Finnish and Namibian university libraries. The Finnish and Namibian IL teachers have benchmarked the IL teaching practices and this has yielded new ideas how to develop IL teaching, but these ideas have not yet been put into practice.

The UNAM Library is currently drafting information literacy policy and planning how to develop and implement the policy. These issues will be worked on collaboratively during the project of the Finnish and Namibian university libraries. In October 2012, the participants of the study visit to Finland will focus on writing an IL policy and a practical implementation plan. Therefore we have not yet been able to provide more detailed information in this article.

5. Conclusions

At UNAM, the situation in IL teaching resembles the situation in HU in many ways. However, HU and UNAM have very different histories and HU has had a longer time frame during which to develop IL teaching, thus the current IL practices can partly be seen as a result of the different history. There are many similarities and universities can learn from each other.

In many cases IL teaching still concentrates on the information resources and information retrieval techniques which resemble the content frame described by Bruce and co-writes (Bruce et al. 2006).

The IL teaching could be shifted towards the learning to learn approach, but this would require further training of the library staff and close collaboration with the teachers in the faculties and experts in university pedagogy.

Questions which need to be discussed while the IL plan at UNAM is developed include the roles of different staff groups: the library staff, the teaching staff in the faculties, and other support and administrative staff, such as experts in IT and pedagogy. If all the relevant actors in the universities collaborate, the students will develop sound information literacy practices which they learn through people, artefacts, texts, and bodily experience (Lloyd 2010).

Ensuring that the whole teaching community of the university knows and acknowledges the expertise of all the members of the academic community is an essential task. The paramount issue is how to ensure enough resources for IL work and focus on the staff resources for IL teaching in a cost-efficient way. The amount of teaching is not significant as only the quality of learning matters. The same applies to HU and therefore collaborative development of IL services will be fruitful.

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