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Information literacy initiatives at Sri Lanka universities: A case of the South Eastern University

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ABSTRACT

Information Literacy (IL) is an essential competency to enable students to be lifelong learners and to develop professionalism. This paper describes the initiatives taken by library professionals to teach information literacy to undergraduate and postgraduate students of Sri Lankan universities; especially it explores the case of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL). The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the steps taken to integrate information literacy in the university's curricula and to prepare a conceptual framework to teach information literacy. A series of five workshops have been carried out successfully in SEUSL and the feedback of students has been evaluated. Workshop participants are highly satisfied with the programmes and achieved some extent of skills on information searching, finding, evaluating and presenting. Their suggestions and requirements are taken into account for designing the course. The outcome of these workshops has assisted in drafting a framework for teaching information literacy. A proposal for an Information literacy programme as one credit unit for Faculty of Applied Sciences of SEUSL has been drafted to submit to the faculty board meeting and university senate, whilst preparation of the web tutorial is underway.

Key words: Information literacy; Academic library; Teaching framework; Information literacy model

INTRODUCTION

There are many more definitions have been created for Information Literacy by scholars and academicians around the world. To understand about the concept the author has selected the definition of Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). Accordingly information literacy is defined as 'a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information'(ACRL, 2000). An information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the extent and nature of information needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- Understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally.

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Since delivery of information literacy instruction to students is becoming progressively more important due to exponential growth of literature especially electronic resources and the potential resource base has been widened. In addition, information is available through several medias including graphical, aural and textual and in different formats. Hence, such information overload and information explosion has created a very big challenge to individuals in finding, evaluating and understanding information. Therefore the first and foremost important role of a librarian is to direct students to locate high quality print and electronic sources and educating them on searching, finding, evaluating and presenting information. They should create an information literate society for twenty first century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Information Literacy (IL) is the key for life long learning. It is the mix of computer literacy, IT literacy, library skills, information skills and learning to learn. Therefore teaching IL to undergraduate students is crucial to library academics in order to create lifelong learners. Reviewed literature has shown that teaching Information Literacy is common in USA, UK, New Zealand and Australia. Few other countries also teach IL to their undergraduate and graduate students. However, the terms used for this purpose are 'information skills', 'library skills', 'library instruction' etc.

There are many models available on Information Literacy around the world. Those are 'The Big 6 Models' by Eisenberg and Berkowitz (1990), 'Information Search Process' by Kuhlthau, 'Stripling and Pits Research Process Model' and 'Pathways to Modern Information Skills Model' by Pappas and Tepe (McDonald 2003). Among these, The Big 6 Model is very popular. The big six are:

- Define the task at hand
- Create information seeking strategies
- Locate and access information
- Use, interact with information, synthesize, organize and present
- Critically evaluate product and process. (Eisenberg, 2008)

Information Literacy was at first introduced to Sri Lanka in 2004 through a workshop organized by National Institute for Library and Information Science (NILIS) in collaboration with IFLA/ ALP. The "Empowering Eight Model" was created at this workshop to be practiced. This model contains eight steps namely as identify, explore, select, organize, create, present, assess and apply (Wijethunga, 2008). Some university libraries of Sri Lanka adopt this model to teach Information Literacy.

However, so far neither a standard nor national curriculum has been formulated in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan university libraries have practiced some other standards like ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards for higher education and Australia New Zealand Information Literacy Frame work in addition to some other standards. However it is important to note that:

“A Western influenced information literacy curriculum, based on Western norms and taught according to Western pedagogical practices, may not succeed when it focuses on behavioural changes as indeed it must, according to how we assess educational results in terms of outcomes” (Dorner and Gorman, 2006, p.282)

This argument should be considered by local expertise in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) and when a national curriculum is prepared in future they should consider the target groups (how people learn, their culture, structure and society). The importance of integrating Information literacy in the curricula is highly realized by academic librarians of Sri Lanka and initiatives are presently being carried out to draw a national curriculum with the help of international experts.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This is a case study of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. In addition, interviews with university librarians of Sri Lanka in order to identify the initiatives they have taken to teach information literacy in their respective universities. For this purpose all fifteen national universities were selected and the librarians in-charge for Readers Services were interviewed. Results were analyzed qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Information Literacy in University Libraries of Sri Lanka

Even after the “Eight Empowering Model” was created, only a very few libraries had the practice of delivering Information Literacy. In Sri Lanka user education programmes, orientation for freshmen, library tour and hands on practices for catalogue search are common to all academic libraries.

Among the 15 national universities in Sri Lanka, Faculty of Science of University of Colombo, has integrated Information Literacy and Librarian’s involvement in teaching. National Institute for Library and Information Science (NILIS) of University of Colombo instructs information skills to their post graduate students (Wijethunga, 2008). Faculty of Science of University of Ruhuna also has introduced two credit units for first year and the final year undergraduate students. The course co-coordinator says that they will implement IL to other faculties in forthcoming academic years. University of Kelaniya library initiated a pilot project to teach Information Literacy for undergraduates for 15 hours teaching and practical in 2008 and it was subsequently stopped due to various factors such as non availability of resource persons, logistical issues and negative attitudes of students (Jayatissa, 2009). However, they are still working to integrate IL with the main academic programmes. In University of Peradeniya, Faculty of Agriculture conducts a 15 hours IL programme for graduate and undergraduate students and they are planning to have a mandatory course unit in each faculty’s academic programme. University of Moratuwa has collaborated with Faculty of Engineering to teach information skills to freshmen in their nine week “Communication Skill Development Programme”(Seneviratne, 2009). In Sabragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, library academics teach information skills to freshmen. University of Jaffna, University of Rajarata, Open University of Sri Lanka and

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University of Wayamba introduce Information Skills for freshmen during the orientation programmes.

Information Literacy at SEUSL

South Eastern University of Sri Lanka was established on 23rd November, 1995 as a university college and was upgraded as a university in 1996. At present, SEUSL has four faculties; Faculty of Arts and Culture, Faculty of Management and Commerce, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Languages and the Faculty of Applied Sciences. The library of SEUSL serves nearly 1500 undergraduate users, 100 academics and 300 non-academic, academic support and administrative staff members. The mission of the SEUSL is to develop and strengthen its role as world class university through teaching and learning, continuous improvement of academic research and support programs, and utilize the best and suitable administrative practices that will lead to regional and national development with the integration of advanced technologies in the university system to meet the global challenges (SEUSL,2010). In order to achieve the mission of the university, the library has its own mission, vision and strategic plans in line with the university's mission. In this context, the library conducts an orientation programme to all library students throughout their intensive course. The orientation programme includes; library tour, introductions to library rules and regulations, library services, introduction to information sources, access to information and hands on practice in using library catalogue and some online resources.

Orientation is held for freshers of all four faculties separately at the beginning of each academic year. We allocate six hours for each faculty. No proper evaluation has been carried out. The main objective of this programme is orienting the students to library and guiding them to use the library resources. However, in spite of this instruction programme, the library observed that the students who actively involved in research have difficulties in finding, locating and using information. This phenomenon has led library to submit a proposal to a World Bank funded project known as improving Relevant and Quality of Undergraduate Education- Quality Enhancement Fund (IRQUE - QEF1). This funding was made available to Social Sciences discipline. The proposal emphasized the need for information literacy education and it outlined the objectives and expected outcomes. Under the sponsorship of IRQUE- QEF-1, the Library, SEUSL successfully held a two - day workshop for final year special degree students of all Social Science disciplines. This workshop incorporated all aspects of information resources in an effort to address the varied needs of a diverse students' body.

The main objective of this workshop was to develop IL skills to effectively use information resources, evaluate information, using and applying to learning and research activities. Specific objectives are given below.

- To provide the key concept of information literacy
- To provide knowledge and skills in collecting, storing, retrieving, managing, and presenting information
- To provide effective search strategies
- To guide the students to select appropriate tools for searching and collecting information
- To guide them in evaluating and applying information to create new knowledge

During this workshop discipline-specific instructions were given. For this purpose librarians approached faculty members to plan instruction and practical in the context of given disciplines to cover areas of specialization. Learning outcomes of the sessions were; students being able to formulate research questions, effectively use university catalogue, use print sources effectively such as books, journals, indexes, abstracts and encyclopedias, use of existing databases and electronic journals, identify useful websites, search engines, directories, evaluate the quality of information obtained, avoid plagiarism and use accepted citation styles for both printed and online resources. Orientation of information users with library professionals is also expected from this workshop.

Feedback of the students was evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively and it was found that nearly 85% of them have noted that it is a very useful and important lesson and will be helpful for their ongoing research activities. In addition most of them requested to consider holding this type of an IL programme in the first or second years of study. Such an early activity will help throughout their university learning and research processes. They requested to teach this course to every member of this university. This feedback has motivated the library professionals to arrange more workshops to teach information literacy to other students too.

IRQUE- QEF1 funded project enabled us to improve relevant and quality undergraduate education for Social Sciences and that helped us in arranging workshops to all special and general degree students who study any discipline of Social Sciences. Similarly, IRQUE- QEF2 funded project was awarded for Languages, hence we were able to cater students who learn Languages. Due to budgetary constraints and bigger student population, we were unable to hold any workshop to the students of Faculty of Management and Commerce. However it was possible to hold a workshop to Faculty of Applied Sciences out of university funds as the number of students is very small. We have planned to hold one more workshop to the final year Applied Science and Management and Commerce students in near future.

Table 1: Information literacy workshops details at SEUSL

Date and workshop Number	Faculty	Year	No.of students Participated	Sponsored by
29.11.2008 No.1	Faculty of Arts and Culture-	Final year- Social Science special degree students	56	IRQUE – QEF 1
10.01.2009 No.2	Faculty of Arts & Culture	2 nd and 3 rd year- Social Science special degree students	95	IRQUE – QEF 1
18.07.2009 No.3	Faculty of Applied Sciences	Final year students	47	University fund
12.12.2009 No.4	Faculty of Arts & Culture- & Faculty of Islamic studies	Final year Special degree students of Languages (Tamil, English and Arabic) and Islamic Civilization	55	IRQUE – QEF 11
19.12.2009 No.5	Faculty of Arts & Culture	2 nd and 3 rd year students	44	IRQUE – QEF 1

Design and Delivery of Course content

Designing of course modules and determining the content has been time consuming and very tough. Library academic staff at SEUSL including Acting Librarian was involved in this exercise. Workshops were held to introduce basic concepts of information literacy as well as production, organization, accessing and use of information within particular disciplines corresponding to students' major research interests. Seminars were organized linear in the sense that students had no choice but to progress from module one; introductory lesson on information literacy, to module eight; ethics of using/presenting information. Design principle of each module was making them interactive and practical based. Hands on training were given at all necessary locations; on catalogue search, Google search, and accessing electronic journals and databases. Handouts were given at each segment throughout the workshop. These workshops were held at the IT Laboratory. Both lectures and hands on practices were being carried out at the same place. The following contents were selected at first.

- Introduction to Information Literacy
- Effective use of information Sources (print, non print, reference sources, accessing and navigating information sources for a given topic)
- Search methods and search strategies
- Access to information through internet
- Scholarly information retrieval
- Access to electronic journals and databases
- Plagiarism and citation styles

Feedback of students obtained through open ended questions indicated that they were highly satisfied with the course contents and we reviewed and modified the contents in the 4th and 5th workshops in which search strategies were not separately taught instead we introduced in the catalogue search and database search. Similarly pathfinders for specific disciplines were introduced by Acquisition Librarian and Electronic Information portal were specifically taught in the last two workshops.

Table 2: Feedback of students regarding usefulness, workshop materials and arrangements

Work shop No.	Usefulness of Workshop in percentage					About work shop materials in percentage					About work shop Arrangement in percentage				
	VMU	US	CD	NTU	NU	VG	GD	CD	BD	VB	VG	GD	CND	BD	VB
01	87	13	0	0	0	70	23	08	0	0	70	23	08	0	0
02	86	8	6	0	0	68	30	00	00	02	72	14	10	02	02
03	92	8	0	0	0	78	18	04	00	00	65	32	00	01	02
04	89	11	0	0	0	54	37	05	02	01	89	11	0	0	0
05	88	09	03	0	0	61	36	03	00	00	47	47	06	0	0

VMU - Very much useful
 US - Useful
 CD - Cannot decide
 NTU - Not that useful
 NU - Never useful

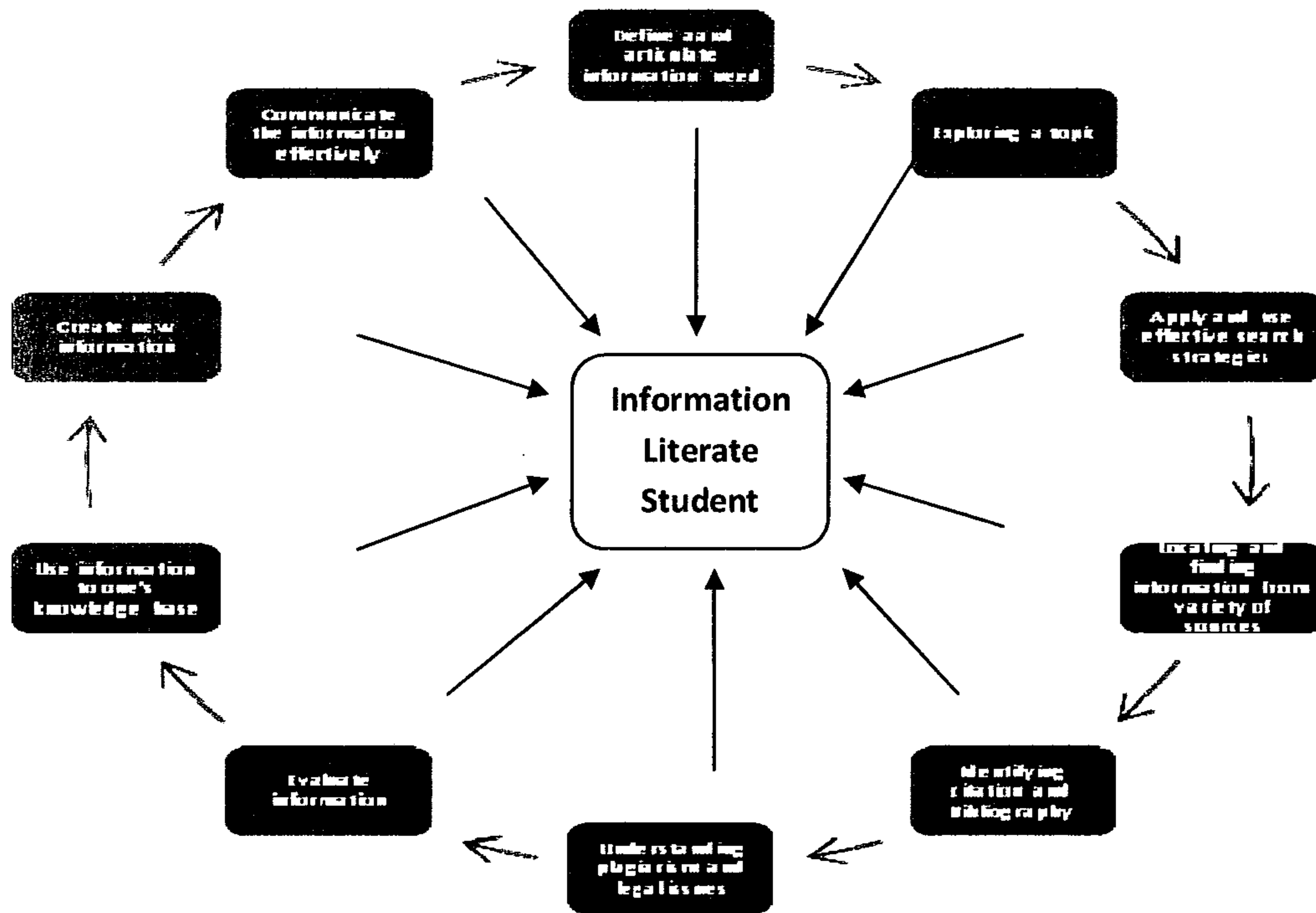
BD - Bad
 VB - Very bad

Feedback of students is uniformly positive in all instances. Quality of handouts was also included under 'Workshop materials'. 'Workshop arrangements' included hall arrangements, lunch, refreshments and audibility. In the open ended questions we requested them to comment about the programmes. It was amazingly noted that they expressed very positive comments. Also some students requested to teach them research methodology, too. But majority of students complained about the malfunction of the internet connectivity during internet and database searches.

Consequences of these IL Workshops at SEUSL

According to the feedback and suggestions of workshop participants and the experience we had during the workshop; library professionals of SEUSL has decided to prepare a one credit bearing course unit for first year students on IL. For this purpose we have created a framework to instruct IL initially at Faculty of Applied Sciences.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework to teach information Literacy at SEUSL



This conceptual framework has been constructed by adapting the ACRL's IL competency standards and empowering eight models. In order to create information literate students library academics will focus on the dimensions given in the framework above. Accordingly lessons are prepared for teaching, instruction and for hands on practices. Course contents have been prepared along with the workshop contents and some more additional modules. Finally a project work will be given to the students. Half of the total evaluation points will be assigned for this project work and their presentation.

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In addition a web tutorial has been designed as per the local needs of our users. It provides very basic concepts and knowledge on IL including an access guide, navigating information, ethical use of information and especially on how to build a search strategy. We have to mount this in our university website after undertaking some pilot study. The success of this web tutorial should be evaluated with input from users after a certain period of usage.

CONCLUSION

Teaching Information literacy to undergraduate students is a timely important effort. Academic libraries must consider how information literacy instruction can be effectively designed and delivered to students. Feedback from the series of workshops and the experiences the library professionals gave us a greater sense of confidence that the students are receiving good knowledge and skills, though we had some practical problems regarding internet connectivity, shortage of teaching staff members and logistics. The success of these initiatives largely depends on the integration into university's curricula. That is the preferred and most effective approach to teaching Information Literacy skills. A credit bearing course unit to undergraduate students will be beneficial to teach information Literacy very effectively.

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