

## Information Literacy Instructional Practices: A Survey of University Libraries in Zambia

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### Abstract

Information literacy (IL) instruction is a fundamental professional practice in which university libraries are the primary pioneers. Therefore, IL is designed to teach library patrons how they can quickly and effectively locate the needed information. The main purpose of the study was to investigate (IL) instructional practices in university libraries in Zambia. The study's objectives were to evaluate IL Policies; library staffing; time spent on instruction; IL tools being used and the form of support that librarians receive from university faculties. A descriptive research approach was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. A structured self-administered questionnaire was sent via email to 62 university libraries. Out of 62 head university librarians, 60 responded and all questionnaires were used for data analysis. The study results showed that IL programmes exist in some university libraries. However, the practice is low and largely informal. Thus, the study recommends that university libraries should introduce an IL Policy and IL department, lobby for financial support, and deploy trained IL instructors.

**Keywords:** Information literacy; Information literacy instruction; Information literacy practices; University libraries, Zambia.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Information explosion poses a challenge to students and researchers in academic and research institutions. In response to this phenomenon, university libraries across the globe have engaged in IL instruction. The main endeavor of IL instruction is to equip information users with Information Literacy (IL) skills in finding, accessing, evaluating, and using information sources legally and ethically from various formats using search tools such as databases, electronic books, journals, and search engines including Google (ACRL, 2015). The main instructional approaches are course-related library instruction sessions, course-integrated projects, online tutorials, and stand-alone courses (Ameen and Ullah, 2016). The commonly used topics of IL orientation are the library's system of organizing materials, research methodologies, library catalog, indexes and abstracting services, bibliographic databases, and other digital search tools (Dorvlo, 2016).

#### 1.1 Statement Problem

There has been an increase in the number of private and public universities in Zambia. Despite this, there is scarce information on IL instructional practices in university libraries. As argued by Julien *et al* (2018), university libraries should implement compulsory IL lessons so that information seekers can become lifelong learners. The consequence of not having IL programs in universities is that individuals may not develop intellectual abilities of reasoning, critical thinking, and skills to 'learn how to learn' (ACRL, 2015). Therefore, the focus of the study was to examine the existing IL components and methods of delivery.

#### 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to evaluate the existing information literacy instructional practices in university libraries in Zambia. In doing so, the study sought to:

- i. investigate whether librarians were adequately trained in handling IL instruction,
- ii. determine the duration of time librarians, dedicate to IL instruction at the beginning and throughout an academic year,
- iii. assess the type of commonly used IL instructional tools,
- iv. establish whether libraries had an IL policy and a department in charge of IL activities.
- v. determine the financial support that instructional librarians receive from university administrators,

- vi. evaluate the strategies used by instructional librarians to promote IL programmes within academic faculties.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Information literacy is referred to as the ability to locate, manage, critically evaluate, and use information for problem solving, research, decision making, and continued professional development (Kasowitz-Scheer & Pasqualoni, 2002). Students, researchers, and other information users who are privileged to undertake IL lessons from the library tend to acquire lifelong skills for retrieving appropriate information from various sources (ACRL, 2015). Additionally, they can use information search tools such as databases and internet sites without difficulties. The learning institutions that mainly offer IL programmes are special libraries, school libraries, academic libraries, and research institutions (ACRL, 2015; ALA, 2015).

According to a study by Rafique and Khan (2020), a university library should have an IL Policy, IL department, and IL programmes embedded into the school curriculum. The deployment of trained IL instructors is also crucial in the provision of library services. With a well-organized structure of IL programmes students can become effective in research skills for their academic work (Akakandelwa, 2002). In addition, librarians have a mandate to ensure that students are given an opportunity for thorough IL lessons and the training should be compulsory. In America and Canada, time spent on IL lessons throughout the academic period is good enough for students to grasp IL skills (Julien & Latham, 2018).

IL instruction is not only about walking the students through the library by showing them the location of library materials, but it is about teaching library patrons how to search for information using various search tools such as bibliographies, indexes, catalogs, registers, finding aids and online databases (Dadzie, 2016). In the United Kingdom (UK), it was discovered that students who were oriented through hands-on IL lessons developed skills to handle various instructional tools such as OPAC catalogs, internet tools, and print materials, and their information search skills had tremendously improved compared to students in Nigerian universities (Baro and Seimode, 2013). Furthermore, a study by Lumande *et al.* (2016) in university libraries in Zambia, Malawi, and Botswana found that financial support for libraries was also very important for IL programmes to run effectively. Financial support from university administration should be aligned with the university budget line (Tshuma & Chiganda, 2018). In addition, the marketing of IL programmes is cardinal (Dadzie, 2016). Furthermore, for library patrons to understand the importance of IL programmes in the institution, librarians should collaborate with faculties in raising awareness among library users. (Julien *et al.* 2018, Tshuma & Chiganda, 2018). In the context of university libraries in Zambia, the IL programmes may have been impacted by the coming of new private and public universities. However, the universities are yet to be equipped with modern library facilities and well trained library staff. As a result, most students tend to write poor assignments and hire other people to do research projects for them.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The study population consisted of 62 universities registered under the Higher Education Authority (HEA) as shown in Table 1. One head librarian from each university library was purposely selected giving a sample size of 62 librarians. A structured self-administered questionnaire was sent via e-mail to 62 Head university librarians. Out of 62, two (2) were returned. The response rate was 97%. The results of quantitative data were analysed in Microsoft Excel with descriptive statistics to produce percentages and frequencies, while qualitative data was sorted into categories of responses and generated themes from which interpretations and conclusions were made and drawn.

Table 1: Breakdown of University Libraries per province

SN	Province	Private Universities	Public universities
1	Lusaka	39	4
2	Copper belt	6	2
3	Central	1	2
4	Muchinga	0	1
5	Southern	5	0
6	Western	2	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>53</b>	<b>9</b>

#### 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

##### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Out of 60 participants, most were female (55%), the majority had a first degree (68.3%) and worked in private universities (Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic characteristic

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	33	55
	Male	27	45
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>
Level of Education or Qualification	PhD	1	1.7
	Master's degree	14	23.3
	Undergraduate degree	41	68.3
	Diploma	4	6.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Type of University	Public University	9	15
	Private University	51	85
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Job Title	Chief librarian	8	13.3
	Librarian	42	70
	Acting librarian	2	3.3
	Assistant librarian	8	13.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>

##### 4.3 Training of Librarians in Information Literacy Instruction

A majority (88.3%) of the study participants indicated that they were not adequately trained in handling IL instruction. (Table 3).

Table 3: Training of Librarians in Information Literacy Instruction

SN	Staff	Frequency	Percentage
1	Full time instruction librarian	6	10
2	Other library staff	53	88.3
3	Reference/ public service librarians	1	1.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.4 Time Spent on Instruction

On the duration of time spent on IL instruction at the beginning of an academic year, 11.7% of respondents spent 75% while 41.7% spent less than 50% of the time (Fig.4).

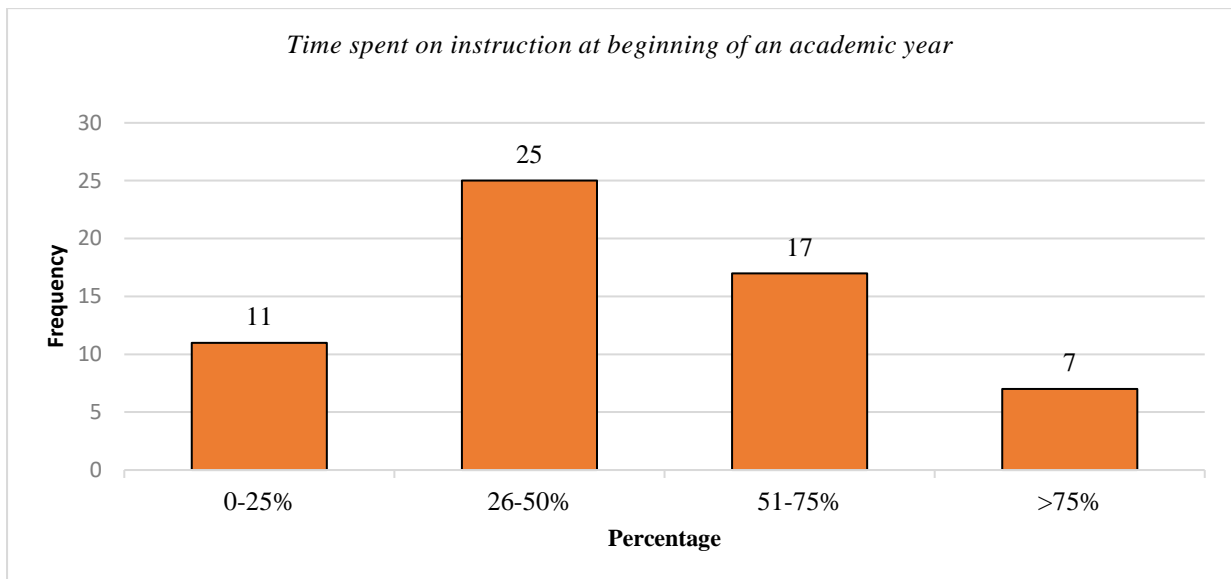
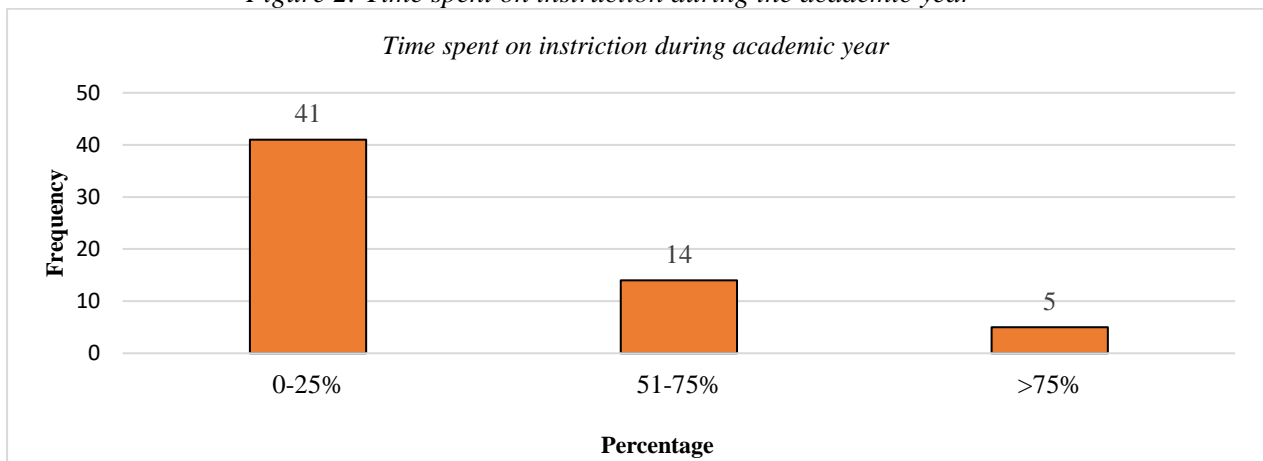


Figure 1: Time spent on instruction by staff at the start of an academic year

On the amount of time spent on IL instruction during the academic year for staff (other than full-time instruction staff), 68.3% of respondents spent less than 25% of the time while 23.3% spent between 51-75% and 8.3% spent more than 75 percent (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Time spent on instruction during the academic year



#### 4.5 Instructional Tools

Asked what instructional tools they used to conduct IL, the study further established that 33% of respondents used library classification systems and library catalogs such as OPAC, 33% conducted library orientations, 5% used internet tools, and 13.3% preferred printed materials over e-books as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Instructional tools

SN	Tools	Frequency	Percent
1	Audio Visual Materials	4	6.7
2	Library Classification Systems and Catalogs	20	33.3
3	Online Databases/Library use in general	20	33.3
4	Other Print references	8	13.3
5	Scholarly Communications	2	3.3
6	Internet/World Wide Web	3	5
7	Print Indexes	3	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.6 Instructional Objectives

Regarding IL objectives, 31.7% of respondents said their primary objective was to orient students on databases, and 26.7% were oriented on physical materials. 16.7% were oriented on information management and 3.3% were oriented on information evaluation. A complete list of items is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Instructional objectives

SN	Objectives	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Teach to critically evaluate the quality and usefulness of information	2	3.3
2	Teach students general strategies	3	5
3	Teach students how to find information in various sources	19	31.7
4	Teach students how to locate materials in the library	16	26.7
5	Teach students how databases in general are structured	7	11.7
6	Teach students how to manage information	10	16.7
7	Teach awareness of technological innovation	3	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	
<b>Are you able to meet instructional objectives?</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
1	Yes	37	61.7
2	No	23	38.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.7 Level of Information Literacy Support

The participants were asked whether library administrations supported their IL programmes. Out of 60 respondents, 59 reported receiving funds for library activities. However, regarding the level of support towards IL programmes, 48.3% felt they received moderate support, 23.3% received full support and 21.7% received very little support. Table 6 below shows the results.

Table 6: Level of support from university administration in the instruction work

SN	Funding for library	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	59	98.3
2	No	1	1.7
<b>Level of IL support</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Very little	13	21.7
2	Moderate	29	48.3
3	Full support	14	23.3
4	Non	4	6.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>59</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.8 Mode of Information Literacy Promotions

In terms of promoting the IL programmes, results in Table 7 below show that 50% used notices or letters, 18.3% made direct personal contacts with faculties, 11.7% used social media, 10% used email, and another 10% used departmental meetings.

Table 7: Mode of advertising for instruction programmes

SN	Mode of publicity	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Email discussion lists	6	10
2	Departmental meetings	6	10
3	Social media	7	11.7
4	Personal faculty contact	11	18.3
5	Notices	30	50
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study found that 68.3% of libraries needed to have IL policy, and a curriculum with objectives based on how to access library materials, use of databases, information management, and technology. These findings are akin to a study by Mugwisi (2015) that IL practices in several university libraries in Zimbabwe were informal due to IL policy issues compared to South Africa. However, Julien *et al* (2018) discovered that the U.S IL policy and written objectives played a role in the implementation of effective IL programmes in American academic libraries.

It was also discovered that several Librarians were not trained in IL programmes. Only 10% of universities had full time instructional librarians while 88.3% of universities used other library staff for instruction. Meanwhile, one library depended on Reference/Public service librarians for IL instruction programmes. This is similar to a study by Baro *et al.* (2013) who discovered that a lack of specialised and trained library staff attributed to the poor running of IL programmes in most Nigerian academic libraries.

It can be deduced that 88.3% of university libraries in Zambia do not have full-time skilled IL instructors. This implies that the problem emanates from a lack of established IL Departments or units in the institutions. Julien *et al.* (2018) warn that IL instruction should be run by skilled library instructors with teaching methodology skills. Having trained library instructors in an academic library helps to ensure that needed content is covered. They can also avoid poor teaching approaches during instruction classes.

The study further established that in the proportion of time spent on instruction at the start of an academic year for staff with instructional roles (other than full-time instruction staff), 11.7% of the libraries spent at least 75% of the time on IL classes while 41.7% spent less than 50%. This shows that many university libraries in Zambia are not offering compulsory library orientations to all new students both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. These findings are consistent with those of Pelemo (2021), who noted that most students in Ghana missed out on library orientations because they often became very busy with course registrations. In addition, library staff are not committed to conducting orientations so that students may become aware of the services and materials found in libraries.

The study further discovered that most of the libraries spent less than 25% of the time on instruction, 23.3% of libraries spent between 51-75% of the time, and only 8.3% of libraries spent more than 75 percent of the time. Julien and Heidi (2018) warn that academic libraries should spend enough time on IL lessons so that students can become lifelong learners. Therefore, students can easily acquire information related to their general educational and professional formation. Dorvlo (2016), emphasizes that the post library orientation is a panacea for students to become research experts.

The findings of the study also show that students needed to utilise various library instructional tools to enhance their capacity in school assignments. The results show that 33% of libraries used OPAC catalogs, 33% conducted library orientations, 5% used internet tools, and 13.3% preferred print materials over e-books, audio-visual and reference books. These findings are akin to a study by Rafique and Khan (2020) who discovered that at the University of Lahore in Pakistan, students were walked through library facilities without proper exposure to subtle IL tools used in information search. Likewise, a study by Chitumbo *et al* (2015) revealed low usage of print serials resources by many students at the University of Zambia Library due to a lack of IL programmes to equip them with necessary information search and retrieval skills. However, these findings differ from Hepworth and Walton (2009) who discovered that libraries in the UK provided students with required IL search tools. It can be deduced that university libraries in Zambia are limited to traditional librarianship despite advancements in IL search tools globally. Students are not being exposed to modern library technologies embedded in the latest prescribed and recommended online study materials.

Consistent with other studies, difficulties in implementing current IL programmes are associated with poor funding and administrative support. Out of 60 institutions, 59 did not receive adequate funds to support library activities including IL programmes. Most of the libraries indicated moderate support. This study is congruent with the findings by Dadzie (2016) who reported that in Ghana, insufficient support from university management was a major bottleneck to IL programmes. However, a study by Julien (2018) discovered that all 600 academic libraries in the USA received full federal government support in their instructional roles. Lumande (2016) stresses the need to fund academic libraries in Southern Africa. He is of the view that good budget allocation towards academic libraries creates a conducive environment for instruction programmes.

In terms of promoting IL programmes in university libraries, the study found that publicity was informal and weak. Half of the libraries used notices or letters, 18.3% made personal contacts with faculties, 11.7% used social media, 10% used emails and another 10% advertised through departmental meetings. The study is similar to findings by Tshuma and Chigada (2018) at selected academic libraries in Zimbabwe, which discovered that there was minimal promotion of IL instruction in academic libraries. The possible explanation could be that perhaps library staff feel too lazy to vigorously collaborate with faculties and teaching staff.

## **6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It can be concluded that IL practices in university libraries in Zambia are largely poor. The study has established that many university librarians do not have a postgraduate degree as required by the Higher Education Authority Act No. 23 of 2021 of the Laws of Zambia. This implies that several librarians are not qualified to manage academic libraries. Further, the lack of IL policies, inadequate IL search tools, less time spent on instructions, poor marketing, and low attendance from students have also contributed to meager implementation of IL programmes. Given the above findings, university libraries in Zambia should:

- i. create departments for IL programmes.
- ii. develop and implement IL policies.
- iii. employ full time and skilled IL instructors.
- iv. spend more time on IL lessons at the beginning and during the academic calendar.
- v. adopt ICT search tools in teaching students IL.
- vi. university management should render full support towards the instructions.
- vii. Raise awareness among faculty members and students about the significance of IL programmes.

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