Title:
Embracing the teaching of Information Literacy Skills (ILS) at the Zimbabwe Open University

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Background of Presenters:

Tonderayi Chanakira has contributed to the development of the library profession for a period of 24 years.

Qualifications:

- BA General degree obtained from the University of Zimbabwe in 1988.
- Msc degree in Information Science obtained from INSDOC, India in 1994.
- Diploma in Peace & Security in Africa obtained from the Uppsala University of Sweden in March, 2013.

Organizations worked for are as follows:

1. National Archives of Zimbabwe as Librarian/Archivist (6 years).
2. University of Zimbabwe as Faculty of Arts Librarian, [Main UZ Library]; Technical Editor [Human Resources Research Centre HRRC] & Senior Assistant Librarian, Institute of Mining Research Library [IMR] (5 years).
3. ZimTrade as a Market Adviser in Information (6 years).
4. SADC (Gaborone, Botswana) as an Information Specialist (3 years).
5. Senior Librarian at the Ministry of Education in Namibia in the Namibia Library & Archives Services (NLAS) Department in Namibia (2 years).
6. Guest Lecturer in the Department of Information & Communication Studies, University of Namibia (UNAM).
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Abstract

The paper is a case study aimed at assessing the impact of the teaching of the Information and Literacy Skills (ILS) Programme at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) to benefit students enrolled at the institution. The study also sought to find out how many of the ZOU tutors and librarians who teach the ILS Programme have received formal/informal pedagogy training in the teaching of ILS skills to students. The objective of the study was to find out why ILS is being taught at the ZOU and whether the teaching of the ILS programme by ZOU tutors and librarians is having a positive impact on the students’ academic performance with regard to the quality of their studies as propagated by the ZOU philosophy of open distance learning.

The research used a quantitative research paradigm based on a case study research design in which data was collected using triangulation research methods of data collection through interviews and questionnaires. The data analysis was used and derived from a purposive sample of a certain percentage of ZOU students; ZOU librarians; ZOU tutors and ZOU administrators. Data were collected by administering questionnaires, analysing ZOU students; ZOU tutors; ZOU librarians and ZOU administrators’ perceptions of the ILS programme. The case study revealed that ZOU students have been taught ILS through a ZOU module (LIS 102/RAM 209) since 2009 but there is need to improve the ILS teaching methods in order to make ZOU students appreciate why they are being taught ILS. A major finding of the study was that a large percentage of ZOU students are not being taught ILS as a curriculum subject. The programme is only taught to students studying the Library and Information Science Degree.

The study concluded that the teaching of the ILS Programme by Distance and Open Learning (ODL) at the ZOU is still a new concept and recommends that the ILS programme needs to be spread to cover all registered students. The paper also recommends that ZOU tutors and librarians teaching ILS should be staff developed through regular pedagogy training workshops to enhance their teaching skills.

Keywords: Information Literacy Skills; Pedagogy; Information Explosion; Plagiarism; Library & Information Science; Library & Information Services; Tutors, Librarians; Zimbabwe Universities Library Consortium (ZULC), training
Introduction

The teaching of the ILS Programme was introduced at the ZOU in 2009 as a response to the need of capacitating ZOU students regarding by them with long life learning skills. The ILS Programme has benefited many ZOU students, management staff, teaching staff, and non-teaching staff since its inception. The teaching and training of the ILS programme at the ZOU has been led by two departments namely: the Library & Department of Library & Information. The Library teaches ILS through holding practical sessions at workshops and departmental visits whilst the other department teaches ILS through a module.

Contextual Problem Analysis

The Paradox of ILS Learning:

There is beauty & the beast in the teaching of Information Literacy Skills (ILS) at the ZOU. It has to be understood from the onset that the source problem facing the academia & students of the ZOU is the proliferation of too much information, particularly on the internet which has made it challenging for tutors and students to keep pace with vibrant skills to access the right information to answer a specific research need. Another challenge facing ZOU tutors & their students regarding selecting information from the Internet is how to justify its credibility regarding its source of origin when one cites from certain sources emanating from online sources.

Furthermore, both ZOU tutors & students have also had to cope with the concept of information explosion challenges pertaining to research. Quality academic research output arises if a student is equipped with the right ILS skills. Lack of ILS skills amongst tertiary students has led to challenges of plagiarism as some students fail to effectively present well researched assignments and research projects, thereby compromising the quality of their work.
The ZOU Strategic Plan

ZOU imparts knowledge to its students through the concept of distance and open learning. The philosophies of the institution are best captured in its vision; mission and core values as highlighted:

**Vision:**
To become a world class open and distance learning university.

**Mission:**
The ZOU exists to empower people through lifelong learning thereby enabling them to realise their full potential in an affordable and flexible manner while executing their endeavours.

**Core values:**
- Dedication to the highest level of excellence
- Creation of an innovative culture
- Promotion of integrity
- Adherence to higher levels of ethical standards
- Delighting stakeholders.

What is Information Literacy?

The coining of the term ‘information literacy’ is accredited to Paul Zurkowski who came up with the term in 1974. (Phiri, J. D, 2010) citing (Zurkowski, P. G (1974). Information literacy skills further comes into play when one has competencies defined as the ability to know when information is needed; ability to find the needed information; ability to evaluate the information as well as ability to use the information that has been found to effectively solve a research need thus according to (Mutula, S,2011). Information Literacy is also further defined as the skill to identify what information is needed, understand how the information is organized, identify the best sources of information for a given need, locate those sources, evaluating the sources critically and sharing the information. It is the knowledge of commonly used research techniques.
Why is Information Literacy Important?

Information literacy is critically important because we are surrounded by a growing ocean of information in all formats. Not all information is created equal: some is authoritative, current, reliable, but some is biased, out of date, misleading, and false. As such, the amount of information available will keep increasing and this development has led to what is generally regarded as “information explosion”. The technology used to access, manipulate, and create information will likewise expand bringing in concepts such as cloud computing.

The Teaching of ILS at the ZOU:

Why teach ILS at the ZOU?

The need to teach ILS at the ZOU was influenced by a process led by the University of Zimbabwe’s Library (UZ Library) in 2005. The UZ Library liaised with faculties and its top management to come up with a compulsory LIS programme that was integrated into the UZ teaching curriculum targeting first year students. The University of Botswana (UB) had actually taken the lead in introducing the teaching of ILS as a tertiary institution in Southern Africa and influenced the UZ Library to take the same route through a feasibility study.

The ZOU was challenged to teach ILS out of the need to assist its students learn among other basic computer skills such as MS Office and how to access ICTs which are offered by the Internet. The teaching of ILS was also introduced to improve the quality of work as well as to enhance the research output by ZOU students, especially when they present assignments and projects as part of their course work for exam purposes.

In the context of the ZOU learning philosophy which embraces lifelong learning, ILS is considered as a very important skill that should be attained by all ZOU students. The teaching of the ILS programme in the Department of Library & Information Science at the ZOU was introduced in 2009 (interview with J Phiri, ZOU Tutor). The Library and Information Services Unit trained tutors, lecturers and academics through workshops and faculty visits up until January 2013 when they targeted students. The teaching of the ILS programme by the department of Library & Information Science is done through the use of a module (LIS 102/RAM 209) which targets students studying for their Library and Information Science
Degree and the Records and Archives Management Degree during the first year. The teaching of ILS is not spread to cover other ZOU students in other disciplines within the university.

The teaching of the ILS programme at the ZOU was also introduced to ensure tutors, students, and other university staff to access the plethora of information that is available online and from other information sources such as printed books. The ILS programme is also meant to empower its recipients with life-long skills in seeking information to answer everyday questions, problems and information required for decision-making.

Every year there are periodic ILS training workshops which are organised by the ZOU Library and Information Services Unit for its management, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and students. The process is led by the LIS department. The workshops are conducted through computer lab training sessions, faculty visits and to some extend one-on-one where there is need. The ZOU Library and Information department introduced ILS practical training sessions for ZOU students from all disciplines during the first semester of 2013 with Harare Region being the first to be piloted.

Under the training programme ZOU students are invited to attend what are dubbed as “ebrary and e-resources training sessions” during weekends. (The LIS department is anticipating spreading its ILS teaching programme to cover all 10 provinces in Zimbabwe. ZOU is establishing computer labs in all its Regional Centres and once these are up and running, the LIS Unit will roll out the ILS training programme to all the Regions.

**ZOU ILS Findings**

Statistics made available for the purposes of this paper do confirm that in February 2013 an estimated 42 ZOU students had received ILS training which is coordinated by the ZOU LIS department. The ILS practical sessions cut across all the disciplines taught by the ZOU. The training sessions were conducted during weekends of the ZOU January – June semester. 97 ZOU students who are based in the various regions have also been taught ILS through the module during the first semester as well.

**The ILS Pedagogy Dilemma**
Pedagogy is defined as the principles, practice, or profession of teaching. (www.thefreedictionary.com/pedagogy visited on 07/05/13). The teaching of ILS is guided by an increased use of active engagement teaching as opposed to conventional lectures; and an increased use of student competencies for measuring effective learning after they have been taught ILS. (www.ils.umd.edu/academics visited on 07/05/13). Most ZOU tutors and librarians who are teaching ILS lack pedagogy training via any mode as revealed by 90% of the respondents who admitted that they have never received any training in pedagogy skills training related to the teaching of the ILS programme at the ZOU. Those tutors who answered “YES” for being taught ILS pedagogy got such training through workshops organized from their ‘base’ places of full time employment.

Most ZOU students are mature individuals, usually employed, with limited time for studying and exploring upcoming technologies. This exposes them to challenges when they need to grasp ILS training sessions, and thus tutors, lecturers and librarians need to have pedagogy training so as to effectively impart the teaching of ILS. Most tutors, lecturers and librarians are recruited on the strength of their academic qualifications and have never received any formal training in pedagogy teaching. This creates a challenge as to the approach and techniques of teaching ILS to ZOU students especially when they teach ILS using the module approach.

**Recommendations**

According to the ACRL Guidelines for distance learning library services: “The instilling of lifelong learning skills through libraries is a primary outcome of higher education. Such preparation is of equal necessity for the distance learning community as it is for those on the traditional campus” (ACRL, 1998). It is therefore imperative that ZOU could consider the following recommendations:

- To date, the teaching of the ILS programme at the ZOU is only beneficial to LIS and RAM students, and yet all students require such skills across all ZOU Faculties. The University of Botswana, University of Namibia and the University of Zimbabwe as well as other international universities have adopted a mandatory curriculum-based ILS course for first year students making it an examinable mandatory subject.
This ensures that all students are obliged to undertake this course to empower them with long life learning skills throughout their academic life at a university and after they leave university. The ZOU should adopt a similar route and design its ILS programme to cater for everyone from the basic level as some students lack computer literacy skills due to lack exposure. This type of training is even critical for the distance education student, who may never set foot on the traditional campus (Madaus and Webster, 1998).

- The ZOU should at least enter into strategic partnerships with institutions such as INASP and to also organise training workshops for its tutors and librarians on ILS pedagogy skills as a way of capacity building regarding their teaching skills.

- The Department of Library and Information Services should partner with the ICT Department in the construction of state of the art computer labs in all the 10 provinces. The aim of this will be to make the labs ideal for the teaching of practical ILS sessions.

- The ZOU should strike strategic partnerships with like-minded stakeholders with the intention of sharing knowledge regarding the teaching of the ILS programme in universities. The Zimbabwe Universities Library Consortium (ZULC) and the Zimbabwe Library Association are such groups that ZOU can form alliances with in order to deliver information literacy skills training.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the teaching of ILS has been embraced by almost all tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe including the ZOU. The Department of Library and Information Services & the Library & Information Services Unit (LIS) have been teaching ILS since 2009. The approaches to the teaching of the ILS programme must be coordinated to enrich the content of the two ILS programmes that are taught at the ZOU since both departments are from the same institution. The ZOU should further embrace the teaching of ILS programme in its Strategic Plan document.
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