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Information Literacy Instruction in Thai Higher Education

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Abstract

This research studied the situation of information literacy instruction (IL) in Thai higher education in terms of the responsible units, teaching patterns, course details and content, teaching and learning methods, learning assessment and evaluation, and the role of libraries in promoting IL instruction in universities. The data was collected via questionnaire, sent to 108 university administrators for academic affairs during the academic years 2010-2011. The findings indicated that 70.93% of universities offer IL as a taught course in four similar names. Most of the contents are in accordance with the standards for IL set by ALA and SCONUL. The course topics include selection of information sources and resources, information accessing and searching, and academic report writing. The course instructions use active learning, problem-based, and inquiry-based approaches. All universities assess and evaluate the student's learning outcomes from attendance, participation, and examination. With respect to libraries' roles, training in IL in various topics all through each academic year should be organized together with lectures on IL as a part of students' orientation session.

1. Introduction

Knowledge acquisition in the world of high capacity, advanced and rapidly growing information technology is easy. Information is available everywhere, and it is even more accessible through today's technology, enabling quick retrieval to personal computers. The problem, therefore, does not lie in inadequate information. On the contrary, it is due to its abundance. A person capable in acquiring knowledge

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requires an ability to respond effectively to information threats. The ability to catch up with information is substantial for successful academic achievement and self-learning [1].

Information literacy (IL) is an individual's ability or skill to respond to one's own need for information. Each individual's IL level is different from others. It can be measured from the approach and result of the person's management of information requirement. The Association of Colleges and Research Libraries (ACRL) of American Library Association classifies IL ability or skills of university students into 6 aspects: ability to become aware of the scope of the information one needs, ability to obtain access to information, ability to evaluate the information and its source, ability to link obtained information to previous experience, ability to achieve the required objectives from the use of information, and ability to understand and use information within the framework of ethics and law [2]. Universities in the U.S. rely on the IL standard of ACRL to develop and assess students' IL skills. It has been unanimously seen that IL is the foundation of life-long learning. It is the skill necessary for all fields, all learning environments, and all educational levels [2]. Higher education institutions in other countries, for example England, Australia, New Zealand have developed a standard of IL at the university level [3,4]. Universities all over the world have adopted the IL concept in student development activities. Thus, IL is not only the matter of librarians and the use of libraries, but also an essential issue for those currently involved in university education: university administrators, lecturers, librarians, information technologists, student development officers, and organizations related to students' professional development. They must understand and place importance on it as a component in students' quality development [1].

The Thai Higher Education Standard Qualifications 2009 of the Ministry of Education stipulates the following 5 aspects of graduates' learning outcomes: moral and ethics, knowledge, intellectual skills, interpersonal relationship skills and responsibility, numerical analysis skills, and communication and the use of information technology. It has been found that a number of qualities reflect information literate students at undergraduate level, i.e., (1) ability to search for facts, understand and assess data, concepts, new evidence from multi data sources and use the obtained data to solve problems and do other assignments on one's own; (2) ability to regularly use information technology to collect data, compute, interpret the meaning, and present information; (3) ability to efficiently communicate both orally and in written language, to select appropriate means of presentation for different audience; and (4) ability to learn continuously to develop oneself and his or her professional field [5]. Most universities see the importance of students' learning skills, perhaps owing to impact arising from the National Educational Act of 1999, which rules the principle of all students' ability to learn and develop themselves. Educational principle deems students as the most important and thus educational management is required to enable learners to naturally develop themselves to their fullest capacity [6]. Nevertheless, students' quality development of each university may emphasize different items. The concept applied in improving students' IL skills to enhance their life-long learning quality of each university may not be accepted nor promoted at all.

There are many ways to improve IL at the tertiary level. Spitzer et al. came up with 4 models, namely, training, integrating in a taught course, opening a course itself, and online teaching [7]. However, most universities are found to offer IL as a credit course, which may be in class or through e-learning. Besides, some universities hold a policy to integrate IL in various subjects [1]. In Thailand, IL instruction at an undergraduate level has become widespread and increasingly developed. IL is organized as one course in the programs of many universities. However, from the experiences of the researcher, who has had a chance to be on the board of experts considering undergraduate programs of many universities, it was found that some universities still do not place any importance on the development of information literacy skill of students. Some universities still integrate it as a self-study or in the library use course. Therefore, relevant personnel should be informed that the present context of the library and research has greatly changed.

The research study on IL instruction in Thai universities was conducted during the academic years 2010 and 2011. The researcher is an academic in information science who had the opportunity to be a university