



# Information literacy instruction in four Vietnamese university libraries

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**Abstract** This case study explored the perceptions of academic stakeholders about the development and delivery of information literacy (IL) programs in four universities, and identified elements necessary to establishing IL credit courses in Vietnamese higher education. The following research questions framed this study: 1) How do library administrators, instruction librarians, and faculty perceive the current implementation of information literacy instruction (ILI) programs for undergraduates studies in universities libraries in Vietnam? 2) What are the challenges to including IL as a credit course in the curriculum as perceived by library administrators, instruction librarians, and faculty? Respondents were purposefully recruited from four universities, including library administrators, instruction librarians, and faculty. Three online surveys were distributed to 537 individuals through Survey Monkey with 149 replies and a final receipt of 133 completed surveys. Interview and focus group data collection included 23 face-to-face interviews and nine focus groups. Findings showed IL is considered the domain of librarians and has not influenced Vietnamese campus culture. IL activities at four university libraries take the form of lectures, workshops, and basic IL skills modules. Few ILI activities are subject discipline-related. Respondents reported challenges to an ILI credit course revolve around the lasting impact of teacher-centered instruction and rote learning, misperceptions about the effect of IL on student learning outcomes, degree of support of IL by academic stakeholders, degree of faculty–librarian collaboration, and scarcity of resources. Recommendations are given for academic librarians in Vietnam implementing ILI programs and considering developing IL credit courses.

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## Introduction

Information literacy (IL) competencies are defined as “the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively”

(ALA, 1989). IL plays an important role in developing critical thinking and problem solving skills, and improving academic achievement through active learning approaches, information problem solving, and evaluating information. The

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Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *IL Competency Standards* claims IL is “common to all disciplines” and “forms the basis for lifelong learning” (ACRL, 2000, p. 2). IL competency extends learning beyond classroom settings by providing individuals with critical thinking skills they can apply in professional positions where information management is central, i.e., “Information literacy has a truly transformative effect, one that makes possible the acquisition of other skills necessary for 21st century life.” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007).

However, studies point out that students lack information-seeking skills and are unprepared for lifelong learning (Nahl & Harada, 1996; Rockman, 2004). The *Partnership for 21st Century Skills* (2007) identified a gap between what young people learn and what schools need to teach to prepare students for class assignments as well as careers in a global economy. Therefore, to prepare students for information demands inherent in personal, academic, and career life, they must acquire the ability to access information efficiently and effectively, evaluate information critically and competently, and use information accurately and creatively to make good decisions. One of the challenges facing libraries is teaching skills that help students keep current with developments in advanced technologies and exponential information growth throughout their lifetime. This may be more critical in emerging economies.

In Vietnam the 1986 *Doi Moi* policy, the reform and renovation period in the economy, established radical changes in socio-economic development, including education (Nguyen, 2006). The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) has required universities in Vietnam to modernize management, teaching, and learning methods (Nguyen, 2006). The implementation of a credit system (2006–2020) has been a major step in the instruction reform movement. One of the conditions for a successful credit system is transitioning from lecture and memorization approaches to active learning approaches (Dang, 2006; Lam, 2006). However, in Vietnamese higher education, pedagogy has relied on rote memorization and objective testing rather than problem solving and critical thinking (Kelly, 2000). The shift to a credit system requires critical changes in the curriculum and in teacher roles (Zjhra, 2008).

Research and professional practice show that IL plays a crucial role in improving student achievement, and therefore it is necessary to teach IL in all disciplines (Hollister, 2010; Rockman, 2004). However, recent studies show that little attention has been given to IL and to IL pedagogy for library science students in Southeast Asian countries in general (UNESCO, 2006), and particularly in Vietnam due to lack of leadership to promote IL competency for students (Nguyen, 2008; Pham, 2008). According to the report of a survey of school administrators, teachers, and librarians at a regional workshop, IL was included in extra-curricular activities taught as library orientation sessions; none of the participants reported their institutions had a written IL policy statement; and only one country reported IL was included in assessment (UNESCO, 2006). In Vietnam, teaching IL has not been integrated into university curricula. Pham (2008) emailed a survey to librarians and lecturers in seven educational institutions in Vietnam, and identified some major challenges to delivering IL to student populations, including poor quality IL curriculum, outdated library and information

science curriculum, and predominantly passive teaching and learning styles. In addition, administrative support for IL initiatives has been limited, collaboration is uncommon, and librarians lack expertise (Pham, 2008). As yet there have been no empirical studies on IL and student achievement, nor any on the perceptions of various stakeholders about IL programs in the region. Studies of ILI in Vietnam libraries are needed to obtain feedback from stakeholders including library administrators, librarians, and faculty who could play a useful role in the design, adoption, and implementation of ILI.

## Stakeholder perceptions of ILI

### Objectives

The objectives of this study were twofold. First, it was necessary to obtain the views of Vietnamese library administrators, instruction librarians, and faculty about existing ILI programs. Second, it was important to identify challenges to including IL as a credit course in order to develop useful recommendations.

### Research questions

The following research questions framed this study (Diep, 2011, p. 7):

- How do library administrators, instruction librarians, and faculty perceive the current implementation of information literacy instruction (ILI) programs for undergraduate studies in university libraries in Vietnam?
- What are the challenges to including information literacy (IL) as a credit course as perceived by library administrators, instruction librarians, and faculty?

### Method

Four purposefully selected Vietnam university libraries participated in this multiple case study, identified as Learning Resource Center A (LRC A), LRC B, LRC C, and LRC D. Funded by the U.S. non-government organization Atlantic Philanthropies, the LRC projects began in 2000 involving the design, construction, and development of large-scale library facilities in four universities to upgrade information technology infrastructure, enhanced teaching and learning facilities, and online information (Robinson & Huynh, 2006).

Respondents were purposefully recruited from the four universities, including library administrators, instruction librarians, and faculty. The researcher contacted IL librarians, obtained a list of recommended respondents from them, and invited only potential respondents. Survey instruments were distributed through Survey Monkey only to the ones who were willing to participate.

Table 1 shows the number of email invitations, email replies, and corresponding response rate for the survey respondents at four LRCs. There were 537 email invitations

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