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Developing Information Literate Librarians: A Study of LIS Academics Pedagogical Approaches in the Development of Information Literacy Competencies

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the teaching experiences of LIS educators in Iran to identify the contribution of their teaching to the development of IL competencies in LIS students. Taking an exploratory approach, the study used semi-structured interviews to gather the data. Using the ACRL standards as a framework, the fieldwork questions were designed around the five areas of IL competencies, viz. determining information needs, locating information, evaluating information, using information ethically, and using information for a specific purpose. The data was collected from 15 educators in 6 LIS departments in Iranian universities. IL activities at 6 universities take the form of lectures, workshops, and basic IL skills modules. Few IL activities are subject discipline related. They were asked to reflect on the IL competencies in the context of their teaching experiences to identify the contribution of their teaching to the development of each IL competency. A thematic approach was used to analyze the data. It was found that the LIS educators employ a variety of teaching approaches to transfer IL competencies. This includes getting students to find and select a topic, helping students obtaining their needed information and developing a query on their essay work, and so on.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary with the emergence of new information environments, tools, and technologies, information literacy (IL) has been highlighted as a necessity for librarians and information professionals (Campello & Abreu, 2005; Elmborg, 2006; Johnston & Webber, 2004; Andretta, cited in Virkus, 2003). According to Grassian and Kaplowitz (2009) librarians should be leaders in promoting IL activities. They have to be fully aware of the importance of IL as a concept, understand its relevance in contemporary societies and have to learn about the main aspects of teaching IL (Hebrang Grgić & Špiranec, 2013). In general, the library and information science (LIS) education has been involved in the development of information literacy (IL) for a long time. LIS professionals support a wide variety of users, from retrieving information, to organizing and simplifying massive datasets (Jin & Bouthillier, 2012). In other words, LIS has been seen to employ a wide variety of methods to help users of information skills to access the available knowledge and because of that LIS tends to be defined as a profession whose main concern is to deal with the information needs of its users (Juznic & Urbanija, 2003). Thus, we may say that LIS can serve as a

prelude to IL, and that IL completes LIS in a way of information use. IL should be treated as a new lens or an extension of traditional LIS because core IL skills would be essential for future information professionals. Therefore, LIS and IL could end up with having a synergistic relationship if they converge well.

Graduates of LIS programs are expected to be information literate and be able to impart those IL skills to their patrons. In order to do this, LIS educators must impart IL skills to their students. However, little is known about the pedagogical approaches used by LIS educators in developing those skills. There are many approaches to adapt IL to the LIS discipline which tend to integrate IL into the curriculum as part of the class. These approaches focus on teaching IL through a separate class or as an approach to learning to develop information literate librarians (Derakhshan & Singh, 2011). However, the best effort to develop information literate graduates is to make educators aware of pedagogical approaches (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2005).

To develop information literate librarians, there is a trend to help them maintain a lifelong learning attitude so that they are able to keep pace with the changing information environment (Foster, 2006; Virkus, 2003). The following approaches represent the characteristics of this view:

- Make them aware of information literacy as a concept;
- To become information literate themselves;
- Learn about key aspects of teaching information literacy.

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These approaches imply that the components of IL need to be embedded in the LIS education in order to develop information literate librarians; however, there is no clear approach in this regard. For example, although Virkus (2003) acknowledges the importance of developing information literate librarians, she does not deliver a guideline for teaching and embedding IL to facilitate and develop students' learning in a way that they can learn how to learn. In this regard, she stresses that LIS students need to understand IL holistically. She argues that IL as a base of lifelong learning could be a necessary component of LIS discipline. This is because of the focus of LIS in user education; it demands lifelong learners who are able to help others throughout their learning journey.

Despite the importance of teaching information literacy which has been widely acknowledged in professional literature (e.g. Diep, 2011; Koltay, 2008), "there is no evidence of mapping the research needed in the area of IL and LIS curriculum" (Blumer, Hügi, Bekavac, & Schneider, 2013; Virkus, 2007). The IL studies in Iran mainly focus on the level of IL competencies of students across some disciplines (Alishah Karami, Bakhtiar Zadeh, Khaje, & Safa, 2007; Miri & Cheshmeh Sohrabi, 2011; Mirzaei Ramandi, 2009), and not on the pedagogical aspects of IL, especially in the LIS discipline.

To fill this gap, the present study aims to investigate the pedagogical approaches used by the LIS academics in the LIS programs in Iran and to identify the way in which these pedagogies would contribute to the development of future information literate librarians. This paper presents findings from a PhD project conducted, particularly to address the following question:

- What approaches are taken by the LIS academics in Iran to support the development of the five main areas of IL competencies among LIS students, as future librarians?

To address the question, a module outline analysis of the 26 courses (specialized compulsory modules) from the LIS curriculum showed that the curriculum covers a 2-credit module (Basics of Information Literacy) which focuses on instructional models and learning theories of information literacy. Although IL competencies have not been explicitly addressed in the LIS curriculum, there are some modules, which contribute to the development of four areas of IL competencies in students (Table 1).

After presenting a review of the relevant literature, the methodology and methods employed for data collection and analysis are presented. This paper is based on an unpublished PhD dissertation, which provides further details of the study, including the research instruments and data collected.

Table 1
Courses which contribute to develop IL competencies.

IL competencies	Courses with IL competency elements
Determining information needs	- Methodology in Library and Information Science - Principles of Reference Services - Management of Periodicals - Special Reference Studies - General References Studies
Locating information	- Cataloging and Classification - Library Softwares - Information Technology and Communication - Information Databases
Evaluating information	- Cataloging and Classification - Collection Development and Acquisition - Management and Designing Information Centers and Library Web
Using information ethically	- Introduction to Science metric

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTEGRATING IL INTO LIS CURRICULA

While there was a high degree of IL activity, there was little consistency of approach and no agreed understanding of IL or how it might be integrated into the LIS curriculum. Drawing on the literature on IL in the LIS discipline, approaches to adapt IL to the LIS discipline tend to integrate IL into the curriculum as a part of the class that focuses on teaching IL – through a separate class or as an approach to learning.

To integrate IL into LIS curriculum, have to be fully aware of the importance of IL as a concept, understand its relevance in contemporary societies and have to learn about the main aspects of teaching IL (Hebrang Grgić & Špiranec, 2013). The components of IL need to be embedded in LIS education in order to develop lifelong learners; however, there is no clear approach in this regard. Virkus (2003) and Blumer et al. (2013), for example, although acknowledging the importance of IL in LIS discipline, do not deliver a guideline for teaching and embedding IL to facilitate and develop students' learning in a way that they can learn how to learn. In this regard, they stressed that LIS students need to understand IL holistically. They argue that IL as a base of lifelong learning could be a necessary component of LIS discipline. This is because of the focus of LIS in user education; it demands lifelong learners to facilitate others' learning.

PEDAGOGY OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Jacobs (2008) states pedagogy and information literacy are linked inextricably. Information literacy is both a common and an important learning activity with higher education (Budd, Elmborg, Lloyd, & Sundin, 2014). Limberg, Sundin, and Talja (2013) states that "information literacy can be approached as an object of teaching as well as an object of learning". They highlight that information literacy in librarianship appears particularly often as an object of teaching. The information literacy literature discusses how teaching styles impact significantly on obtaining the skills, arguing that when lectures focus on the pedagogy, students are more likely to engage in gaining skills. According to Webb and Powis (2004) the process of shaping the learning experience for students reflects this changed focus in the IL context. Some believe that guiding students properly to improve information literacy skills has an important link in the PBL teaching (Sun, Yao, He, Chen, & Wang, 2013).

Commentators increasingly highlight the importance of pedagogical approaches to develop information literate individuals (e.g. Virkus, 2007). Bruce (2004) argues that the skills and knowledge needed to deliver effective teaching and teaching experiences should have a crucial place in the educators' portfolio. Virkus (2003) goes further, noting that to fully develop information literate individuals, LIS students must be trained and qualified in information literacy to train others. She asserts that they need to become conversant with pedagogical issues and concepts of information literacy, although these are part of skills needed to function successfully as a LIS graduate.

Virkus (2007) explains that LIS graduates now need an understanding of IL, with teaching skills clustered in five main areas (determining information needs, locating information, evaluating information, using information ethically, and using information for specific purpose). Librarians and information professionals should combine the traditional skill set of librarianship with information literacy skills.

The pedagogical principles involve moving from understandings to applying strategies which fit the needs of specific contexts (Levy, 2005). Webb and Powis (2004) suggest a number of approaches to involve students with a variant of learning styles and also to clarify a rationale for the learning and providing feedback.

Integrating information literacy into the academic curriculum has been a core role for the universities for at least 10 years (Moselen & Wang, 2014). However, efforts do not always lead to the curricular integration of information literacy, and bringing information literacy

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