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Edgar Owira

The Aga Khan University, edgar.owira@aku.edu

Arnold Mwanzu

The Aga Khan University, arnold.mwanzu@aku.edu

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**Enhancing information access through information literacy programs: a case of Marist
International University College.**

by

Owira, Edgar Omondi *
The Aga Khan University, Kenya
edgar.owira@aku.edu

&

Arnold Mwanu
The Aga Khan University, Kenya

Abstract

Information literacy has been used successfully the world over as a strategy to improve access to information resources that usually cost a lot of money but, due to lack of awareness and skills of utilization, result in low or no usage at all. Most local institutions of higher learning have implemented programs that are either embedded in their curriculum or spontaneous to maximize usage. It is essential to assess or evaluate these programs' efficiency and effectiveness and use the feedback to plan for improvements. This study sought to assess and investigate the role of information literacy programs in enhancing information access in institutions of higher learning. The objectives were to examine students' perception of information literacy programs, determine the level of collaboration between the library staff and the faculty, find out the significant challenges encountered in the provision of information literacy programs, and suggest ways of addressing the challenges. The study used a descriptive design method, and the sample comprised 46 respondents made up of 42 students and four library staff from Marist International University College. The study used both questionnaires and interview guides as the data collection instruments. Significant findings of this study show that the students have a positive attitude towards Information Literacy programs. It was noted that there are adequate, relevant and up to date teaching and learning resources while instructional methods were found to be effective. The collaboration between faculty and librarians was also found to be conducive. The program faces many challenges, such as the non-inclusion of some categories of students, lack of training in teaching methods and lack of computer literacy skills among students and staff. The study recommends that library staff collaborate with the faculty, especially in developing and evaluating an acceptable curriculum. Teaching methodologies by the library staff should be improved by carrying out regular evaluations to find out their shortcomings and rectify them accordingly. The students should inculcate a positive attitude towards information literacy. Students should also acquire other related skills, such as computer literacy skills that are prerequisites for becoming a competent information literate person. The institutions of higher learning should be well equipped with adequate and up-to-date resources to support the IL curriculum.

Keywords: Information literacy; Information access; academic libraries; e-resources

Introduction

According to Bothma et al. (2014), information literacy can be defined as the ability to know when the information is needed, to be able to find the information, evaluate the information and use the information that has been found. The American Library Association (2010) defines information literacy as abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and can locate, evaluate, and effectively use the information required. ALA acknowledges that information literacy is increasingly important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources.

The institutions of higher learning in Kenya, who are some of the most significant consumers of this information, were forced to embrace information literacy instruction programs after realizing the inadequacies of the traditional library orientation and user education programs. Communication skills, another standard undergraduate unit introduced in the 1990s by many universities, although having a component known as library skills, was also not fully addressing the information needs to be created by emerging new technologies (King’ori et al. 2012).

By the year 2000, many universities and colleges had started grappling with the high cost of subscriptions to electronic resources that had become popular with students and faculty, mainly due to their high academic quality. In 2003, Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC) was founded to circumvent this problem. Its main objective was to enable a collective subscription to electronic resources to cope with the increasing cost of information resources. Through this consortium, member institutions could subscribe to several popular academic e-journals, e-books and e-databases. By 2015, KLISC had facilitated numerous training workshops geared toward sharpening library staff skills on how to deliver information literacy instructions to assist users in maximising the exploitation of electronic information resources.

The Commission for University Education (CUE) came up with new Information Literacy and Competency guidelines in 2014 (Commission for University Education (2014). The new guidelines stipulated that: The librarians, in partnership with the faculty, shall provide information and instruction to all users through a well-structured information literacy competency program; Universities Standards and Guidelines; The information literacy and competency program shall be integrated into all the

academic programs of the university under standard units at both undergraduate and post graduate levels; The library shall develop and implement the curriculum to meet the emerging information literacy needs of the students and faculty; The curriculum shall be reviewed every five years to ensure integration of new trends; Information literacy and competency programs shall be taught by librarians, and The library shall prepare an information literacy policy. Based on these standards and guidelines, every institution of higher learning is expected to implement information literacy programs and update them regularly.

Marist International University College (MIUC), an institution of higher learning with diploma and degree programs, is involved in research work that creates knowledge through education, teaching, and research activities. As such, the patrons of MIUC library need to be information literate so that they know how to access electronic scholarly information materials for research within the college to ensure that students and staff have easy access to electronic scholarly information materials. This can happen most effectively only if staff and students of MIUC can apply information literacy skills in their use of the information resources available.

The study's specific objectives were to examine the perception of MIUC students toward information literacy programs, determine the level of collaboration between the library staff and the faculty, and find out the significant challenges encountered in the provision of information literacy programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaboration between the Library Staff and the Faculty

For an information literacy program to be successful, a strong collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty in all aspects of the course is necessary Reed et al. (2007). The partnership should be in curricular development, assignment development, in-class teaching, and office hours for individual student development and assessment activities. The need for collaboration is reinforced by a study carried out by Reed et al. (2007) established that where such collaboration is strong, there are substantial increases in information literacy from this collaborative approach. Specifically, the faculty and librarians were found to feel optimistic about the collaborative experience as the integration of librarians into university courses has benefits in terms of increases in student information literacy and

increases in librarian knowledge of faculty expectations.

However, the collaboration between the library and the faculty is not always easy, as observed by West (2013). He noted that traditional library instruction is often completed with little collaboration between instructors and library staff. Usually, a teacher contacts the librarian and requests a session to help students complete a particular assignment. The librarian visits the class, teaches the skills that students will use for the specific assignment, and expresses how important it is for students to ask for help with research. These short Information Literacy sessions are one way for librarians to reach students with important information about how and why libraries are used. While lessons like this can be effective, it is difficult for the librarian to assess whether class activities improve student success in the course or future information-seeking endeavours (West, 2013).

According to the American Library Association (2000), incorporating information literacy across curricula, in all programs and services, and throughout the administrative life of the university requires the collaborative efforts of faculty, librarians, and administrators. The lecturers' roles include giving lectures, leading discussions and establishing the context for learning. The faculty also inspire students to explore the unknown, offer guidance on how best to fulfil information needs, and monitor student progress. Librarians coordinate the evaluation and selection of intellectual resources for programs and services; organize and maintain collections and many points of access to information; and provide instruction to students and faculty who seek information.

Perception of students towards information literacy programs

Students from institutions of higher learning are expected to independently carry out research and assignments in the course of their academic life. According to Aharony and Bronstein (2013), nowadays, as students become more and more dependent on the Web for their research needs, information-literacy skills are as cardinal as reading and writing. Hence, the ability to access, evaluate and use information is a prerequisite for such Students. However, their drive or motivation is of utmost importance to gain these skills successfully.

Franklin (2005) carried out a study on information literacy in the USA. He found that doctoral students find information literacy competencies necessary for a successful outcome of a research project or

course assignment. This implies that competencies in information literacy can determine the success or failure of a student in given research or academic assignment. Although this study helped understand the implications of information literacy programs, it was carried out in a different geographical environment and only targeted doctoral students and did not address the constraints facing information literacy programs.

Significant challenges encountered in the provision of information literacy

Kavulya (2003) identified the main barriers university libraries face in providing information literacy programs as the lack of financial and human resources and inadequate support by their parent organizations. In this regard, the administrators of these institutions are expected to provide these resources. Mugyabuso and Stilwell (2008) carried out a study on information literacy in Tanzania universities where they addressed challenges and potential opportunities. Their analysis identified the unavailability of resources as a significant problem that hinders the implementation of information literacy programs. There is also a failure on the part of librarians to push information literacy as being a function of the university library.

The shortage of computers for students to use to access resources has been identified as a significant problem. For instance, a study conducted by Kinengyere (2007) on the effect of information literacy on the utilization of electronic information resources in Uganda established a shortage of computers for all library users. This indicates that not all IL trainees can utilize the skills acquired. In addition, limited bandwidth affects many institutions resulting in poor Internet speeds.

Tilvawala et al. (2009) observe that the formulation of an information policy in Kenya is hampered by the lack of information skills, mainly among top policymakers, making the wrong choices regarding ICTs. They argue that Information policy should be supported by providing education, running literacy programs and training with the participation of all information stakeholders.

The digital divide has been defined as the gap between those people who have access to the new information and communication technologies and those who cannot (Murelli, 2002:2). The digital divide is still a significant challenge in many African countries due to the enormous costs of accessing information.

The Kenyan university libraries have been found to offer library orientation for new students in their first few weeks of reporting. This, however, has not been very effective due to the limited time given, poor timing and lack of realistic and achievable objectives. The thirty minutes or so allocated to groups of the new students does not offer adequate time to cover the necessary areas.

West (2013) observes that when librarians and faculty members combine their goals and teach toward achieving cohesiveness, including IL, the library and IL become an integral part of the institutional and student experience. The collaboration between librarians and faculty is necessary so that students have the best possible experience when searching and using information.

According to Yousef (2010), librarians and teaching faculty have many mutual goals and concerns. Both want students to understand better and respect books, journals, and other intellectual property. Both want to enhance student literacy, particularly information literacy and help students become writers, problem solvers, critical thinkers, and self-directed, lifelong Students. Lastly, both want to build a social and learning community on campus. Librarian-faculty relations are therefore essential since information literacy requires practical expertise. Yousef (2010), therefore, recommends that both librarians and faculty members be involved in designing relevant programs.

This study is hinged on the understanding that for the students to be efficient users of information resources, they need information literacy skills. However, information literacy programs are influenced by the collaboration between the library and the faculty, availability and adequacy of resources, perception of Students and the kind of instructional methods used to teach the program.

METHODOLOGY

Interview schedules were used to collect qualitative data, while the questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data. The library staff, faculty and staff were involved in data collection because they engaged in information literacy programs. The questionnaires used the Likert scale to collect and analyse the data, whereby the scale of 5 points was used to compute the means and standard deviations. The results were then presented in tables, graphs and charts as appropriate, with explanations in prose.

The study was conducted by distributing 48 questionnaires for administration, and 42 questionnaires were returned for analysis yielding a response rate of 87%, which was commendable and acceptable.

The response rate was achieved due to an elaborate mobilization strategy that included discussions with the library staff, students, administrators, and faculty staff. The questionnaires comprised both structured and semi-structured questions. The structured questions were meant to ease data analysis while the semi-structured questions were meant to help get detailed information for the study.

FINDINGS

Cooperation between Library Staff and Faculty

Figure 1 indicates that 82% of the respondents thought that library staff and faculty cooperation was conducive. Only 10% were of contrary opinion while 8% were undecided. This indicates that most respondents view the collaboration between library staff and faculty as conducive. These sentiments were shared by those lecturers interviewed who said that the cooperation is conducive. However, the lecturers suggested that they both need to be involved in designing the curriculum to avoid duplication of efforts, especially in communication skills and computer literacy. These findings are, however, contradicted by those of Dadzie (2007), who observed that problems of shortage of professional staff to handle large numbers of users, inadequate time allocated for user education, and lack of cooperation between library staff and faculty hindered the effective implementation of user education programmes in the libraries of Southern African countries. The study also noted that in Nigeria, user education in universities was found to be uncoordinated, purely introductory and non-examinable. This scenario is replicated in many universities and other educational institutions across Africa, resulting in grossly underutilization of libraries' meagre information resources.

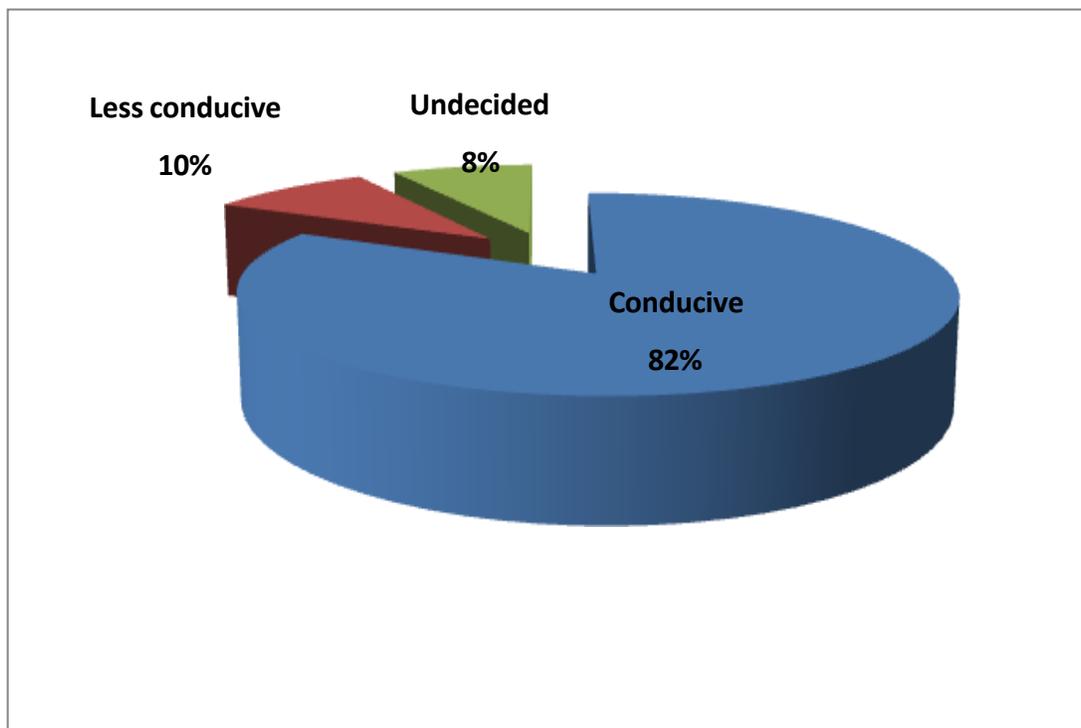


Figure 1: Cooperation between library and faculty

Relationships between Lecturers and Library Staff

Respondents were asked whether the working relationship between lecturers and library staff was good. 50% agreed, 45% strongly agreed, and 5% disagreed. Hence, the study observes an agreement among respondents that the working relationship between lecturers and library staff was good. These findings are supported by those of Ranaweera (2007) recommends that information literacy programmes need to be implemented mainly by the library staff in schools, universities, public and other libraries to achieve library goals and to convert their users into lifelong learners and critical thinkers. However, Ranaweera noted that these programmes would be more successful if the library staff could enlist the cooperation of the teaching and administrative staff.

IL Curriculum was developed by both librarians and lecturers

Table 1 shows that 43% (18) of the respondents agreed that the Information Literacy program was developed by both librarians and lecturers, 21% (9) strongly agreed, 5% (2) strongly disagreed, and 2% (1) disagreed while 26% (11) undecided. The majority, therefore, agreed that the Information

Literacy program was developed by both librarians and lecturers.

Table 1: IL Curriculum Development

	Responses	Frequency	Percent
	Strongly Agree	9	21.4
	Agree	18	42.9
	Undecided	11	26.2
	Disagree	1	2.4
	Strongly disagree	2	4.8
	Total	41	97.6
Missing	System	1	2.4
	Total	42	100.0

Relevancy of IL Resources

When the respondents were told to rate the statement that IL resources available are irrelevant, 41% strongly disagreed, 26% disagreed, and 14% were undecided. Those who agreed were 14%, and those who strongly agreed were 5%. Going by the majority, it is clear that the available IL resources are relevant to the course. However, because most of the available resources are e-resources, some resources from sources such as Wikipedia were considered untrustworthy.

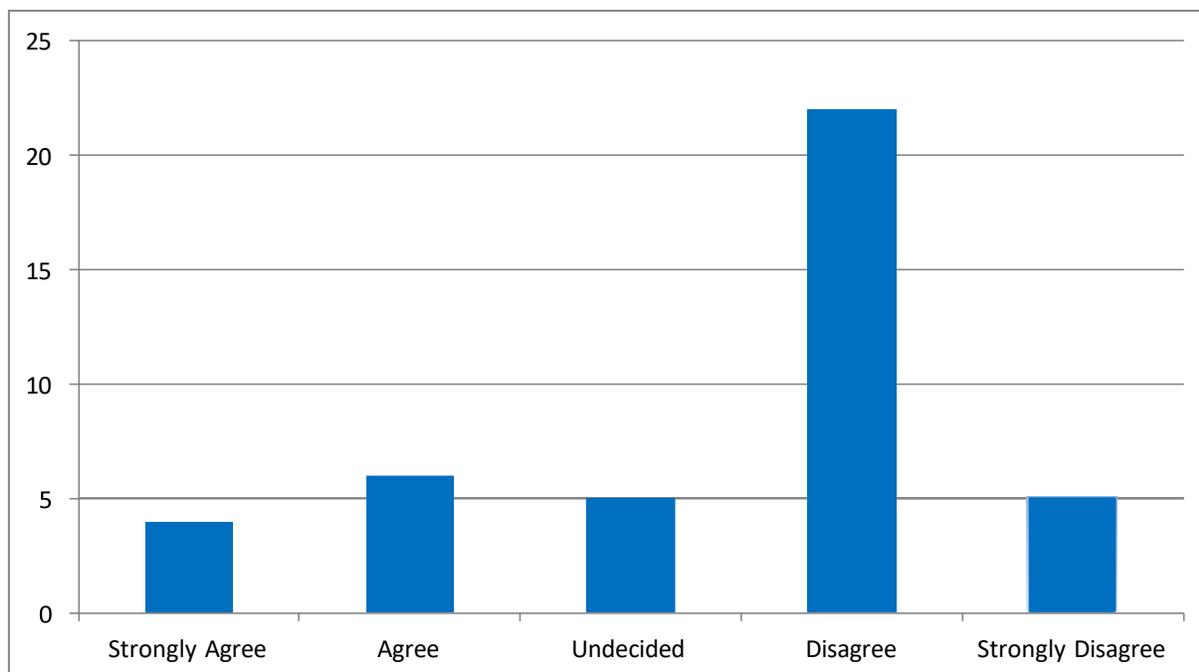


Figure 2: Relevancy of the Resources

The interest of Students in IL

When the respondents were asked whether most of the students show interest in Information Literacy, 43% of the respondents agreed, 26% agreed, and 12% were non-committal. However, 17% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed. Hence, most of the respondents agreed that most of the students show a lot of interest in Information Literacy. However, the staff interviewed observed that the targeted student category has little interest. In contrast, although most lecturers are interested in Information Literacy programs, they were reported to be too engaged and hence do not find adequate time for such programs. It was noted that lecturers could play an important role in encouraging students to be more involved in information literacy programs.

Students' attitudes toward IL

On whether most Students have a negative attitude towards the IL program, 48% of the respondents disagreed, and 17% strongly disagreed. Those undecided were 14%, while those who agreed were 19%, and those who strongly agreed were 2%. This implies that most Students have a positive attitude towards information Literacy programs.

Methods used to teach IL are effective.

On whether methods used to teach IL are effective, 60% agreed, and 21% strongly agreed, while 7% strongly disagreed and 5% disagreed, while 7% were undecided. Going by the majority, it was therefore evident that methods used to teach Information Literacy were adequate. In support of these findings were the lecturers who noted that the methods are effective based on assessments and evaluations done so far. However, most librarians are not trained as teachers; hence, they are likely to use trial and error methods due to the uncertainties involved. The methods used were also described as too theoretical, which denies students the chance to grasp the practical application of the skills gained.

Table 2: Effectiveness of Teaching Methods

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	9	21.4
Agree	25	59.5
Undecided	3	7.1
Disagree	2	4.8
Strongly disagree	3	7.1
Total	42	100.0

Knowledgeable and supportive Instructors

When asked about the statement that instructors are not knowledgeable, 57% disagreed, 24% strongly disagreed, and 14% were undecided. Those who strongly agreed were 3%, and those who agreed were 2%. This is an indication that most instructors are knowledgeable in information literacy. On whether instructors support students, 64% of the respondents agreed, 24% strongly agreed, while 7% were undecided, and 5% disagreed. Hence, most of the respondents support the opinion that instructors are supportive of Students.

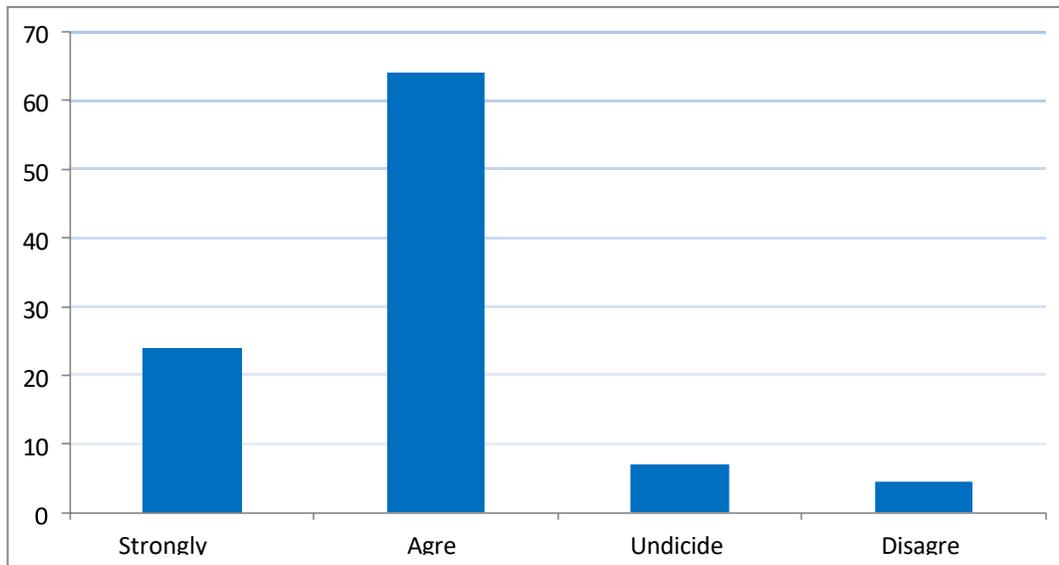


Figure 3: Supportive Instructors

Teaching Methodologies

When asked whether teaching methodologies are poor, 48% disagreed, and 29% strongly disagreed, while 12% were undecided and 12% agreed. This indicates that the teaching methods applied in Information Literacy programs are effective.

Collaboration between Faculty and the Librarians

When told that the collaboration between faculty and librarians is poor, 49% disagreed, 22% strongly disagreed, while 14% agreed, 5% strongly agreed, and 10% were undecided. This implies that collaboration between faculty and librarians is conducive.

Support from Administrators

When asked whether support for IL from the administrators is poor, 17 (41%) disagreed, 14 (33%) strongly disagreed, and 5 (12%) were undecided. Those who agreed were 4 (10%), and 2 (5%) strongly agreed. Therefore, this implies strong support for the IL program from the administrators.

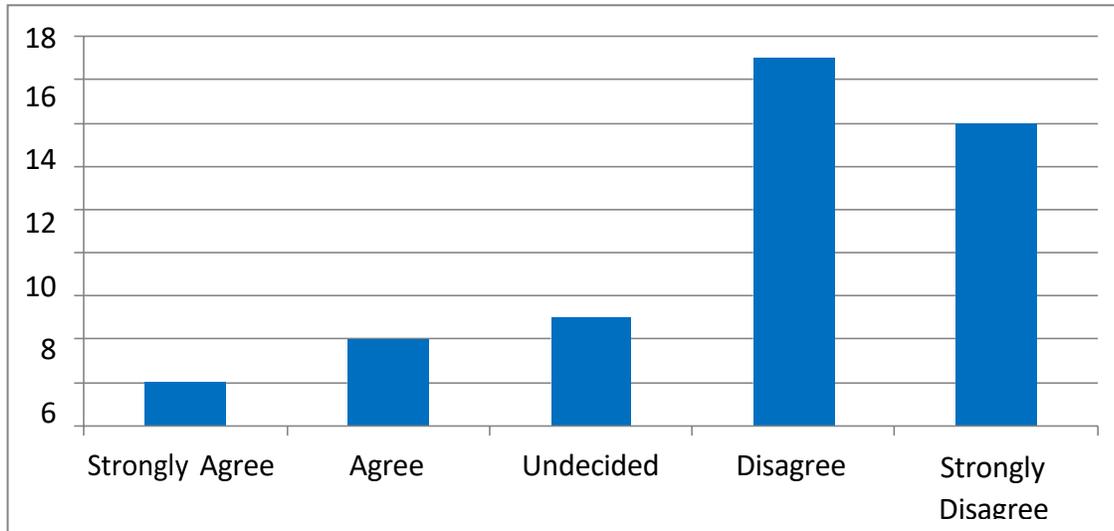


Figure 4: Support from Administrators

Interest in Information Literacy Skills

When told that most students have no interest in IL skills, 43% disagreed, 19% strongly disagreed, 17% were undecided, 17% agreed, and 5% strongly agreed. This shows that most students have an interest in Information Literacy Programs.

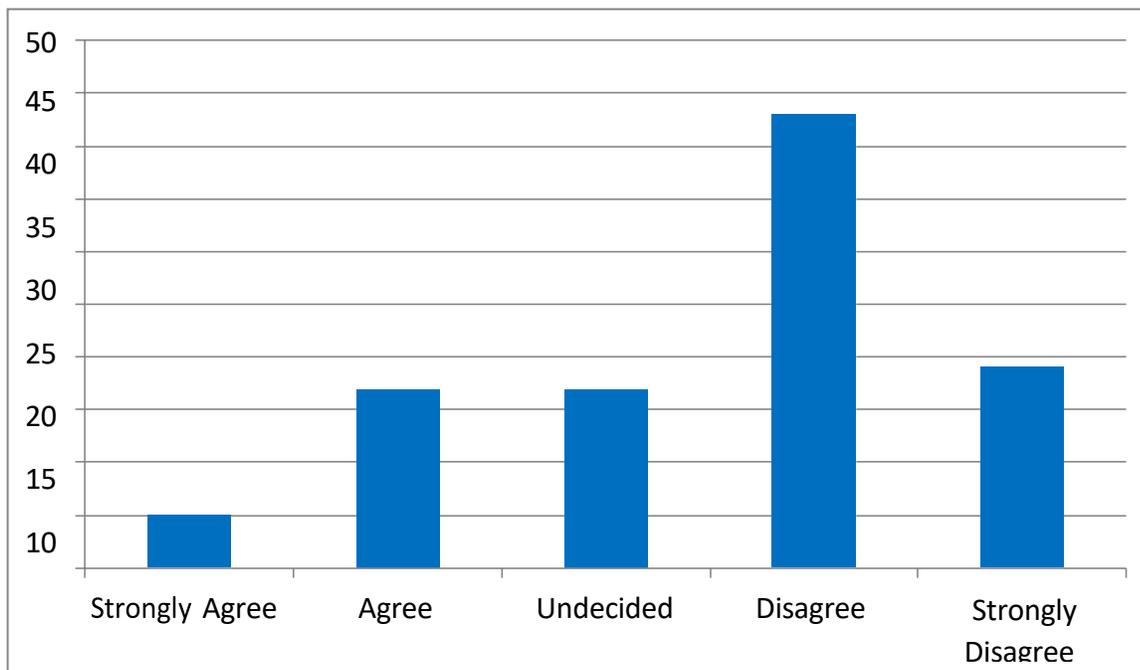


Figure 5: Interest in IL Skills

Significant challenges facing IL Programs

When asked to share their opinions on the significant challenges facing information literacy programs, the respondents gave varied answers. They ranged from lack of adequate teaching and learning resources to lack of awareness and appreciation about the program to the negative attitude towards the program among students and staff. The fact that librarians have not been trained to teach is also a handicap while targeting only one section of the student population (those doing bridging and certificate courses) while ignoring other potential groups like those taking degree and diploma courses. The course was newly introduced; hence, teething problems are yet to be overcome. There is also the poor collaboration between the library staff and faculty members. Lack of computer literacy skills among students and staff was also found to hamper proper course delivery as Information Literacy requires some knowledge in computer literacy.

On the students' perception of Information Literacy, the study found that most students show interest. They were also found to have a positive attitude towards information Literacy programs. This was also reinforced because most students could do their assignments on time and satisfactorily.

The study established that the collaboration between faculty and librarians can be described as conducive. For instance, this collaboration was found to have enabled the development of the information literacy program curriculum by both librarians and lecturers. The Information Literacy program was also found to receive strong support from the management as administrators were found to support librarians in providing information literacy.

The study identified several major challenges facing information literacy programs. They included a lack of adequate teaching and learning resources, a lack of awareness and appreciation of the program and a negative attitude towards it among students and staff. Librarians being handed a teaching job without prerequisite training was also a drawback. The program targeted only one segment of the student population, therefore denying others the opportunity to acquire information literacy skills. Lack of computer literacy skills among students and staff was also found to hamper proper course delivery as Information Literacy requires some knowledge in computer literacy.

Conclusion

The study noted that the students have a positive attitude towards Information Literacy programs. It was also established that there are adequate, relevant, and up to date teaching and learning resources while effective instructional methods. Similarly, it was noted that collaboration between faculty and librarians is conducive. However, the program is also faced with a myriad of challenges, such as the non-inclusion of some categories of students, lack of training in teaching methods and lack of computer literacy skills among students and staff.

Recommendations

The study recommends that all the stakeholders in the institutions of higher learning need to join hands to ensure that there is harmony in the provision of Information Literacy Programs. Therefore, the study recommends that library staff reach out to the faculty whenever the need arises to improve the information literacy program. For instance, they should collaboratively work together to develop an acceptable curriculum. The library staff should improve their teaching methodologies by conducting regular evaluations to find out and rectify their shortcomings.

The faculty should be involved in the preparation of the IL curriculum. Students should be inculcating a positive attitude towards information literacy. They should also acquire other related skills such as computer literacy skills that are prerequisites for becoming a competent information literate person. The institutions should be well equipped with adequate and up-to-date resources to support IL.

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