

Information Literacy Skills among Postgraduate Students: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract

Information literacy has emerged as a core competency for students in higher education in the digital age. The ability to identify information needs, locate relevant resources, evaluate credibility, use information ethically, and acknowledge sources appropriately is essential for academic success and lifelong learning. The present study investigates the level of information literacy skills among postgraduate students, with special reference to second-year students of the Botany Department. Using a descriptive survey method and a structured questionnaire based on ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards, data were collected from 30 respondents. The findings reveal that while students show moderate awareness in identifying information needs and differentiating between scholarly and popular sources, significant gaps exist in areas such as locating library resources, citation practices, understanding peer review, and ethical use of information. The study highlights the urgent need for structured and continuous information literacy programs through collaborative efforts of librarians and faculty.

Keywords: Information Literacy, Postgraduate Students, Library Use, Research Skills, Citation, Plagiarism

1. Introduction

The concept of information literacy was first introduced by Paul Zurkowski in 1974 to describe the ability of individuals to use information tools and primary sources effectively for problem-solving. Since then, information literacy has evolved into a critical skill set required to navigate the rapidly expanding information environment. In the present digital era, mere literacy—the ability to read and write—is insufficient. Students must possess advanced competencies to access, evaluate, and ethically use information from both print and electronic sources.

Information literacy plays a vital role in higher education, particularly for postgraduate students who are expected to engage in research, seminars, and scholarly writing. Without adequate information literacy skills, students may struggle to identify reliable sources, apply appropriate research methods, and avoid unethical practices such as plagiarism.

2. Concept and Definitions of Information Literacy

Information literacy refers to a combination of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable individuals to recognize information needs and to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. The American Library Association (1989) defines information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively. Similarly, CILIP (2018) emphasizes critical thinking and balanced judgment in the use of information.

3. Need for the Study

Postgraduate students require information for academic assignments, self-learning, seminars, and research activities. However, the abundance of digital information, much of which is unfiltered and unreliable, makes it difficult for students to identify authentic and current sources. The study is therefore necessary to assess the existing level of information literacy skills among students and to identify areas requiring intervention.

4. Statement of the Problem

Despite access to vast information resources, many students lack the skills required to use them effectively. The study seeks to answer the following questions: -

1. What is the level of awareness of information literacy among students?
2. Are students able to locate and access information sources effectively?
3. Can students differentiate between current and outdated information?
4. Do students understand ethical and legal use of information?
5. Are students able to distinguish between scholarly and popular sources?

5. Objectives of the Study

- To assess the level of awareness of information literacy among students.
- To evaluate students' ability to locate and access information resources.
- To examine students' skills in identifying current and authentic information.
- To analyze students' understanding of citation, plagiarism, and ethical use of information.

6. Hypotheses

- Most students are not able to correctly identify and locate information sources in the library.
- Most students are not aware of legal and ethical use of information.
- An average number of students are able to identify citation types correctly.

7. Scope and Limitations

The study is limited to second-year postgraduate students of the Botany Department. First-year students, research scholars, faculty members, and non-teaching staff were excluded from the study. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the selected group.

8. Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive survey method. A structured questionnaire based on the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education was used as the data collection tool. The questionnaire was administered to 40 students, out of which 30 responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 75%. The collected data were analyzed using simple percentage analysis.

9. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, mainly frequency counts and percentages. The results are presented in the form of tables to ensure clarity and ease of interpretation, following standard international journal presentation norms.

Table 1: Response Rate of the Questionnaire

Gender	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Received	Response Rate
Male	10	6	60%
Female	30	24	80%
Total	40	30	75%

Table 1 shows that out of 40 questionnaires distributed, 30 were returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 75%, which is considered adequate for descriptive studies.

Table 2: Purpose of Information Need among Students

Purpose	Number of Students	Percentage
Completing assignments	6	20%
Updating self-knowledge	24	80%
Preparing seminars	0	0%
Conducting research	0	0%
Total	30	100%

From the above table No.2.,it can be interpreted that out of 30 students 6(20%)need information to complete assignment given by the teachers; 24 (80%) students need to update self-knowledge; and none i.e.0% needed information to conduct research and need to prepare for seminar.

It is clear that 24 (80%) students need information to update self-knowledge which is good percentage; 6(20%) needed to complete the assignment and none i.e.(0%) needed information to prepare seminar and to conduct research. This shows there is unawareness about research and about seminar. Since respondents are second year students they have research activities and seminars in their curriculum but they don't have need of information. Their information needs are academic and study oriented like completion of assignment and to update self-knowledge

Table 3: Tools Used to Find Information in the Library

Tool	Responses	Percentage
OPAC	8	27%
Index	1	3%
Library Professional	1	3%
Subject Teacher	1	3%
All of the above	19	64%
Total	30	100%

From the above table No. 5. It is evident that out of 30 respondent 8 (27%) are literate with the exact tool which could be used for finding the document from the library as they have opted OPAC. Whereas 1(3%) respondent opted for an Index; 1 (3%) opted for ask your subject teacher; 1 (3%) respondent opted library professionals; 19(63%) employ all the earlier mentioned tools to find the document in the Library.

It is clear that only 8 (27%) respondents are literate in using the exact tool for finding the information from the library; whereas 22 (73%) are not aware as they are taking the help of library professionals and asking subject teachers and index and using all the earlier mentioned tools to find the information in the library.

This finding disapproves the hypothesis no. 1. i.e. “Most of the students are able to identify and locate information sources in the library”

Table 4: Ability to Identify Scholarly Sources

Source Type	Correct Identification	Percentage
India Today	0	0%
Journal of plant production science	25	83%
India Yearbook	2	7%
Indian National Bibliography	3	10%
Total	30	100%

Libraries provide various types of materials ranging from scholarly to popular material like treatise monograph, advanced documents, theses dissertation, encyclopedias, serials, popular magazines for various purposes. Students to utilize these sources should know its specification and special features and accordingly question was asked to check whether students can find authentic Information on the topic “Neural Networks” in sources like popular magazine, Year book, Journal of Computer and System Indian National Bibliography and responses received are tabulated as below in table no. 4

From table no.4., it is evident that out of 30 respondents 25 (83%) are information literate as they choose a journal named Journal of plant production science to search authentic information on the topic “Mitochondria”;while 2 (7%) opted for India Yearbook; 3 (10%) opted for Indian National Bibliography and none opted for popular magazine India Today.

It is clear that 25 (83%) are information literate as they choose a journal named Journal of plant production science to search authentic information on the topic ‘Mitochondria’; while five (17%) are information illiterate as they choose popular source for information.

Table 5: Awareness of Citation and Plagiarism

Aspect	Correct Responses	Percentage
Identification of citation type	25	84%
Understanding of plagiarism	21	70%
Knowledge of need for citation	2	6%

From the table No. 5., I asked 3 questions about the identification of citation type, Need for citation, Quotation marks and Plagiarism. As per the response received it is clear that despite reasonable awareness of plagiarism, students showed limited understanding of the ethical purpose of citation.

11. Suggestions

- Information literacy programs should be integrated into the curriculum.
- Librarians and faculty members should collaborate to conduct regular orientation and training sessions.
- Students should receive hands-on training in using OPAC, databases, and citation tools.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on research ethics, citation practices, and plagiarism avoidance.

12. Areas for Further Research

- Design and implementation of subject-specific information literacy programs.
- Comparative studies of different instructional methods for information literacy.
- Development of online and MOOC-based information literacy modules.

13. Conclusion

Information literacy is a crucial competency for postgraduate students in the contemporary academic environment. The present study reveals that while students possess basic awareness, significant gaps remain in advanced research and ethical information use skills. A well-structured, continuous, and collaborative information literacy program involving librarians, faculty, and policy-makers is essential. Strengthening information literacy will empower students to become confident researchers and responsible users of information in the knowledge society.

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