

Introducing Information Literacy as a Credit Course for First Year Students at UD Some Reflections

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Background of the Study

A comprehensive definition of IL by Johnston and Webber (2003) is quoted here:

"Information literacy is the adoption of appropriate information behavior to obtain, through whatever channel or medium, information well fitted to information needs, together with critical awareness of the importance of wise and ethical use of information in society".

Owusu-Ansah (2003) believes that as learning is multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time, so **special approaches should be used for promoting IL among students, faculty, and administrators** of colleges and universities.

Several studies have shown that lack of IL is partly the cause of underutilization of existing information and communication technologies (ICTs), and information resources. Therefore, **now the libraries are realizing their role and are struggling to respond to these challenges** (Baro, Endouware, & Ubogu, 2011; Walker, 2006).

This was also the background drive for introducing the **2 credit hrs IL Course** for the Preparatory/First Year Students at University of Dammam, KSA since last academic year (2013-2014).

Objectives

This paper reports the **students' feedback about the current practices of teaching IL as a credit course at UD**. The aim is self analysis and drawing the future directions in the light of findings.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- 1) share the experience of introducing the IL as a credit course to the first year students at UD and to review its initial outcomes;
- 2) find out the students' opinion about this course and its impact/utilization in other courses of study;
- 3) review the problems encountered and discrepancies found in the course;
- 4) recommend some revisions for the coming year course in the light of this experience.

Methods

To achieve these objectives, unique quantitative and qualitative techniques of data gathering, such as **literature review, questionnaire survey, interviews,** and **personal observations** were employed, analyzed, and reported.

Results

(Anonymous Feedback Survey)

Table-1. Students' Satisfaction with the Course

Sr.	Are you satisfied with your experience:	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
1	during this course	1.51	2.00	2	1.146
2	what you learnt from the course	1.62	2.00	3	1.255
3	time/duration of library related assignments	1.24	1.00	1	1.164
4	teaching style and explanations	1.35	1.00	1	1.230

Scale: Highly Satisfied= 3, Satisfied= 2, To some extent satisfied= 1, Not satisfied at all= 0

Note: The entire course was not taught by information professionals, they only taught a few sessions of the course.

Table-2. Students' Opinion About Strengths of the Course

Sr.	What were the strengths of this course-	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
1	Guidance during assignments	2.51	3.00	2	1.216
2	Relevant contents taught	2.50	3.00	1	1.216
3	Explanation of concepts i.e., data/information/knowledge	2.62	3.00	4	1.299
4	Types of information sources taught	2.65	3.00	3	1.207
5	Assignments	2.27	2.00	2	1.097
6	Instructions about citation management	2.41	2.00	2	1.189
7	searching techniques and tips	2.54	3.00	4	1.238

Scale: Excellent= 4, **Good**= 3, **Fair**= 2, Poor= 1

Table-3. Other Comments About the Course

Sr.	Comments about the Course	Frequency	Percent
	Good learning experience	5	29.4%
	Assignments were difficult and time consuming	4	23.5%
	More time should be given for library part classes	3	17.6%
	The course should be optional	2	11.8%
	It should be taught in computer lab	2	11.8%
	It should not be started in middle of the year or suddenly	1	5.9%
	Total	17	100%

Interviews

*[Semi structured interview of 5 students
(group leader)]*

The interviewed students expressed that:

- The **course contents were very rich**, so it was difficult to cope up with these contents in such a short time (n= 5);
- The course was started all of a sudden in the second term. In such situation, **the course should be optional** (n= 1);
- The **entire course should be taught by information professionals** not just few sessions (n= 3);
- Great learning, such as **searching techniques, literature review, citation management with EndNote** and so on (n= 5);

- More time and practice is needed for this type of course and related assignments (n= 3);
- The course should be taught in the computer lab with hands on practice experience (n= 2);
- In the beginning, only searching techniques should be taught and then literature review can be taught in other term (n= 1);
- However, it was a good learning experience. (n= 5)

Findings and Reflections

For the purpose of reflecting back, the definition of Johnston and Webber (2003) is re-quoted here:

"Information literacy is the adoption of appropriate information behavior to obtain, through whatever channel or medium, information well fitted to information needs, together with critical awareness of the importance of wise and ethical use of information in society".

Adoption of appropriate information behavior

A deliberate effort was made to develop the appropriate information behavior among students. A motivation for becoming the information literate was tried to rouse among the students during the initial lectures. The students were taught the difference between data, information, and knowledge with practical examples from real life. They were also taught about different types of information sources. The Students' satisfaction with the course and what they have learnt from the course confirms this claim; however, they suggested to reduce the theoretical part.

Obtaining the information well fitted to information needs

The students were taught how to search the **print and online information sources specific to their information needs**. They were given practical assignments related to searching the literature on a particular topic from the library and online databases. A focus was given mainly on the online information resources subscribed by UD and search techniques for hunting the treasure of online information resources. The **use of advanced searching techniques such as Boolean operators, range and phrased search** etc were also taught to help the students in finding the information well fitted to their information needs. The **students also admired the value of this learning experience**.

Critical awareness of the importance of wise and ethical use of information in society

This part of the course can be divided in two parts, i.e., **avoiding the plagiarism** and **citing the references**.

- The first part remained less focused, though a basic introduction of the plagiarism was given; however, the practical use of plagiarism software such as Turn-it-in could not be taught due to some technical reasons.
- On the other hand, the **students got good skill of citation management** with the help of EndNote Online version. They were able to complete their assignments with proper in text citations and references at the end.
- **Wise use of information is a long process** and this skill will be developed gradually as they will keep on working with such activities.
- The students admired that **the use of citation management software and other skills learnt also helped in their other courses** and have enhanced the quality of their work. A visible change in quality of work/assignments was also reported to the researcher (as a director of female libraries) by few faculty members who were teaching other courses to these students.

Conclusions

The findings show that students were **overall satisfied** with their learning experience during this course; however, **majority of them found the course contents difficult to grasp within one semester**. The students mentioned that they had learnt a lot through these practical assignments and the skills learnt in this course had also **supported their other assignments for other subjects**.

Recommendations

- In the light of overall feedback and personal experience, the researcher explored that **the course was more system centered rather than user centered**. Due to this reason, it requires more rigor and vigor to make its objectives achievable.
- It is important to **re-plan the course from scratch**.
- The course **should be divided in three levels of difficulty**. only one level should be introduced in one semester.
- More time should be allocated** for explaining and then completing the library related assignments.
- The whole **course should be taught by the information professionals** to get the real benefits of the course.

*Thanks for your
patience*

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