

Empowering 8[®] in practice: information literacy programme for law undergraduates revisited

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The purpose of this paper is to review an information literacy programme offered for undergraduates in a Faculty of Law in Sri Lanka. Constructive Alignment Theory of Biggs (2002) and the Empowering 8[®] Information Literacy Model were used to design the programme. Effectiveness of the programme was measured by comparing the pre and post test marks of the students, and the feedback of the students and staff. It was determined that by following the programme, the students received declarative knowledge on a variety of tools and techniques required to become successful in an academic environment. Library and faculty members gained first hand insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the information usage of the students and understanding the reasons for the weaknesses so that they could address the issues appropriately. It also determined that, several critical success factors, other than an appropriate curriculum, are essential for an IL programme to thrive. The programme is unique since it is the first evident IL programme designed and delivered in Sri Lanka using an IL model.

Keywords: Empowering 8[®]; Information literacy; Sri Lanka; Law students; First-year undergraduates

Introduction

In Sri Lanka, a wide disparity in the educational facilities and exposure to libraries and information resources exist across the country. Students with these different exposures and experiences have to study on a common ground when they enter the universities, and because of their prior learning experiences, variation exists in adapting to the higher education environment, especially among rural children. Those who enter the university with less experience in information use need extra support from the library staff, to reap the full benefits of the advanced information resources available in the university library. To fulfill this need, the authors designed an Information Literacy programme and implemented it initially for the Law undergraduates of University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and this paper reflects on the critical success factors.

Review of the Sri Lankan LIS literature revealed that, information literacy writings have been emerging from 2002 onwards and the thematic representation of these works is limited to three areas.

Introduction to and significance of information literacy

Wijetunge¹, Ranasinghe² and Ranaweera³ have discussed the need for information literacy in Sri Lanka

and made several recommendations for the promotion of the concept among the librarians and in the national context. Jayatissa⁴ comments that the first information literacy initiative in Sri Lanka could be traced back to the international workshop conducted by the National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS) with the support of the IFLA/ALP in 2004 in which Empowering 8[®] was formulated. Wijetunge and Alahakoon⁵ discuss the emergence of Empowering 8[®], an information literacy model that emerged in Sri Lanka at this international workshop. All this literature is related to university libraries and it is evident that information literacy in other types of libraries is yet to be represented.

User education or information literacy programmes offered by various universities

Several authors elaborate several programmes offered by Sri Lankan universities and discuss the objectives of offering the programmes, course contents, duration, assessment and the participant feedbacks of the programmes.⁶⁻⁹

Assessment of programmes offered by the university libraries

Ranasinghe and Siriwardena¹⁰ and Ranaweera¹¹ critiquing the programmes offered by the universities

as a whole, comment that the programmes do not satisfy the user needs and hence they need to be improved. A noticeable characteristic of the programmes mentioned in these papers is that some of them are not formal information literacy programmes but library orientation programmes. Gunasekera¹², Hindagolla¹³, Hindagolla¹⁴, and Somaratne¹⁵ assess the user attitudes towards the services offered by specific libraries. Damayanthi²¹, Dharmaratne¹⁷ and Millawithanachchi¹⁸ specifically comment about the use of e-resources offered by the libraries and conclude that the training offered by the libraries is not adequate and therefore the e-resources are not exploited to the maximum by the undergraduates. One detailed assessment of the existing information skills of the undergraduates in Sri Lanka by Seneviratne and Wickramasinghe¹⁹ is recorded in the literature. They have surveyed a sample of 918 undergraduates using a test, which assessed eight information literacy skills across four standards using the information literacy standards formulated by the American College and Research Libraries²⁰ and the skills set formulated by Project SAILS²¹. The authors have established that the skills of undergraduates need to be improved through more formal information literacy programmes.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were:

- To reflect on the development process of the information literacy programme for law students,
- To revisit on the educational theories which underpinned the design and delivery of the programme and
- To identify the critical factors which make the delivery and implementation of information literacy programme successful.

Methodology

Biggs²² recognized four major steps in aligning a course: defining the intended outcomes (the objectives), choosing teaching/learning activities likely to lead to attaining the objectives, assessing students' learning outcomes to see how well they match what was intended and arriving at a final grade. Based on these four steps, the curriculum objectives were identified according to the needs of the Deans. Then the teaching / learning activities and the corresponding assessments were designed.

The curriculum was developed as a framework which can be filled with the subject related contents so that it can be adopted for social science, and humanities as well as science undergraduates. Faculty of Medicine was not considered, because their requirements significantly differ from other faculties. The programme was to be delivered using an assignment topic chosen jointly by the library and teaching staff. It was expected that, when the students actively engage in learning with a goal of completing the assignment, the skills introduced could be perceived in the appropriate contexts generating enthusiasm among the students rather than offering the modules in isolation to their academic work.

The second semester of the first year was considered as the ideal time for the programme to be offered because by that time the students have settled down in their hostels, got over the cultural shocks (at least to some extent) of moving from school and family environments to the university environment where they suddenly become independent adults. By this time they have completed their induction programme in IT, which provides the basic IT skills, had a flavor of assignment writing in the university and have gained initial experiences in using the library resources. Many of them have also realised by this time that, they have difficulties in using some of the resources and some guidance in using and integrating the information into their assignments would be beneficial for them. Experience has proved to the library staff that the orientation offered at the very beginning of the academic year is less effective because the students are not aware of the gravity of their information needs at this stage; hence they are either absent or pay less attention to the content delivered. Previous studies also have proved that adults learn best when they are actively engaged in learning with a specific motivation.²³⁻²⁴

The Faculty Board of the Faculty of Law approved the proposed programme, however due to time limitations and coverage in other modules, only nine topics (given below) fitting in to the Identify, Explore and Select stages of Empowering 8[®] were selected to be offered.

Identify

1. How to write successful assignments in the faculty of law – I Types of assignments given in the faculty, objectives of these assignments, their expected learning outcomes, weight of

the marks given to assignments in a particular subject, parts of assignments (Abstracts, introduction, body, conclusion, references, format of submission and deadlines etc.), significance of reading and information gathering for successful assignment writing.

2. How to write successful assignments in the Faculty of Law– II

Use of brain storming and mind mapping techniques to analyse the assignment topic

Explore

3. Understanding your library

Introduction to the library in general (including rules and regulations)

Introduction to the specific material relevant to the faculty (books, Journals and E-Resources).

4. How to find the information for your assignment from the library

Using the OPAC and card catalogue to locate material

Select

5. Effective reading for academic use- I

Parts of book and their purpose

Parts of a journal and their purpose

Extracting information from Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

6. Using the E-resources - I

Introduction to Firefox

Introduction to full text databases subscribed by the library with more emphasis on the one relevant to the faculty (e.g. more time spent on Hein Online for Law students).

Searching, saving and printing, making a note of the citation details

7. Using the E-resources - II

Advanced searching of the databases

8. Using the Internet as an academic tool including e-books and other collections.

9. Evaluation of print/ non print information sources
Reflect on own information sources for assignment

Due to time limitations, the faculty also proposed, to offer the programme to small groups, with each group covering the topics in four days and taking the post test and evaluating the programme in the following week. Whatever practice sessions intended for them, had to be covered within this allocated time.

These proposed changes diluted the quality and effectiveness of the programme. Because of shortening the programme, three stages of Empowering 8[®] (Organize, Create and Present) were removed from the IL Programme. Nevertheless, it was decided to offer scaled down version to provide some exposure and guidance to the students rather than not offering anything at all.

Although the structural changes were made to accommodate the time limitation, the programme was amply supported by the Dean and the rest of the faculty. A senior teacher was appointed as the faculty co-ordinator to liaise with the library and the undergraduates. The second author served as the library co-ordinator of the programme and both of them harmonized the scheduling, resources, duplication of handouts, communicating with the students etc. In addition, eleven teachers were assigned to participate in the sessions as observers so that collaboration is developed between the library and teaching staff within the learning context sharing each other's expertise.

The 250 enrolled students of 2009 were divided into 5 groups and the programme was scheduled to be held across five weeks from 21st October to 2nd December 2009. The first group consisted of students studying in English medium and the other groups consisted of those studying in Sinhala medium students. Accordingly, the programme was delivered to the first group in English and to the rest in Sinhala.

The assignment topic "*Prepare a report in groups of five students, on any five aspects relating to the professional ethics of the members of the legal profession in Sri Lanka,*" was selected jointly by the faculty and library staff because most of the intended skills proposed to be introduced through the IL Programme could be offered through this topic conveniently. The students who were following the IL Programme did not actually complete the assignment, but learnt how the different tools and techniques taught in the IL programme could be applied to complete a given assignment; so that they can apply the skills introduced in future learning environments.

One senior member from the Faculty of Law and six Senior Assistant Librarians (SALs) including the two authors, SAL cataloguing, SAL Reader Services, SAL Periodicals, and SAL e-resources were planned to serve as resource persons.

Implementation of the programme

The programme started with a common session for all students with a very comprehensive one-hour lecture on how to write successful assignments in the Faculty of Law delivered by the Dean of the faculty and a copy of the PowerPoint presentation was distributed among the students. After this session a pre-test (in Sinhala and English to meet the individual students' language needs) was administered to all those who attended (85 per cent of 250 students). The test contained 30 open-ended questions related to the modules to be offered. Open-ended questions were used instead of Multiple Choice Questions to obtain a realistic assessment of their knowledge instead of an inflated knowledge expressed through guesswork.

The second session started at 4.00 pm on a Monday in the library with 15-20 minute introduction to Mind Mapping and Brain Storming. This was followed by an active lecture¹ of 40-45 minutes, drawing a mind map for the chosen assignment topic covering the content to be included, format of the report and the management of the assignment writing process. Students brainstormed on the sub themes and learnt how to use a mind map to identify the contents and the writing process of the assignment. Copies of the sample assignment and the PowerPoint presentation were distributed among the students for their future use.

This was followed by the third session "understanding your library" from 5:00 – 6:00 pm. Since only one hour was allocated for each session, a library tour could not be completed during the session (but the students have already taken a library tour as part of their faculty induction programme). Instead, a 45 minute PowerPoint presentation was made introducing the staff structure and the significant sections of the library, i.e. the Sri Lanka collection, Permanent Reference collection, e-resources room, services offered including Interlibrary Loan facility, rules, and regulations of the library etc. During the last 15 minutes, there was a question and answer session for the students to raise issues about the library.

The fourth session on "How to find information for your assignment from the library" started at 4:00 pm on Tuesday. A brief introduction was made to the

card and online catalogues covering the basics. Then the group of 50 was separated into several smaller groups to practice searching the catalogues to find library material related to their sample assignment topic. Several senior library staff members guided each group and it was ensured that all groups had a session with both card and online catalogues.

The fifth session on "Effective reading for academic use" was divided into two sessions. In the first part of the session, which lasted for about 15 minutes, different types of printed material, i.e. monographs, multi volume publications, journals, encyclopedias etc. and their components, i.e. title page, contents page, copyright statement, bibliography, index, foreword and preface, as well as journal issue and volume numbers, structure of a book and a journal etc. were demonstrated using samples. This was essential as the students do not get an opportunity to use some of these formats during their school education. The second part of the session was used to practice using general and subject encyclopedias, dictionaries and thesauri. Students were given simple assignments to complete in pairs using these materials. When two pairs finished their assignment, they were asked to exchange the assignments so that every pair gets an opportunity to use more than one resource. Students had fun in doing this and also learnt how to use the material which they would have otherwise used rarely. This session was taken inside the Permanent Reference collection so that they become familiarized with the collection as well as the staff in charge of the collection for further advice when needed. The session was guided by the two authors and a staff member from the Permanent Reference section.

Session six was delivered on Thursday in the e-resources room which has 30 computers with some students sharing the machines. This was not the ideal condition but taking the students out to a different computer lab with adequate computers would not have given them a contextual learning opportunity. This session was also divided into two parts of 15 and 45 minutes with the first part introducing basics in Firefox with a brief hands-on session and the rules and regulations of the e-resource room. The second part introduced the e-resources available with a special emphasis on Hein Online and E-Law (Sri Lankan) databases. Session seven was continued immediately after session six and devoted more time to gain hands-on experience in searching, Boolean

¹Active lectures are lecture periods including mini-sessions of student activity. May involve brainstorming, buzz groups, case studies, discussion, demonstrations and other interactive teaching methods (Cox 1994: 28)²⁵.

expressions, saving and copying articles from the databases. In these sessions the staff in charge of the E-resource room was also introduced and two of them joined the authors in helping the students with hands-on sessions.

Session eight and nine were delivered on Friday again in the e-resources room and they were entirely devoted to introducing the Internet as an academic tool. The level of complexity of this session had to be changed to cater to two kinds of student groups. The initial sessions proved that the Internet skills of the English medium group were above the expected level and the rest of the groups were below the expected level. Therefore, an advanced session was delivered to Group one and a much simpler introductory session was offered to the others. This was an unexpected challenge faced by the resource person, due to lack of time to conduct needs assessment of Internet skills in more details. However it was addressed successfully.

Evaluation of the programme

There were two types of evaluation: 1) evaluating the effectiveness of the programme in increasing the knowledge of students and 2) evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme implementation and delivery. Effectiveness on the programme on students’ knowledge was measured by comparing the marks gained by the students for pre and post-test. The post-test was administered to 129 who attended the common evaluation session but only the scripts of

those who attended the pre-test and at least two days of the programme were considered (34 per cent of the total) in calculating the averages. It was initially planned to have the post-test for each group once they complete the programme but this had to be changed since the attendance of the first group was poor. It was revealed that on Wednesday (the day allocated for the evaluation), the students did not have any other classes but only the evaluation in the afternoon, therefore they had to come to the university, only for the evaluation. Since many were travelling from a distance this has been a dissuasion to attend. The authors discussed with the faculty and decided to have a common session for all. Figure 1 illustrates the average scores obtained (out of a maximum of 30) at the pre-test and the improvement in the performance at the post-test.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme implementation and delivery was made using an evaluation form, which assessed seven aspects; attendance, time allocation for sessions, course delivery methods, course contents, physical environment provided for the programme, best things of the course, as they perceived and the recommendations for future programmes. For the items except attendance, students were requested to mark their preference in a continuum of five options varying from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Question two examined the reasons why the student did not attend the programme at all and Question 3 examined the reasons why the student

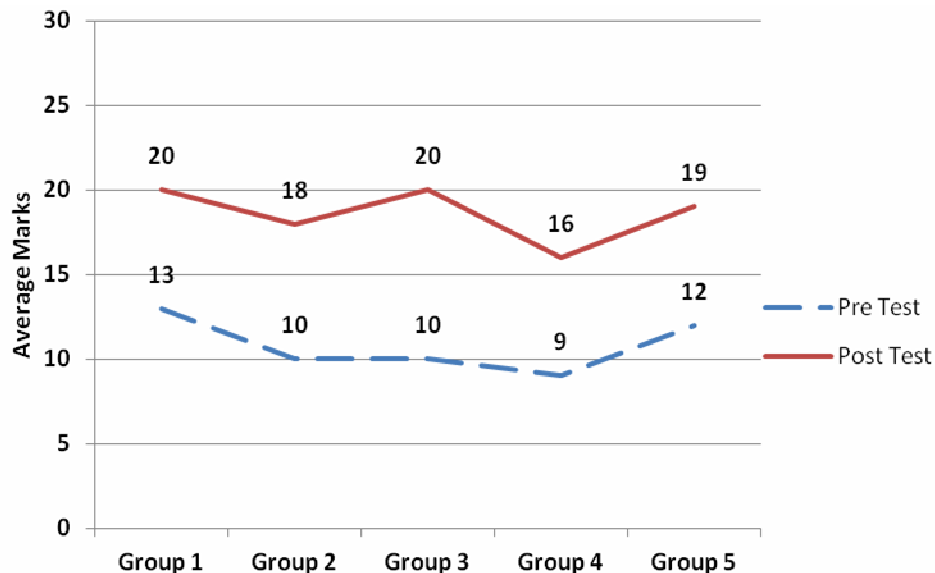


Figure 1 – Performance at pre- and post tests (2009)

did not attend the programme after the first day. Forty-one students had either not attended at all or not attended after the first session. Thirty seven percent (37%), of them indicated, that they were sick therefore could not attend and 44 per cent indicated that the time of the sessions were not convenient because they have travelling difficulties after the session's closure at 6:00 pm. Another 10 per cent have stated that they had to submit assignments and were using the library; therefore they had no time to attend the IL Programme. A further 10 per cent have indicated various other reasons.

Dropping participation rate was a special problem since the beginning of the programme. We noticed that the average attendance dropped from 85 per cent on the first two days to 15 per cent towards the third and fourth days (Thursday and Friday) of the programme. Informal inquiries revealed that most students were travelling from the suburbs daily or living in hostels and private boarding places and leave for their homes on Friday afternoon. It is too late for them to travel after finishing the programme at 6:00 pm on Friday since travelling is exceptionally time-consuming on Friday evenings. Therefore, they have opted to go home instead of attending the programme. Evaluation endorsed this. Sixty eight per cent (68%) disagreed that the "time slots allocated for the sessions are convenient (4:00-6:00 pm)" (Table 1) and 71 per cent recommended that the time should be changed. Not only the students but also some of the staff members mentioned this as a factor, which prevented them from attending the programme although they wanted to attend.

A comment made by one student that "I know enough about using a library therefore I did not attend" drew the attention of the authors. Although only one student has given this response, it made the authors reflect strongly on the marketing of the programmes among the students. Of the 250 student, 121 students did not attend the final session and perhaps there were many others who thought likewise. It was decided to target this group when the IL Programme is marketed for the next intake.

Other responses proved that the students had a very positive attitude towards many aspects as Table 1 illustrates. The only aspect they rated as negative was the in convenience of the allocated time (4:00 – 6:00 pm) endorsing the comments of the 44 per cent that indicated that they did not attend the programme because of travelling difficulties.

Most students identified the usefulness of the topics covered, the good explanations and presentations, as the best things in the course. They agreed that the programme was very useful to obtain a good idea about the library. Academic reading and note taking, Firefox, searching Internet, mind mapping and brainstorming were identified as the most useful topics covered. Three common suggestions for the future were to expand this programme to second, third and fourth year students also, making participation compulsory and to spend more time on e-resources. Of the respondents, 71 per cent have recommended that the time of the programme be changed next year. Usefulness of the IL Programme was further established through certain comments made by the students on the evaluation forms;

"really it was useful for me because I [learnt] many things regarding my studies after the library programme" and *"this course was very important to collect accurate and strong [reliable?] information for my assignments. This is a very useful course and I think it should continue to next year also."*

Table 1—Evaluation of the programme by the participants

Statements	Agree (%)	Agree with reservations (%)	Disagree (%)
The time allocated for the whole programme is enough	74	8	18
The length of each session is enough	74	15	11
Time slots allocated for the sessions are convenient (4.00-6.00 pm)	32	14	54
The topics were clearly explained	80	13	7
Instruction materials are adequate (multimedia, websites etc)	95	1	4
PowerPoint presentations and handouts are useful	79	0	21
Content is relevant to my studies	85	8	7
Level of complexity was suitable for me	71	14	15
Awareness about the library after the programme was increased	80	7	13
Awareness of the library resources was increased after the programme	80	15	5
The physical environment was suitable for the programme	79	10	11

To augment the evaluation by the students, a second evaluation form was handed over to the faculty members who participated as observers. Instead of returning the individual evaluation sheets the faculty co-ordinator wrote a letter communicating the collective opinion of all stating that they were very happy about the programme and thanking the library for designing and delivering a useful programme. Their satisfaction was expressed much earlier also; after the completion of the sessions for the first group, the two faculty members, of which one was the faculty co-ordinator of the programme who participated in the sessions as observers circulated a letter among the other faculty members stating that:

“We participated in the programme conducted for the first year undergraduates by the library and we found that the programme to be useful not only to the students but also to the teachers as well. Therefore we wish to inform you that if you are interested you could participate even though you were not included in the roster prepared for the programme.”

These comments were endorsed by the Faculty Board met in January 2010 by documenting an appreciation of the contribution made by the library staff. Expanding the programme to senior students was also discussed at this meeting.

The programme was offered again in 2010 also, in the same model but without any changes to the time schedule. There was a participation rate of 87 per cent at the initial session. As expected the attendance was low on Thursdays and Fridays, However, the course was completed and the post-test proved that those who attended the programme had increased their knowledge.

The IL Programme was not offered in 2011 because the two authors were not available in the library. In 2012, the programme was not conducted because the usual intake was delayed due to a problem in the selection process of students to the universities. The faculty has requested the library again to offer the programme to the 2012 intake but not in isolation, as it was offered in the previous years, but integrated with Legal Systems, which is an assessed course unit throughout the year.

The authors believe that the programme delivery and student learning would be considerably improved in this way, as legal Systems, is an assessed module. Authors are also considering using the university website to address some of the issues identified. Some of the reflections of the authors during the process of

development and implementation of the programme are documented below for the benefit of the others who design and implement IL programmes for undergraduates.

Reflections

When the whole process was reflected upon, many positive as well as negative facts, which affect the successful delivery of an IL programme could be identified. The Academic Administrators of the faculty realised the value of and the necessity for an IL programme and extended their extensive support in implementing the programme. Appointment of a faculty co-ordinator made the implementation convenient. Having two teachers with every group as observers also enabled the strengthening of faculty – library collaboration and for the faculty to appreciate the library’s contribution towards improving the quality of undergraduate education. Dedication of the library staff, both professional and paraprofessional was an immense strength. There was excellent enthusiasm from converting several library collections in to temporary teaching/learning spaces to delivering the lectures and demonstrations. This is especially appreciated since the library staff had to devote time after their normal working hours. Having a modern air-conditioned seminar room equipped with 20 computers and multimedia projector, an e-resource room which can accommodate 30 at a time and the spacious Permanent Reference collection which could be easily converted in to teaching / learning area made the delivery of the programme easy in an attractive, comfortable and meaningful space.

However, this initiative proved that having an IL curriculum, a dedicated staff to deliver it, academic and administrative support of the faculty and the ideal teaching/learning facilities are not sufficient to make the programme a success. The main issue with the programme was the low participation due to inconvenient time for students. Overall completion rate was 34 per cent of the entire batch, which proved that taking the socio-cultural background and related issues of the students in to consideration in scheduling the programmes is vital for the successful completion and reaping the full benefits of such programmes.

Another factor that affected the attendance of the students is the absence of summative assessment of the knowledge gained. This was established by the comments made by students that they did not attend because they had other work. As evident in literature,

most students are heavily influenced by the assessment system. They study those topics and practice those skills, which they think are most likely to be assessed (Gibbs and Habeshaw 1989)²⁶. They claim that students put most of their effort into aspects of their course, which are assessed. The choices made about the assessment will largely determine what the students learn (Habeshaw et al. 1993)²⁷. They further commented that, before deciding how the students are to be assessed, it is necessary to decide what they are to learn and why they are to learn it. Nevertheless this same IL framework adopted in another faculty of the same university and offered as a credited module has become very successful and being offered continuously.

Not being able to offer the programme in 2011 drew the attention to the contribution of champions for the success of IL programmes. Bruce (1994)²⁸ has stressed the role of librarians as IL champions in the development, implementation and evaluation of curriculum. Maddison and Menai (2010)²⁹ also have pointed out that IL champions' are there to be – the main point of contact, to assist in training, to encourage, enthuse, and promote, to advise the project team on local issues and to contribute to IL advocacy across the country. Presence of IL champions hence proved to be an essential factor in the successful delivery of an IL programme.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the design and implementation of an Information Literacy Programme based on the Empowering 8[®] IL model, for the first year undergraduates in a Faculty of Law in Sri Lanka. The support of the faculty staff, enthusiasm of the library staff and good infrastructure facilities to offer the programme were identified as the strengths and opportunities while several other socio-cultural issues were identified as threats. It was learnt if the scheduling of the programme is carried out without due attention to the students' social needs, they will not reap the full benefit of the programme. It was also revealed that there should be some sort of summative assessment and incentive to participate rather than leaving the attendance and completion to mere love for new knowledge and skills. The paper presented a reflective analysis of the entire process and it is expected that it will be beneficial for those who intend to design and implement IL programmes in similar academic environments.

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