

Information Literacy Policies and Practices in Health Science and Medical Libraries in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

An information literate person has the skills to find, access, evaluate and use information sources legally and ethically. Information literacy (IL) skills are usually taught in academic and educational institutions. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the existence of information literacy policies that guide the implementation of information literacy skills training programmes and the practices available in the delivery of information literacy training in medical and health libraries in Kenya. The study's objectives were to determine the availability of IL training policies; the integration of IL into the curriculum; Content of IL; Institutional support and the challenges faced in IL training. This was a qualitative study that adopted a survey methodology. The respondents were head librarians in four types of medical and health libraries from academic, research, special and mission (faith-based) hospitals. A structured self-administered questionnaire was sent via email to fifteen (15) libraries within Nairobi and in surrounding rural areas. Out of the fifteen libraries, ten responded and all the questionnaires were used for data analysis. The results showed that 40% of the libraries had IL policies that guide IL implementation. Sixty percent of the libraries had no IL policies but still carried out some aspects of information literacy. The study concluded that health and medical libraries were aware of the benefits of information literacy programmes and the importance of policy guidelines in IL implementation. The study results showed a gap between academic and research, special and hospital libraries in Information Literacy training. Among challenges faced in Information Literacy training were lack of time for students to attend Information Literacy sessions; lack of adequate information infrastructure, and lack of time for librarians to immerse themselves in Information Literacy programmes due to understaffing. The study noted

that there is need for librarians to be trained in information literacy and pedagogical skills. An in-depth research on the impact of information literacy in learning and healthcare delivery in Kenya is required. The paper recommends training of librarians in health-related information resources especially evidence-based practice resources.

Keywords: Information literacy; Kenya; Hospital libraries; Medical libraries; Policies

1. INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, the government is responsible for the provision of healthcare services. Other players include faith-based organisations and the private sector. It is estimated that the public sector provides 55% of health services in Kenya (Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, Kenya & Ministry of Medical Services, Kenya, 2009). The rest of the health care services and training is shared among non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs) and privately sponsored healthcare facilities. The Kenyan Constitution (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2010) affirms that every person has the right to life, to a clean and healthy environment, and the right to healthcare services. Currently, responsibility for the provision of healthcare services is at the County level with a view of bringing health services closer to the people (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2010). Provision of health information services is available at all levels of healthcare services to both students and healthcare providers. Most Kenyan libraries have access to thousands of electronic books and journals through a consortium, the Kenya Library Information Services Consortium (KLISC) that enables joint subscription platforms. Using all these resources effectively for learning, teaching, research and healthcare delivery becomes a challenge to the user unless guided by skilled library staff. Librarians in collaboration with faculty/departments in these institutions can enable the optimal use of these resources through information literacy skills training.

Despite the availability of many diverse information resources, research has shown that electronic information sources are poorly utilised and lack of awareness is often cited as one of the major reasons for none utilisation (Ndinoshiho, 2010). Information literacy instruction is required for maximum utilisation of these resources. To be effectively implemented, IL policies are required to guide on content, trainers, duration and format as well as required infrastructure. Several organisations have become interested with the way individuals seek, evaluate and use

information. Information literacy is therefore an important aspect in the delivery and use of information services and resources. The need for information literacy training is influenced by information overload in all subject areas, but more so in the medical and health sciences fields due to rapid innovations in teaching, research and the delivery of healthcare services. The advancement in information and communication technology (ICT) has enabled production of information resources in various formats such as databases, electronic books, journals and audio-visual formats. Currently, most library users are also technology literate and are exposed to various internet-based sources of information by using several search engines, Google being the most popular. To utilise these search engines, they require skills to help them identify quality and relevant information to satisfy their information needs. Some of these sources available through Google and other similar sources may not be relevant and valid for quality training, research and health care delivery hence users should be educated on how to access and to evaluate the information for quality. The sheer abundance of information and technology will not in itself create more informed citizens without a complementary understanding and capacity to use information effectively (The Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy (ANZIIL) & The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) , 2004, p. 3). Information literacy is therefore an essential programme and service that libraries in all sectors are called upon to embrace to help prepare today's library user for the digital world.

Equipping information users with information literacy skills empowers them to access, evaluate and use all types of information resources effectively. Several aspects of information literacy training have been researched across the globe, especially among academic library settings. These studies cover areas such as collaboration between librarians and faculty, integrating information literacy into the curriculum and IL support for off-campus students (Russell, 2008; Korobili, Malliari, & Christodoulou, 2008; Salisbury & Sheridan, 2011; Clairoux, Desbiens, Clar, Dupont, & St-Jean, 2013). In Kenya studies have shown that information literacy is taught in public and private universities in varying degrees and according to each institution's policies (Kavulya, 2003; Amunga, 2011; Tilwawala, Myers, & Andrade, 2009; Kingori, Kemoni, & Chege, 2012). The Commission for University Education (CUE) a body that accredits academic programmes for Kenyan Universities has developed Standards and Guidelines for Academic libraries (Commission for University Education Kenya, 2014). In the CUE Standards and

Guidelines, the IL standards indicate that IL should be integrated into the curriculum and should be taught by a librarian. Available research concentrates on IL in academic and research libraries (Amunga, 2011; Kingori, Kemoni & Chege, 2012). This research focused on four types of libraries; academic, research, special and mission (faith-based) hospital libraries.

The study was guided by the following objectives; investigation of the existence of policies that guide the teaching of information literacy skills; integration of IL into the curriculum, assessment of the IL content; assessment of the level of institutional support in the provision of information literacy and the challenges faced by the librarians in information skills training.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Information literacy (IL) has many definitions, but these definitions are aligned to the American Library Association (ALA) that defines information literacy as a set of abilities requiring a user to recognise when information is needed, have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information (American Library Association, 1989). The information literacy competencies were endorsed by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2000 for application in higher education (ACRL, 2000). Besides the ALA's information literacy definition, other organisations and individuals have defined information literacy with different emphasis. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO'S) Information for All Programme (IFAP) defines information literacy as the capacity of people to recognise their information needs; locate and evaluate the quality of information; store and retrieve information; make effective and ethical use of information and apply information to create and communicate knowledge (UNESCO, 2008). The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) has defined information literacy as knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner (CILIP, 2012). The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) agree with the ALA definition but indicate that an information competent person, whether a student, a professional or a worker can recognise her/his information needs, knows how to locate, identify access, retrieve, evaluate, organise, and use information (Lau, 2006).

2.1 Information Literacy Best Practices

The ACRL has developed standards of IL best practices to guide in the implementation of information literacy training; mainly among undergraduate students (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2003). The standards are applicable to different situations and scenarios, such as; in developing, advancing, revitalising or assessing information literacy programme (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2003). The ACRL guidelines for best practices have ten characteristics that libraries can apply according to situations and environments (Hunt & Birks, 2004). Briefly, these characteristics are: a) formulating an IL mission, b) goals and objectives, c) planning d) administrative support, e) articulation with curriculum, f) collaboration, g) pedagogy, h) staffing, and i) outreach and assessment/evaluation (Hunt & Birks, 2004). Due to the increase in access and use of internet-based information resources, information literacy is important in the Kenyan educational and services context. The ease of using this information through just ‘copy and paste’ exposes users not grounded in information retrieval and use skills to plagiarism and unreliable information. However, for information literacy training to be effective there is need to have it regulated and guided by policy.

2.2 Policies and Guidelines in the Implementation of Information Literacy

Policies articulate the process that is required in the execution of a programme or system. A policy has a mission, goals and objectives, audience and scope, work roles and required resources in terms of human and physical resources. A policy also enables monitoring and evaluation of the activities being carried out. Research has shown that IL policies influence the success of IL programmes (Lockhart, 2011). One of the areas stipulated by ACRL IL best practices is the existence of a well-planned system with mission, objectives, goals, personnel and resources (ACRL, 2003). Medical and healthcare libraries should adopt information literacy best practices in the delivery of IL instruction. Operating with an approved IL policy leads to achieving best practices in IL.

2.3 Integration of Information Literacy into Curriculum

Integration of IL into the curriculum enables students to acquire information skills that are applicable in any work or life situation (Salisbury & Sheridan, 2011). Researchers argue on the importance of embedding IL into the curriculum as it enables students to critically evaluate the accessed information and apply it to their study and research (Salisbury & Sheridan, 2011).

Librarians understand the importance of IL integration into the curriculum (Hunt & Birks, 2004) as it exposes all students to quality information sources that are subscribed by their institutions as well as gaining skills for application in research and study and in future information use. The challenge faced by librarians is to convince the faculty and administrators of the relevance of an IL curriculum integrated (Kloda, 2008). There is also a tendency by academics/faculty not to view “librarians as partners who can help them to instruct information literacy skills and research strategies to students. They are reluctant to integrate information literacy into the curriculum” (Derakhshan and Singh, 2011, p. 219). In this regard, has argued that in order to have a successful IL implemented there is need for “collaboration and negotiation; contextualisation, and ongoing interactions with information (Wang, 2013). Some libraries face an uphill task in getting an IL integrated into the curriculum (Lockhart, 2011). Most researchers agree that the best IL are the ones that are mainstreamed into the curricula (Clairoux, Desbiens, Clar, Dupont, & St-Jean, 2013; Lwehabura & Stilwell, 2008). However, there are tentative strides in the integration of IL with curricula in the United States of America and Canada in Medical Schools (Nevius *et al.*, 2018). An IL programme that is integrated into the curricula is more likely to succeed as students are assessed and graded just like any other university course and programme where they earn credits.

2.4 Information Literacy Content

Information literacy skills require that the user is able to seek, locate, evaluate and use quality information resources legally and ethically. The content of IL considers these areas within a subject related context. Studies have shown that students lack the ability to search, evaluate, and use information sources appropriately (Gross & Latham, 2013). IL instruction content usually includes searching strategies that include the use of appropriate plans in narrowing or broadening searches, evaluation of information resources for quality as well as academic integrity in terms of citations and referencing. These topics are taught in relation to specific discipline areas and focused to a particular audience. This study was aimed at finding out the content of the IL instruction within the target libraries.

2.5 Institutional Support in Information Literacy Implementation

The implementation of IL programmes requires institutional support. Inclusion of IL in the strategic plan of the institution ensures acceptability by all stakeholders, allocation of resources

as well as monitoring and evaluation (Russell, 2008; Kingori, Kemoni, & Chege, 2012). Institutional support for IL implementation also includes enactment of policies, the provision of training facilities, library staff support through training and motivation.

2.6 Barriers/Challenges in the Implementation of Information Literacy

Librarians offer IL as part of their work. IL instruction requires cooperation from all stakeholders. Support from the institution is in terms of policy approval and provision of adequate information infrastructure. Faculty, administrators and students are crucial in the effective implementation of the IL training. Research has found that librarians face challenges such as lack of approved IL policy; lack of proactivity by librarians; lack of partnerships between librarians and faculty to mainstream IL; inadequate library staffing; and lack of a willingness to learn by students (Lwehabura & Stilwell, 2008, p. 183).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative study that adopted a survey research method. Self-administered questionnaires were sent through email to fifteen (15) purposely selected libraries. The questionnaires targeted the heads of medical and health libraries. Although the sample was small it was representative of various types of libraries such as academic, research, special and hospital libraries that are based in the capital city, Nairobi Kenya and surrounding rural areas. The sample also was representative of government, private and mission (faith based) libraries. Out of the fifteen questionnaires, ten were returned, but with follow ups through telephone calls. The response rate was 66%. The results were analysed by using descriptive statistics with Microsoft Excel to produce percentages and frequencies.

3.1 Scope

The inclusion criterion was for institutions with a designated medical or health science library. In Kenya, some public, private, mission (faith based) universities have medical and health science courses and no specific medical or health sciences library. Libraries that were not specifically medical or health science were excluded from the research. This was to ensure an objective comparison between libraries that had the same user characteristics. The research focused on Information Literacy policies and practices and not on information resources, users' experiences or Information Literacy competencies.

3.2 Challenges in Data Collection

The questionnaires were sent through email. Questionnaires were followed up through telephone calls for those whose telephone contacts were known. The email questionnaire dissemination method had challenges in that the researchers could not tell whether a questionnaire was received or not as the recipients never acknowledged receipt. Only until a filled questionnaire was filled and returned did the researchers know that the respondent had received the questionnaire. Questionnaire receipt was confirmed when a filled version was received and with no receipt of a filled one meant that the email recipient was not reached. Only in one instance did the researchers receive a message that the recipient could not be reached. Email follow-ups to those who had not responded did not yield any responses and this was probably because of change of email address or the targeted individuals had left the institution. In some institutions, email services could have had challenges, and this may have affected the response rate. However, this shortcoming was mitigated by telephone follow ups to the relevant respondents and institutions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results focus on demographics and target audience, availability of policies, integration of IL into the curriculum, IL content, institutional support and IL implementation challenges.

4.1 Demographic Status

Sixty percent of academic libraries, 20% special libraries, 10% research and 10% Mission Hospital library responded. The gender of the respondents was 60% female and 40% male. This may not reflect the headship of these libraries as headship was not particularly asked. (Fig. 1).

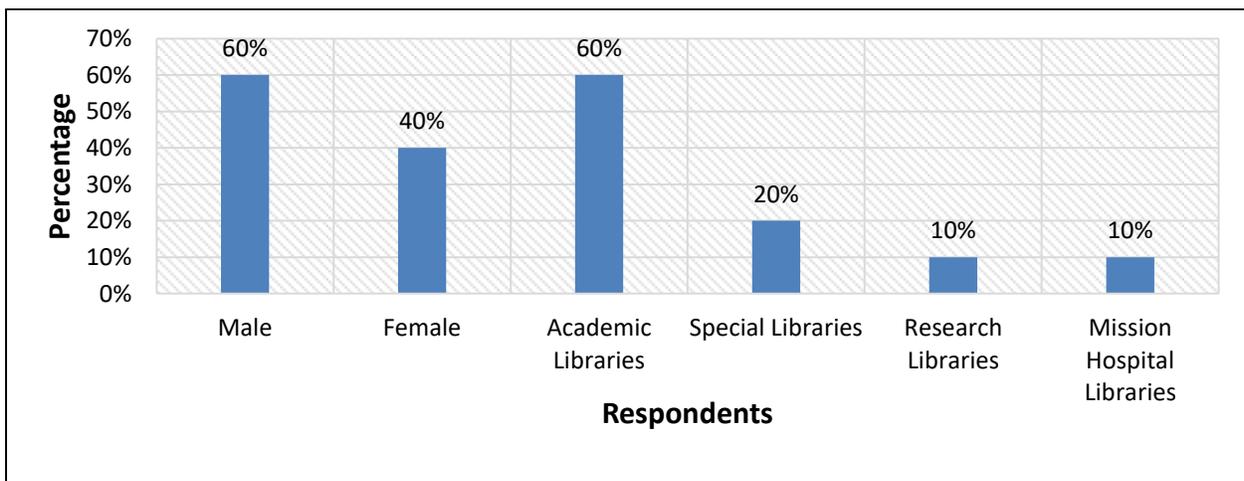


Figure 1: Background Characteristics of Respondents

4.2 Target Groups

Information literacy is taught at various levels, for medical students, healthcare professionals, lecturer/faculty, researchers and administrators. Each of these groups have unique information literacy needs due to their various roles; for instance the researcher and the administrator will need to access and use different types of information resources, different from the undergraduate and postgraduate students. Although the general IL principles are the same, the areas of emphasis differ for each user group. In their study, Clairoux, Desbiens, Clar, Dupont & St-Jean, (2013) indicated that their experience of IL in Canada and Haiti forced them to adapt “their teaching style and workshop contents to a clientele showing diverse levels of information literacy and technological abilities” due to the different levels of learners such as faculty versus students (p.206). **Table 1** below shows the target group diversity.

Table 1: Target groups

Target groups	Type of Library				Total %
	Academic %	Research %	Special %	Mission Hospital %	
Undergraduates	50	0	10	0	60
Academics	40	0	20	0	60
Nurses	40	0	10	10	60
Researchers	20	10	20	0	50
Postgraduate	30	10	10	0	50
Doctors	30	0	10	0	40
Administrators	20	0	10	0	30

4.3 Policies and Guidelines in the Implementation of Information Literacy

The existence of information literacy policies is seen as a contributor to the success of the IL programmes. One of the areas stipulated by ACRL is that as IL best practice is the existence of a well-planned system with mission, objectives, goals, personnel and resources (ACRL, 2003). The findings show that 40% of the libraries had IL policies. However, the respondents were not prompted to indicate whether the policy was officially approved nor had any knowledge of the policy content. Sixty percent (60%) of the libraries indicated that they had no policies, but still provided IL training. It was noted that one library had said that attendance to library orientation was mandatory for all new students.

4.4 Integration of Information Literacy into Curriculum

Integration of IL into the curriculum exposes all students to the library's subscribed electronic information resources and how to use them in relation to their areas of study. All the libraries provided some form of IL but only 20% of the academic libraries had the IL integrated into the curriculum and examined. According to Hunt and Birks (2004), a common barrier to integration of IL within the curriculum is different perceptions on campus of what the term information literacy means (Hunt and Birks, p.31). It has been opined that the existence of a policy assists in integrating IL into the curriculum (Clairoux, Desbiens, Clar, Dupont, & St-Jean, 2013). This study showed that only 20% of the libraries had their IL integrated into the curriculum. The low figure could be explained by lack of leadership from librarians. The study noted that only 30% of the librarians were aware of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) IL best practices and standards. It would be difficult for such librarians to initiate successful IL training programmes or policies for they lack the necessary and relevant knowledge to justify the existence of IL policies within their institutions.

4.5 Information Literacy Content

The information literacy skills training reflect areas that the students or users can develop competencies in. Asked about the content of the information literacy training, the responses showed that a variety of topics are covered as reflected in **Table 2**. Considering that nursing is one of the popular courses, information resources in this area should be part of the IL content. The students and healthcare personnel require evidence-based practice information resources for patient care. The reason why evidence-based practice information sources were least taught could be due to lack of library staff knowledge of these resources. In general most researchers agree that the best IL are the ones that are mainstreamed into the curricula (Clairoux, Desbiens, Clar, Dupont, & St-Jean, 2013; Hunt & Birks, 2004; Institute of Development Studies; Information Training and Outreach Centre for Africa, 2010; Lwehabura & Stilwell, 2008; Kloda, 2008). An IL programme that is integrated into the curricula is more likely to succeed as students are assessed and graded just like any other academic programme. The teaching of IL also shows a great difference between the academic and other libraries. Trainers in mission libraries as well as special libraries may not have adequate knowledge to offer a comprehensive IL instruction programme as their IL content is limited as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Information Literacy Content

Information Literacy Content	Type of Library				Total %
	Academic %	Research %	Special %	Mission Hospital %	
Information searching strategies	50	10	20	10	90
Use of internet and search engines	40	10	20	10	80
Sources of information	30	10	20	10	70
Use of electronic scholarly databases such as PubMed and HINARI	40	10	10	10	70
Evaluation of information and information sources	30	10	20	0	60
Online Public Access Catalogue – OPAC	40	0	10	0	50
Reference management tools	30	0	20	0	50
Copyright and intellectual property rights	20	10	10	0	40
Evidence based practice information sources	20	0	10	0	30

4.6 Institutional Support in Information Literacy Implementation

Institutional support for IL implementation is key to the success of the IL programme. Support can be through the enactment of policies, the provision of ICT infrastructure to facilitate training, library staff support through training and motivation. On the existence of IL training facilities, 90% had a specific room for IL training. According to 80% of the respondents the room was fitted with the necessary training facilities such as computers, projector and internet access. Forty percent (40%) of the libraries had a specific person assigned with the responsibility of IL training and 20% of these trainers had been trained in pedagogical skills. The challenge for librarians that teach IL skills is that most of them have no teaching backgrounds. Training in pedagogical skills prepares librarians to plan, prepare, conduct and evaluate information literacy training. Being trained in pedagogical skills is seen as institutional support for the IL implementation. From the responses, institutional support for IL in terms of facilities is encouraging. These findings have been echoed by other researchers; that in order for IL to be successful, there is need for institutional support for the programme (Clairoux, Desbiens, Clar, Dupont, & St-Jean, 2013;

Lwehabura & Stilwell, 2008; Russell, 2008; Kingori, Kemoni, & Chege, 2012; Institute of Development Studies; Information Training and Outreach Centre for Africa, 2010).

Another type of support is the integration of IL into institution's strategic plan. The implementation of IL programme is achieved and sustained if it is an integral part of the strategic plan of the institution. This ensures acceptability by all stakeholders, allocation of resources as well as monitoring and evaluation. Responses from 30% of the respondents showed that IL was part of their institution's strategic plan and 70% indicated they did not have. Respondents were further asked to indicate the strategic intent in the strategic plan that showed support for IL. One institution reported that the IL strategic intent was to support research and learning and another institution's IL strategic intent was that all graduates should have information literacy skills as a key generic attribute. IL is better instituted when they are part of the institutions own plans (ANZIIL & CAUL, 2004; IDS & ITOCA, 2010; ACRL, 2003).

4.7 Barriers/Challenges in the Implementation of Information Literacy

All types of libraries had challenges as shown in **Table 3**. The major challenges were time constraints for students. These challenges are not unique to Kenyan libraries. At a pre-conference meeting held in Gaborone Botswana in December 2010, the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Library and Information Associations (SCECSAL) identified some of these challenges (Institute of Development Studies; Information Training and Outreach Centre for Africa, 2010). Challenges such as inadequate time for librarians reflect understaffing, especially in the rural areas where libraries are managed by a single staff, with a large user population. The staff has only time for library orientation. Another challenge faced was on how to reach out to distant learning students who are on the campus for a very short time. Some libraries had initiated online IL tutorials as a solution. In Tanzania several IL training challenges were identified as lack an IL policy; lack of proactivity by librarians; lack of partnerships between librarians and teaching staff to mainstream IL; inadequate library staffing; and lack of a willingness to learn by students (Lwehabura & Stilwell, 2008, p. 183). The Kenyan librarians identified different challenges from those experienced in Tanzania.

Table 3: Barriers/challenges

Barriers/challenges faced while delivering information literacy skills training	Type of Library				
	Academic %	Research %	Special %	Mission hospital %	Total %
Time constraints for students	60	10	20	10	100
Inadequate staffing in the library	50	0	10	10	70
Lack of policy guidelines	20	10	10	10	50
Mode of attendance is voluntary	40	10	0	0	50
Lack of adequate space and equipment	30	10	10	0	50
Lack of cooperation with other departments/units	30	10	10	0	50
Inadequate staff training expertise	30	0	10	0	40
Problem with internet access for practical sessions	20	10	0	0	30

The above challenges are reflective of the fact that information literacy is not integrated into the curriculum since the time constraints for students would not be a challenge as IL would be slotted in the timetable. The other reflection is lack of policy since the policy would outline the staff required to teach, the mode of implementation and the duration and period of learning. One of the librarians cited lack of an allowance as a challenge. This shows that IL training is seen as an additional responsibility and hence the need for allowances.

5. CONCLUSION

In Kenya IL is undertaken by all types of medical and health libraries. Some medical and health libraries have information literacy policies that guide the implementation of IL through the curriculum. The study shows a gap in the training of IL among special and hospital libraries, and this may be explained by the level of knowledge and skills of the library staff in this area. In academia, IL seems to be well developed with IL covering broad subject areas although an important topic such as evidence-based medicine is least taught. The challenges faced in the practice of IL may be overcome with the enactment and implementation of IL policies. This study has looked at certain aspects of IL training such as existence of policies and the IL practices. A more in-depth study is required that will explore more areas in IL including student

competencies and faculty opinions of the IL. The study concludes that medical and health libraries in Kenya are implementing certain elements of information literacy despite the challenges faced.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the research findings, the following recommendations were made.

- i. Time for information literacy can be resolved if the IL is integrated into the curriculum and creation of IL webinars.
- ii. Staffing challenges can be solved by increasing staff and offering IL webinars.
- iii. Librarians serving in medical and health science libraries should be trained in IL pedagogical skills to improve on their information literacy training practices.
- iv. Librarians should be encouraged to push for policy guidelines to help streamline the delivery of IL training.
- v. The IL instruction programme should be embedded into the curriculum as this would ensure that all students are exposed to the programme and the IL would be mandatory as an examinable course.

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