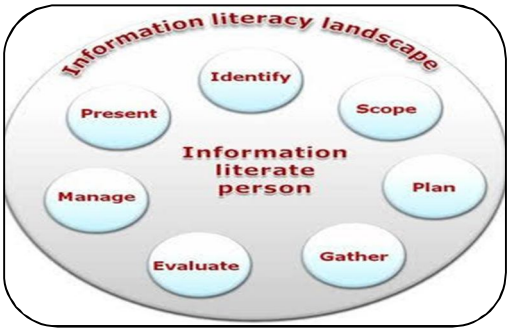
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EFFECTIVENESS OF LIBRARY ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES IN DEVELOPING INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS AMONG FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT



Library orientation programmes play an important role in familiarizing first-year students with library resources, facilities, services, and information retrieval techniques. These programmes help students develop essential information literacy skills, including identifying information needs, locating relevant resources, evaluating information critically, and using information ethically. With the increasing availability of digital libraries, electronic databases, and artificial intelligence tools, effective library orientation has become essential in higher education. This article examines the objectives, significance, applications, limitations, and improvement strategies of library orientation programmes. It emphasizes practical training, digital literacy, academic integrity, and continuous learning to promote independent learning and academic achievement.

KEYWORDS: *Library orientation, information literacy, academic libraries, first-year students, digital literacy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries are essential components of higher education institutions, supporting teaching, learning, research, and independent learning. Their role extends beyond providing books and journals to helping students locate, evaluate, and ethically use information. First-year undergraduate students often face challenges in using library catalogues, classification systems, electronic databases, scholarly journals, and citation tools.

Although students may be familiar with digital devices and search engines, they may lack the skills required to identify reliable academic information, evaluate sources critically, and acknowledge references appropriately. Library orientation programmes help address these challenges by introducing students to library facilities, services, digital resources, and information retrieval techniques.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2016) emphasizes the importance of understanding how information is created, discovered, evaluated, and used. Effective orientation programmes should therefore include practical demonstrations and learning activities. This article examines their educational significance in developing information literacy skills among first-year students.

2. MEANING AND DEFINITION OF LIBRARY ORIENTATION

2.1 Meaning of library orientation

Library orientation is an introductory educational activity through which newly admitted students become familiar with the resources, facilities, services, rules, and procedures of an academic library. It helps students understand how the library functions and how its resources can support their academic activities.

Traditional library orientation generally includes an introduction to the library building, reading rooms, book arrangement, classification systems, membership procedures, borrowing rules, reference services, and opening hours.

In contemporary academic institutions, orientation also includes demonstrations of online public access catalogues (OPACs), electronic journals, e-books, scholarly databases, institutional repositories, remote-access facilities, and digital library services.

Library orientation may be organized through classroom presentations, guided library tours, practical demonstrations, workshops, videos, online tutorials, or blended learning activities.

2.2 Definition of library orientation programme

A library orientation programme is a planned and structured educational activity designed to familiarize students with library resources, facilities, services, and information retrieval procedures while introducing the knowledge and practical skills required for effective, independent, and ethical use of information.

This is an operational definition formulated for the present article.

2.3 Meaning of information literacy

Information literacy refers to the ability to recognize an information need and determine how to locate, evaluate, interpret, and use relevant information effectively and responsibly.

For first-year students, information literacy includes the ability to:

1. Identify appropriate information sources for academic assignments.
2. Search library catalogues and scholarly databases.
3. Formulate effective search queries using keywords and Boolean operators.
4. Evaluate the authority, accuracy, relevance, currency, and purpose of information.
5. Distinguish scholarly publications from unreliable or misleading content.
6. Record bibliographic details and prepare accurate references.
7. Understand plagiarism, copyright, and academic integrity.
8. Verify information obtained from websites and generative AI tools.

Library orientation and information literacy instruction are related but distinct. Orientation primarily introduces students to library resources and services, whereas information literacy instruction develops their ability to use information critically, independently, and ethically. An effective programme should integrate both components.

3. PURPOSE OF LIBRARY ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES

The primary purpose of a library orientation programme is to enable newly admitted students to use library resources confidently and effectively throughout their academic studies.

Its major purposes include the following.

3.1 Familiarization with library services: To introduce students to the library building, facilities, collections, membership procedures, borrowing rules, reading rooms, and reference services.
3.2 Promotion of academic adjustment: To help students adapt to the information requirements and independent learning expectations of higher education.
3.3 Effective utilization of resources: To encourage the appropriate use of books, journals, reference materials, electronic databases, e-books, and institutional repositories.
3.4 Development of research skills: To introduce students to effective information retrieval techniques and the use of scholarly resources for assignments, seminars, projects, and research activities.
3.5 Promotion of critical thinking: To help students distinguish reliable information from inaccurate, biased, outdated, or misleading content.
3.6 Encouragement of academic integrity: To develop awareness of plagiarism, copyright, citation, referencing, and responsible use of information.
3.7 Promotion of independent learning: To encourage students to take responsibility for identifying their information needs and finding suitable resources.
3.8 Development of digital competence: To familiarize students with digital library services, online research tools, and responsible information practices.

The overall purpose is to transform the library from a place primarily associated with borrowing books into an active learning environment that supports academic achievement and lifelong learning.

4. OBJECTIVES OF LIBRARY ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES

The objectives of an effective library orientation programme should be specific, practical, and relevant to students' academic needs.

The principal objectives are:

1. To familiarize first-year students with library facilities, collections, services, and rules.
2. To explain library classification systems, call numbers, shelf arrangements, and borrowing procedures.
3. To develop students' ability to search OPACs and identify relevant library holdings.
4. To introduce electronic journals, e-books, scholarly databases, and institutional repositories.
5. To develop effective searching techniques, including keyword selection, Boolean operators, filters, and search refinement.
6. To enable students to evaluate the credibility, relevance, accuracy, and currency of information.
7. To introduce citation, referencing, plagiarism prevention, and copyright awareness.
8. To promote responsible digital information practices, including verification of AI-generated claims.
9. To encourage independent learning and the regular use of library resources.
10. To develop awareness of reference services, research assistance, and subject-specific library support.
11. To encourage students to explore information beyond prescribed textbooks.
12. To support the development of lifelong learning and research competencies.

5. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF LIBRARY ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES

5.1 Transition to higher education

First-year students often enter higher education with different levels of familiarity with academic libraries. Orientation helps reduce uncertainty and supports their adjustment to new academic expectations.

5.2 Increasing complexity of information resources

Academic information is available through print collections, electronic databases, open-access journals, institutional repositories, websites, and multimedia resources. Students require guidance in identifying appropriate resources for different academic tasks.

5.3 Development of information literacy

Students must move beyond basic information retrieval to critical evaluation, interpretation, and ethical use. Library orientation provides an initial foundation for developing these competencies.

5.4 Efficient utilization of library resources

Academic institutions invest considerable resources in books, journals, databases, digital infrastructure, and professional library services. Orientation can increase awareness of these resources and encourage their effective use.

5.5 Prevention of misinformation and plagiarism

Students may encounter inaccurate information, fabricated references, misleading websites, and unverified AI-generated content. Orientation can introduce source-verification techniques, citation practices, and academic integrity principles.

5.6 Promotion of independent learning

Library orientation encourages students to search for information beyond prescribed textbooks. This supports self-directed learning, critical thinking, assignment preparation, and research awareness.

5.7 Equal access to information

Students may differ in language proficiency, prior educational opportunities, disability-related needs, and access to technology. Inclusive orientation programmes can explain available support services and provide accessible learning materials.

5.8 Support for teaching and research

Students with appropriate information-seeking skills are better prepared to engage with scholarly literature, complete assignments, participate in projects, and develop research-related competencies.

5.9 Development of lifelong learning skills

The ability to identify information needs, search for credible sources, and evaluate evidence remains useful beyond university education. Orientation introduces students to practices that can support lifelong learning and professional development.

6. USES AND EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS OF LIBRARY ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES

Library orientation has several practical applications in academic institutions.

6.1 Introduction to library facilities and services

Orientation explains the location and purpose of reading rooms, reference sections, circulation counters, periodical sections, digital learning facilities, and other library services. It also clarifies membership procedures, borrowing limits, renewal facilities, and library regulations.

6.2 Effective use of catalogues and classification systems

Students learn how to search for books by author, title, subject, or keywords. They are introduced to call numbers and shelf arrangements, enabling them to locate materials independently.

6.3 Access to electronic information

Orientation demonstrates how to access e-books, e-journals, subscribed databases, open-access publications, and institutional repositories. Where institutional licensing permits, students can also learn to use remote-access services.

6.4 Assignment and project preparation

Students are shown how to identify relevant books, scholarly articles, and reference materials for assignments, seminars, projects, and presentations. This is particularly important when academic work requires sources beyond general internet searches.

6.5 Development of search strategies

Practical exercises introduce keyword selection, phrase searching, Boolean operators, filters, and search refinement. Students learn that an effective search requires planning rather than entering an entire assignment question into a search box.

6.6 Evaluation of information sources

Orientation can introduce systematic methods for evaluating information according to authority, accuracy, relevance, currency, purpose, and supporting evidence. Students can compare scholarly articles with general websites and social media posts.

6.7 Citation and referencing

Students learn to record author names, publication years, titles, journal details, page numbers, and identifiers such as digital object identifiers (DOIs). They are introduced to the referencing style prescribed by their institution or department.

6.8 Responsible use of artificial intelligence

Orientation can explain that AI-generated answers and references require independent verification. Students should learn to confirm claims using reliable publications, follow institutional policies on AI use, and protect confidential information.

6.9 Continuing learning and research support

Orientation introduces students to reference consultations, subject-specific library instruction, research guides, workshops, and online tutorials. These services help students obtain further assistance when academic requirements become more complex.

6.10 Development of reading habits

By introducing students to books, scholarly journals, newspapers, reference materials, and digital resources, orientation can encourage regular reading and broader intellectual engagement.

7. LIMITATIONS OF LIBRARY ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES

Despite their educational value, library orientation programmes have several limitations.

7.1 Limited instructional time

Orientation is frequently conducted during institutional induction, when many other activities compete for students' attention. A short session may not allow sufficient time for practical exercises, questions, and individual guidance.

7.2 Differences in prior knowledge

Students enter higher education with varying levels of digital competence, language proficiency, academic preparation, and previous library experience. A uniform programme may not adequately meet every student's needs.

7.3 Passive teaching methods

Programmes based primarily on lectures, presentations, or guided tours may improve awareness without ensuring that students can independently apply the skills demonstrated.

7.4 Inadequate infrastructure

Unreliable internet connectivity, insufficient computer facilities, limited database subscriptions, and inadequate staffing may restrict hands-on instruction.

7.5 Information overload

Introducing too many services, databases, procedures, and rules in a single session can overwhelm students. They may forget essential information before having an opportunity to use it.

7.6 Limited assessment

Some libraries evaluate orientation through attendance figures or satisfaction questionnaires alone. These measures do not establish whether students have developed the intended information literacy competencies.

7.7 Weak curricular integration

If library instruction is not reinforced through coursework, students may fail to retain or apply the skills learned during orientation.

7.8 Accessibility and language barriers

Students with disabilities, limited digital access, or differing language needs may require accessible materials, assistive technologies, alternative formats, and additional support.

7.9 Rapid technological change

Changes in databases, authentication systems, digital platforms, and AI tools require regular revision of instructional materials.

7.10 Limitations of a single-session approach

A single introductory session may be useful for initial awareness but may not address every information literacy competency in sufficient depth. The scope and effectiveness of such sessions depend on their content, teaching methods, opportunities for practice, and follow-up support.

These limitations do not make library orientation unnecessary. Rather, they indicate the need for sustained instruction, practical engagement, institutional support, and periodic improvement.

8. Recommendations for Improving the Effectiveness of Library Orientation Programmes

The following measures are recommended for academic libraries.

1. **Define measurable learning outcomes:** Specify the competencies students should demonstrate after completing orientation.
2. **Assess prior knowledge:** Use a short baseline assessment to identify existing skills and learning needs.
3. **Prioritize hands-on exercises:** Allow students to practise catalogue searches, database access, source evaluation, and citation.
4. **Use multiple assessment methods:** Combine knowledge tests, practical tasks, and student feedback instead of relying exclusively on attendance.
5. **Provide follow-up instruction:** Conduct refresher workshops and subject-specific information literacy sessions during the first semester.
6. **Integrate instruction with coursework:** Collaborate with subject teachers to connect library activities with assignments, seminars, and projects.
7. **Develop digital learning materials:** Provide accessible tutorials, short videos, research guides, and frequently asked questions that students can consult when required.
8. **Teach responsible AI use:** Include information verification, awareness of fabricated citations, privacy, and academic integrity.
9. **Promote inclusive access:** Provide accessible instructional formats and additional support according to students' needs.
10. **Encourage active participation:** Use guided searches, group activities, demonstrations, and practical problem-solving exercises.
11. **Review programmes periodically:** Use feedback and assessment results to revise instructional content and teaching strategies.
12. **Document good practices:** Maintain clear instructional plans, assessment rubrics, and evaluation reports to support consistency and professional development.
13. **Strengthen librarian–faculty collaboration:** Involve teaching faculty in identifying the information requirements of assignments and designing relevant learning activities.
14. **Encourage independent resource use:** Provide opportunities for students to locate, evaluate, and use information without continuous assistance.
15. **Ensure continuous professional development:** Enable library professionals to update their knowledge of information literacy instruction, digital resources, research tools, and emerging technologies.

Implementing these measures can help academic libraries move from one-time introductory activities towards a continuing programme of information literacy education.

9. CONCLUSION

Library orientation programmes help first-year students meet the information demands of higher education. Beyond introducing library facilities and services, effective programmes develop students' abilities to identify information needs, locate relevant resources, evaluate credibility, and use information ethically. In the digital environment, students require guidance in scholarly searching, citation practices, plagiarism prevention, and the responsible use of artificial intelligence. Programme effectiveness depends on practical activities, accessible instruction, institutional support, and continuous engagement. Collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty can strengthen learning outcomes. Therefore, library orientation should be considered the beginning of continuous information literacy education, promoting independent learning, academic achievement, responsible information use, and lifelong learning.

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