FROM BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION TO INFORMATION EMPOWERMENT: THEORETICAL TRAJECTORIES IN INFORMATION LITERACY

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1. ABSTRACT :

The concept of Information Literacy (IL) has significantly evolved, shifting from its initial focus on bibliographic education to a broader and more empowering framework. Initially concentrated on instructing users in the identification and citation of information sources, information literacy has evolved into a multifaceted concept integral to critical thinking, lifelong learning, and civic participation. This study examines the theoretical pathways that have influenced this transition, outlining significant advancements within behavioural, cognitive, constructivist, critical, and sociocultural perspectives.
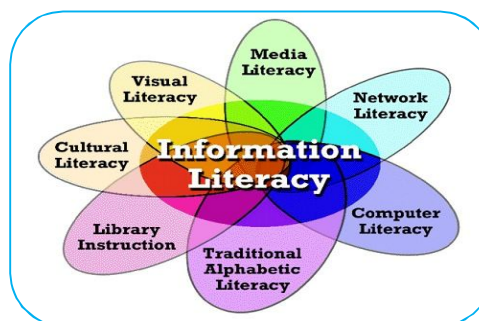
This research examines key models—including the Big6 Skills Model, Kuhlthau's Information Search Process, the SCONUL Seven Pillars, and the ACRL Framework—to illustrate the transition of information literacy from a competency-based framework to a more comprehensive, empowerment-focused paradigm. Inspired by constructivist learning theories, critical pedagogy, and sociocultural viewpoints, information literacy (IL) is increasingly seen as a mechanism for individual and social transformation, especially in an era characterised by algorithmic media, disinformation, and digital monitoring.

This theoretical investigation highlights the necessity for more inclusive, pluralistic frameworks that tackle power, identity, and access within the information ecosystem. The study ends by examining the ramifications of these theoretical developments for information literacy research, teaching, and policy formulation in higher education and beyond.

KEYWORDS *: Information Literacy, Bibliographic Instruction, Critical Pedagogy, Constructivism, Sociocultural Theory, ACRL Framework, SCONUL Seven Pillars, Empowerment, Information Competency, Theoretical Models*

2. Historical Context: Transitioning from Bibliographic Instruction to Information Literacy

The development of Information Literacy (IL) originates from the period of bibliographic training, which became significant in academic libraries from the 1950s to the 1970s. The initial emphasis was on instructing students in the navigation and use of library catalogues, indexes, and reference materials, particularly in light of the increasing intricacy of academic collections (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2009). This pedagogical method was predominantly skills-oriented and facilitated by

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librarians, prioritising procedural expertise above conceptual comprehension. By the 1980s, the swift advancement of information technology and the emergence of personal computers required an expanded understanding of user education. The American Library Association (ALA) codified this transition in its 1989 study, which characterised an information literate individual as one who can discern when information is necessary and possesses the skills to access, assess, and utilise it effectively (ALA, 1989). This study was a crucial turning point, establishing information literacy as a fundamental educational goal rather than a secondary library ability.

In the next years, information literacy (IL) gained more traction due to the efforts of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), notably with the implementation of **the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education in 2000** (ACRL, 2000). These standards highlighted performance indicators and quantifiable results, linking information literacy with assessment-oriented pedagogical frameworks in higher education. The **Alexandria Proclamation of 2005** subsequently underscored the worldwide significance of information literacy (IL) by acknowledging it as a basic human right and a catalyst for social and economic advancement (IFLA & UNESCO, 2005). In a notable theoretical and pedagogical transition, the ACRL discontinued its competency-based standards and implemented **the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education** in 2016, signifying a shift towards threshold ideas and comprehensive learning experiences (ACRL, 2016).

Librarians, educators, and policy-makers have been instrumental in redefining information literacy to address evolving social demands. Their joint endeavours have broadened information literacy beyond library education to encompass curricular integration, digital citizenship, and lifelong learning programs, highlighting its significance as a cross-disciplinary and civic competency (Head et al., 2013; Julien & Genuis, 2011).

3. Conceptual Foundations of Information Literacy

Information Literacy (IL) has had considerable conceptual development since its origin. Initially articulated in the 1989 ALA Presidential Committee report, information literacy (IL) is described as the capacity to identify when information is required and to efficiently access, assess, and utilise it, so establishing it as a fundamental talent for lifelong learning (ALA, 1989). This term has evolved and been understood via numerous academic perspectives, resulting in a multitude of versions that embody diverse theoretical, educational, and technical settings. For example, Bruce (1997) presented a phenomenographic viewpoint, highlighting information literacy (IL) as a collection of diverse experiences individuals encounter while engaging with information, whilst Webber and Johnston (2000) characterised it as a socio-cultural activity that amalgamates learning, cognition, and information management.

The landscape of information literacy has been influenced by its distinctions and intersections with **related literacies, including information skills, media literacy, digital literacy, and data literacy.** Information skills often denote the procedural competencies required to locate and utilise information technologies (Eisenberg & Berkowitz, 1990), whereas media literacy emphasises the critical analysis of media content and comprehension of media's societal function (Hobbs, 2010). Digital literacy encompasses information literacy and the proficient use of digital tools and technology (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004), whereas data literacy focusses on the ability to read, understand, and convey data (Ridsdale et al., 2015). Although these literacies converge with information literacy, each possesses a unique epistemological and pedagogical grounding.

A notable theoretical progression in information literacy (IL) is its conceptualisation as a threshold concept, a transformational notion that facilitates a novel and previously unattainable comprehension of a subject (Meyer & Land, 2005). The ACRL (2016) Framework for Information Literacy expressly embraces this perspective, delineating six **threshold ideas**, including "Authority Is Constructed and Contextual" and "Information Has Value." These principles emphasise that information

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literacy is not simply a collection of isolated abilities, but a profound, transforming learning process that alters a learner's understanding of knowledge, research, and information ecosystems. This reconceptualisation ties information literacy with higher-order cognitive and metacognitive development, framing it as essential to academic and professional success.

4. Theoretical Trajectories of Information Literacy

The evolution of Information Literacy (IL) has been influenced by several theoretical frameworks that define how humans engage with, acquire knowledge from, and evaluate information. This section examines four principal theoretical trajectories—behaviorist and cognitive, constructivist and inquiry-based, critical and sociocultural, and post-structuralist and postdigital—each of which has provided unique insights to information literacy research and practice.

4.1. Behaviourist and Cognitive Theories

Initial information literacy models were based on behaviourist and cognitive theories, highlighting observable competencies and sequential information-seeking methodologies. These viewpoints regarded learning as a reaction to external stimuli and internal cognitive frameworks that could be developed or improved. The **Big6 Model,** created by **Eisenberg and Berkowitz (1990),** exemplifies this methodology by delineating information problem-solving into six sequential stages: task definition, information seeking, location and access, information utilisation, synthesis, and evaluation, which encompass both behavioural actions and cognitive strategies. **Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (ISP) (1991**) presented a cognitive model that highlights the emotive, cognitive, and behavioural phases students undergo while research, including uncertainty, exploration, and formulation. These approaches offered initial theoretical frameworks for IL training but frequently emphasised procedural skills at the expense of critical involvement.

4.2. Constructivist and Inquiry-Based Learning

As instructional learning progressed, constructivist theories—based on the contributions of Piaget and Vygotsky—started to influence instructional design. Constructivism asserts that learners actively build knowledge via experience, reflection, and social interaction (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). In this perspective**, information literacy (IL)** is perceived not as a fixed collection of skills but as a contextual, dynamic comprehension of information landscapes. The **SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy (2011)** embody a constructivist framework, depicting information literacy as a cyclical process of cultivating skills such as identifying, assessing, managing, and applying information. Moreover, Project Information Literacy (PIL) research has shown that students' **information-seeking behaviours** are influenced more by real-world situations and exploratory learning than by formal instruction alone (Head, 2013). Inquiry-based methodologies use these principles, prompting learners to pose questions, examine sources, and cultivate profound conceptual insights through autonomous investigation.

4.3. Critical and Sociocultural Theories

The IL literature has progressively integrated critical and sociocultural theories, highlighting power relations, cultural settings, and the ideological aspects of information. Inspired by Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, this method regards information literacy (IL) as an instrument for emancipation, promoting critical consciousness and agency in learners. Elmborg (2006) contended that information literacy should transcend mere skill development to empower citizens to question authority, scrutinise information frameworks, and contest social injustices. This critical perspective introduces the notion of epistemic justice—the equitable allocation of knowledge and acknowledgement of varied epistemologies (Fricker, 2007)—and positions information literacy as a practice fundamentally influenced by power dynamics and identity. From this viewpoint, information

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literacy is not impartial but politically influenced, requiring an educational approach that enables students to combat misinformation, censorship, and systemic inequity.

### 4.4. Post-Structuralist and Postdigital Perspectives

Within the framework of the post-truth age and algorithmically regulated information systems, information literacy has been redefined through post-structuralist and postdigital perspectives. According to Foucault's theories of discourse and power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980), information literacy (IL) is perceived as situated within discursive structures that dictate what constitutes valid knowledge. This viewpoint emphasises the production, regulation, and use of information within frameworks of power, surveillance, and commercial motives. Andrejevic (2020) expands this critique by examining how media and digital technologies influence users' attention, involvement, and perception, therefore compromising autonomy and critical thinking. These results underscore the pressing necessity for an information literacy paradigm that enables learners to address algorithmic bias, digital manipulation, and the convergence of media platforms in a monitored, data-centric environment.

5. Redefining Information Literacy: Transitioning from Competency to Empowerment

The transition of Information Literacy (IL) from a competency-based framework to an empowerment-focused paradigm signifies a substantial change in its theoretical and pedagogical approach. Traditionally, information literacy (IL) was examined via a competency-based perspective, emphasising specific abilities that could be taught, quantified, and evaluated. **The ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (2000)** illustrated this paradigm by delineating explicit performance indicators and learning goals that students were anticipated to attain. These standards facilitated the incorporation of information literacy into academic assessment frameworks, although frequently diminished learning to a mere procedural checklist, thereby constraining possibilities for critical engagement and contextual comprehension (Kapitzke, 2003). In reaction to increasing criticisms of the instrumentalist approach, the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (2016) implemented a conceptual transformation by including threshold ideas. The Framework prioritises profound, transformational learning above quantifiable outputs through six interrelated perspectives, including "Scholarship as Conversation" and "Searching as Strategic Exploration." This new orientation embodies constructivist and sociocultural viewpoints, perceiving information literacy (IL) not as a collection of discrete tasks, but as a multifaceted, contextual, and dynamic comprehension of information's role in academic and social environments (Townsend, Brunetti, & Hofer, 2011). The Framework promotes critical engagement by students with information creation and distribution, fostering intellectual curiosity, epistemic agency, and reflective judgement.

Reconceptualising information literacy as empowerment highlights its significance in civic involvement, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. By enabling individuals to scrutinise sources, assess authority, and identify bias, information literacy serves as a conduit for democratic engagement and informed citizenship (Tewell, 2016). Furthermore, the focus on lifelong learning integrates Information Literacy (IL) with the overarching objectives of education in a knowledge society, equipping learners to adjust to evolving information landscapes and to engage substantively in public debate. This empowerment-focused approach of information literacy urges educational institutions to transcend mere skill transmission and cultivate critical consciousness and social responsibility in learners (Elmborg, 2006).

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Information Literacy Empowerment Pyramid

Social Responsibility

Lifelong Learning

Critical Thinking

Civic Engagement
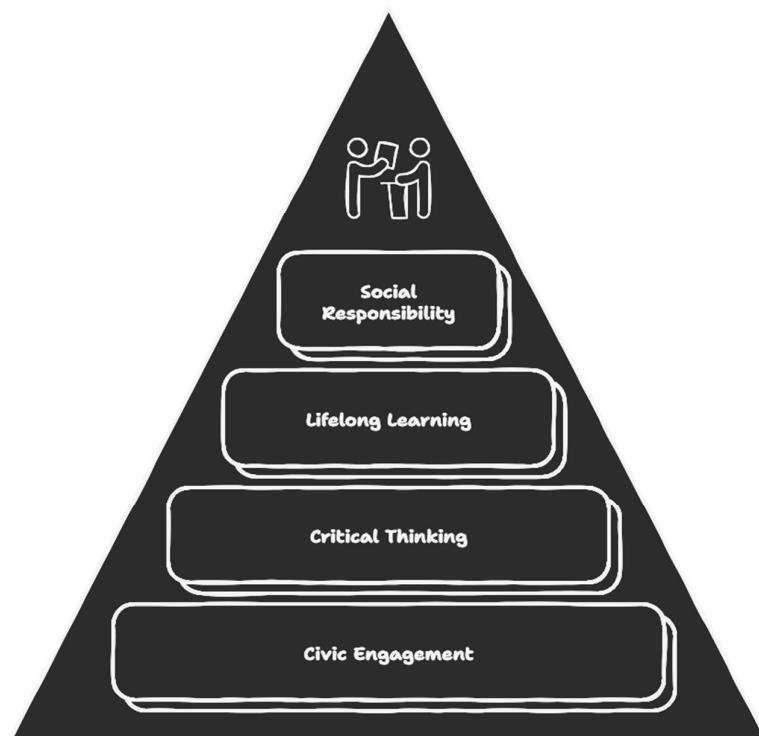
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Table 1. Information Literacy Impower Pyramid

6. Critique and Gaps in Current Theoretical Understandings

Notwithstanding the considerable theoretical progress in Information Literacy (IL), criticisms remain about the limits and biases inherent in prevailing frameworks. Conventional information literacy models, particularly those based on Western academic librarianship, tend to be static, Eurocentric, and library-focused, neglecting the intricate socio-political and cultural settings that shape information practices (Kapitzke, 2003; Buschman, 2009). These approaches often presume a neutral, apolitical perspective on information, overlooking how access, authority, and legitimacy are influenced by power relations.

A significant deficiency in the information literacy literature is the inadequate coverage of indigenous, feminist, and global South viewpoints. Indigenous knowledge systems, often conveyed orally and via experiential learning, contest prevailing Western conceptions of information as written, linear, and individualistic (Todorova et al., 2020). Feminist perspectives on information literacy attack the male-centric biases in knowledge creation and promote the acknowledgement of emotion, embodiment, and relationality in information practices (Accardi, 2013). Scholars from the Global South have also emphasised the necessity of decolonising information literacy, contending that prevailing paradigms marginalise alternative epistemologies and sustain informational imperialism (Shorish, 2018).

Addressing these deficiencies necessitates the formulation of intersectional, pluralistic information literacy theories that incorporate varied cultural, political, and epistemic perspectives.

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Such frameworks will not only augment the pertinence of IL across international contexts but also promote more inclusive, equity-focused educational practices.

7. Implications for Research, Education, and Policy

Theoretical frameworks in information literacy are not only academic creations; they significantly influence curriculum design, teaching, and policy development. In educational contexts, they influence the instruction, evaluation, and integration of information literacy across several disciplines. The transition from competency-based to empowerment-based approaches has resulted in educational innovations that prioritise inquiry, reflection, and critical engagement (Tewell, 2016). Educators are progressively required to integrate information literacy into subject-specific contexts and advocate for it as a vital lifetime skill necessary for academic and civic engagement. Theoretical insights guide institutional tactics for designing information literacy programs, allocating resources, and assessing learning results from a policy viewpoint. National and international organisations, such as UNESCO and IFLA, have championed information literacy as a fundamental human right and an essential component of informed citizenry, highlighting its significance in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2017). Policies that promote interdisciplinary cooperation and the incorporation of critical viewpoints can effectively institutionalise information literacy in significant and equitable manners.

Future study should to adopt multidisciplinary and intersectional methodologies in information literacy, integrating insights from education, sociology, media studies, and cultural studies. Priority must be given to participatory techniques, collaborative creativity with marginalised people, and the investigation of non-Western epistemologies. This research will enhance comprehensive, adaptive, and internationally pertinent information literacy theory and practice.

8. CONCLUSION

This study analysed the progression of Information Literacy from its inception in bibliographic teaching to its contemporary role as a transformational, empowerment-focused concept. Information literacy (IL) has evolved via several theoretical frameworks, including behaviourist, cognitive, constructivist, critical, and poststructuralist views, each adding fresh insights into our comprehension of information, learning, and agency.

The increasing acknowledgement of IL as a dynamic, context-dependent construct necessitates a continual reassessment of its theoretical underpinnings. As information ecosystems grow more intricate, diverse, and contentious, information literacy theory must adapt to incorporate inclusion, intersectionality, and critical analysis. Future paths in IL studies should focus on deconstructing epistemic hierarchies, including marginalised viewpoints, and fostering democratic knowledge participation across varied educational and societal contexts.

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