

Intermediate School Librarian Information Literacy Readiness in Kuwait

Reham Alhuraiti

University College London (UCL), Department of Information Studies, London, UK, Reham.alhuraiti.17@ucl.ac.uk

ABSTRACT:

Information literacy is a critical asset in the 21st century, a plethora of librarianship bodies emphasize the role of school librarian in fostering information literacy (ALA/AASL, 2010; CILIP, 2018). Despite school librarians' potential role as lead educators of information literacy education, they tend to be unacknowledged and underestimated to students, teachers and school principle. In Kuwait, school librarians are academically and professionally trained in librarianship and teaching. However, school librarians' abilities in Kuwait are not employed into information literacy education. The intent of this study reveals Kuwait's intermediate school librarian's awareness of and willingness to teach information literacy. To accomplish this, an exploratory study was conducted using an online survey completed by 178 school librarians from public intermediate schools. Results confirmed that intermediate school librarians in Kuwait are not just qualified in librarianship and teaching methods but also the majority of them said they understood the concept of information literacy and most of all have the desire to work as teacher-librarian.

Keywords: Information Literacy, Information Literacy Education, Intermediate School, School Librarian, Teacher-Librarian, School, Student, Kuwait

1. INTRODUCTION

Citizens need to be acquainted with a set of information literacy competencies in order to equip them for life. The early school years are viewed as the best starting point for intervention by librarians (Henri & Asselin, 2005) to save the sinking ship of information literacy delivery. Efforts are being made to make information literacy a mandatory subject in classrooms, where it has been claimed librarians will need to take on a teaching role in order to ensure successful integration throughout the school (Secker & Coonan, 2013). Some consider school librarians to be an essential element of the educational process in which they should act as learning facilitators and knowledge builders (Loertscher & Woolls, 2012). This indicates the essential role of librarians in teaching information literacy to students while supporting and collaborating with the school teachers (Eisenberg & Berkowitz, 2000; Inskip, 2015; Lloyd, 2010).

In Kuwait, several studies indicated that students of all levels not only lack information literacy skills but also have deficiencies in library and research skills (Al-Issa, 2013; Alkhezzi & Henda, 2018; Rehman & Alfaresi, 2009). Meanwhile, school teachers have been found to be deficient in information literacy competencies and instead are occupied with other classroom responsibilities (Al-Awidi & Aldhafeeri, 2017; AlDaihani, 2017; Shaper, 2015). In contrast, school librarians are potentially academically and professionally trained in information literacy, librarianship and teaching.

Education in Kuwait is governed by the Ministry of Education (MoE). Education is compulsory for a minimum of 8 years, from age 6 to 14, including the intermediate years. The intermediate stage is the third stage in the ladder of Kuwait's educational provision. It lasts for four years for the age 10 to 15, during which time a significant contribution is made to identifying students' abilities, developing their talents, and helping them recognise their capacities.

It is very unfortunate that there are no published studies that have focused on the role of the librarian in developing information literacy in schools in Kuwait. Therefore, this study will focus on the school librarian. This study fills a gap within the literature by revealing the school librarian's awareness and attitude towards information literacy education. This study will benefit the Ministry of Education in Kuwait and policy makers in developing and integrating information literacy in school curricula to enhance the students' competencies through utilising the school librarians' skills.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the current era where information is within the reach of all groups of people, the librarian can play a fundamental role in the development of information literate citizens. School education provides the foundation for establishing basic information literacy skills. The majority of librarians consider themselves as information literacy knowledge providers and not just keepers of book collections (Grazia Melchionda, 2007). However, despite this many school librarians are not involved in the learning practice and their role is often not recognised (Loertscher & Woolls, 2012). The absence of teacher-librarians' utilisation in Kuwait schools has major impact on students' competencies: e.g. significant numbers of librarians do not collaborate with teachers to disseminate this information since they regard themselves as less authoritative than teachers (Abdel-Motey, 1989; Al-Musalam, 1988). As a

profession, it is critical to examine the role of school librarians in information literacy across the school sector. Therefore, the intent of this study is to explore the gaps in information literacy education in Kuwait, by establishing an understanding of the intermediate public-school librarians' capabilities in delivering information literacy education. This will be achieved by unravelling their information literacy awareness of information literacy terminology, educational qualification, as well as their willingness to become information literacy educators.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was designed to address the following research questions among the school librarians of intermediate public school in Kuwait:

1. Are intermediate school librarians aware of and do they understand the concept of information literacy?
2. What are the educational qualifications of the intermediate school librarians?
3. What is the intermediate school librarian's previous education and work training on information literacy?
4. Are intermediate school librarians willing to be teacher-librarian?

4. METHODS

No literature could be found on levels of understanding, awareness and willingness regarding information literacy education and the educational levels among school librarians in Kuwait. Therefore, a study was required to examine the Kuwait's school librarians' existing understanding of information literacy and motivation in relation to information literacy education. An exploratory study was conducted in the summer of 2018 among intermediate school librarians in Kuwait. Exploratory studies are defined as exploring a "phenomena or situations that are not familiar" (Reaves, 1992, p. 9). These studies are commonly used to examine a situation with insufficient information or a problem that have not been studied yet (Shields & Rangarjan, 2013).

4.1. POPULATION:

The population for this exploratory study was public intermediate school librarians from the six governorates in Kuwait's public education system. According to the statistical yearbook, 'Libraries Facts and figures 2017/2016', published by the Libraries Department of the Kuwait Ministry of Education, Kuwait has 366 intermediate school librarians distributed across 204 intermediate school libraries. 178 responded to the survey out of the 366 intermediate school librarians.

4.2. PROCEDURE

A SurveyMonkey questionnaire was created and carried out by contacting school libraries through phone calls and social media platforms, (such as WhatsApp and Telegram) to send the SurveyMonkey link to Kuwait's public intermediate school librarians after seeking their permission, along with information sheet explaining the purpose and nature of the study. All participants in the study were guaranteed anonymity. Respondents generally spent 2 minutes answering each questionnaire. The librarians were asked

to answer closed multiple-choice questions. Data analysis was conducted through SurveyMonkey using various statistical procedures.

5. FINDINGS:

5.1. GENDER

Of the 178 intermediate school librarians who responded in this study, 112 (63.64%) were females, 64 (36.36%) were males and two respondents did not indicate their gender. According to the Libraries Department of Kuwait's Ministry of Education (2017), there are 235 (64.2%) female school librarians distributed across 104 intermediate schools, while there are just 131 males, distributed across 100 intermediate schools. These results indicate that female school librarians in Kuwait constitute a relative majority although they are distributed across approximately an equal number of schools. Prior studies show that women are in the majority in the librarianship and information profession (CILIP, 2014; Department for Professional Employees, 2011; Mars, 2018). This finding indicate that the study sample is representative of the population.

5.2. AGE

Respondents' dominant age group was the 20-29 (51.14%) group, while just 5 (2.84%) of the 178 respondents were aged between 50 and 59 years. Obviously, this could be because Kuwait has a low retirement age policy, with employees able to retire after 25 years of duty or reaching 50 of age (The Public Institution For Social Security, 2009). Low salary and lack of incentives and recognition may be other reasons for early retirement or change of workforce (Al-Ansari, 1992). Another potential reason may be that after a certain number of years of work experience, school librarians could be promoted to the position of library supervisor.

5.3. DEGREE QUALIFICATIONS

A multiple-choice question of the respondent's qualifications (diploma, bachelor, master, PhD, and other) found that the majority of respondents, 162 out of 178 (91.53%), held a bachelor's degree in Library and Information studies. Additionally, 12 (6.78%) of the 178 respondents held a master's degree qualification, 8 of whom were males and 4 were females. Two male respondents held PhD qualifications. Just one respondent, a female in the 50-59 age group, held a diploma qualification, the reason being that at the time when this respondent trained, the diploma was the form of qualification in Kuwait at the Department of Information Studies (at the time, Department of Library and Information Science). This data indicates that school librarians in Kuwait are professionally qualified in terms of library and information education as well as in teaching methods since the undergraduate programme course from the Kuwait Department of Information Studies (DIS) at the College of Basic Education equips them with both competencies (Department of Information Studies, 2017).

5.4. YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Answers to a multiple-choice question on the years of experience of working as a school librarian (1-3, 4-10, 11-18, and 19-26) showed that the majority of respondents, 67 out of 178 (36.85%), had worked as school librarians for 1 to 3 years. Meanwhile, 55 (31.07%) participants had worked for 4 to 10 years and 44 (24.86%) participants had worked for 11 to 18 years, while just 11 (6.21%) had worked for 19 to 26 years. Again, perhaps the low retirement age and low salaries in Kuwait could be the cause of the overall lack of experience (Al-Ansari, 1992; The Public Institution For Social Security, 2009).

5.5. UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF THE TERM ‘INFORMATION LITERACY’

This section of the questionnaire was intended to elicit school librarians’ understanding of the term ‘information literacy’. Figure 1 displays the respondents’ answers to this question. It emerged that 107 (60.11%) respondents out of 178 said that they understood the term ‘information literacy’; meanwhile, 59 (33.15%) were not sure and the remaining 12 (6.74%) did not understand its meaning. It is worth noting that 10 out of 14 respondents with postgraduate degrees said they understood the information literacy concept and 2 of them were not sure. Clearly, the findings indicate that the majority feel that they understand the meaning of information literacy. This might give a positive signal regarding their capability to become information literacy teachers/facilitators.

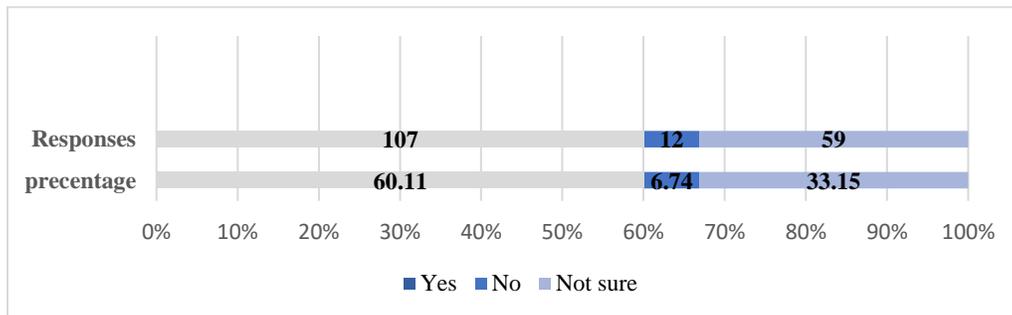


Figure 1: Understanding of the meaning of Information Literacy.

5.6. PREVIOUS LIBRARY/INFORMATION STUDIES ON INFORMATION LITERACY

School librarians were asked whether they had studied information literacy in their information studies education from a multiple-choice question (yes and no). 98 (55.37%) of the respondents declared that they had studied information literacy in their previous librarianship education. Contrastingly, 79 (44.63%) of the respondents revealed that they had not studied it. Only 3 out of 14 respondents with postgraduate degrees had not learnt about information literacy in their previous studies. The finding demonstrates that the majority have studied information literacy.

5.7. WORK COURSE OR SELF LEARNING ON INFORMATION LITERACY

School librarians were asked whether they had received any training at work, attended a workshop or read any information resources on information literacy from a multiple-choice question (yes and no). The majority of respondents (66.85%) had not taken a course or read a book or an article on information literacy. Among the 14 respondents with postgraduate degrees, 6 had not undertaken any work training courses or read any sources on information literacy. This suggests the possibility that relevant personnel in schools and the Ministry of Education in Kuwait do not appear to be offering training in information literacy. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness of information literacy and its significance through measures, such as providing courses and promoting information literacy.

5.8. WILLINGNESS TO WORK AS A LIBRARY TEACHER

In this question, school librarians were asked whether they would be willing to work as teacher librarians, with a multiple choice (yes and no). As shown in Figure 2, the majority of the respondents, 149 out of 178 (83.71%), declared that they would be willing to become Library/Information teachers and expressed interest in this opportunity. Of the 12 school librarians (16%) with a master degree, 10 expressed willingness to work as a teacher librarian; meanwhile, 1 of the 2 school librarians with a PhD degree showed interest in teaching. In total, just 29 of the 178 respondents were not interested in becoming teachers. The data collected show that most of the respondents that did not want to become teachers were either unsure of the meaning of information literacy or did not understand it. Additionally, most of them had not studied, taken a course or read about information literacy.

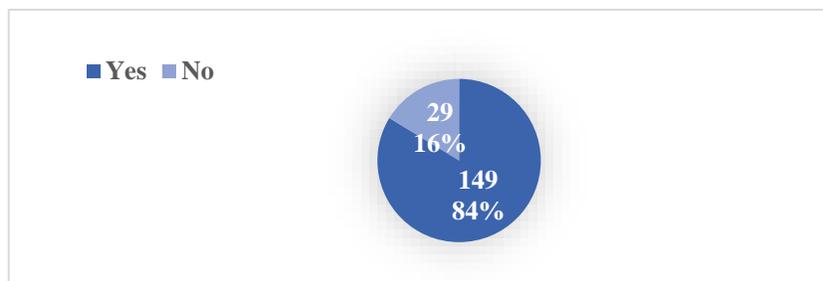


Figure 2: willingness to work as teacher-librarian

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, the study produced important implications for the research study; it provided significant findings for this study and for the information literacy literature as a whole, practically in Kuwait, in terms of the finding that school librarians in Kuwait are not only willing and motivated to teach, but also hold degree qualifications in librarianship where they adapted basic teaching and learning proficiencies to work as teachers. According to previous studies, citizens in Kuwait lack basic information literacy skills due to a lack or minimal level of information literacy education. Some may argue in favour of employing school teachers to foster information literacy in their classrooms. However, the literature review indicated that teachers tend to lack information

literacy competencies and are usually occupied with classroom content to be able to teach information literacy effectively. In fact, teachers in Kuwait need professional support from those with expertise in information literacy to help their students cope with the 21st century's rapid advancements. These important findings thus suggested that school librarians in Kuwait might be the proper candidates to teach information literacy.

REFERENCES

- Abdel-Motey, Y. Y. (1989). Education for school library media specialists in the state of Kuwait: a competency-based approach. *PQDT - UK & Ireland*.
- Al-Ansari, H. (1992). A study of supply and demand of library and information workers in Kuwait: Five-year projections and recommendations for human resources planning. (C. W. Conaway, Ed.). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Al-Awidi, H., & Aldhafeeri, F. (2017). Teachers' Readiness To Implement Digital Curriculum in Kuwaiti Schools. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, 16, 105–126.
- Al-Issa, R. (2013). *Concepts of information literacy and information literacy standards among undergraduate students in public and private universities in the State of Kuwait (Doctoral dissertation)*. Retrieved from <http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/20264/>
- Al-Musalam, M. (1988). A study of the libraries in girls' credit hour secondary schools in Kuwait. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- ALA/AASL. (2010). ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians 2010. Retrieved from https://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aasleducation/schoollibrary/2010_standards_with_rubrics_and_statements_1-31-11.pdf
- AlDaihani, S. (2017). Achieving Excellence in Kuwaiti Schools: A School Leaders' Viewpoint. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2151-6200.1000274>
- Alkhezzi, F., & Henda, B. (2018). Information literacy among graduate students in Kuwait University's College of Education. *Education for Information*, 33(4), 231–246. <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-170141>
- CILIP. (2014). *A study of the UK information workforce*. UK. Retrieved from https://archive.cilip.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/executive_summary_nov_2015-5_a4web_0.pdf
- CILIP. (2018). Schools – Information Literacy Website. Retrieved November 18, 2018, from <https://infolit.org.uk/sectors/schools/>
- Department for Professional Employees. (2011). *LIBRARY WORKERS: FACTS & FIGURES*. Washington, USA. Retrieved from <http://ala-apa.org/files/2012/03/Library-Workers-2011.pdf>
- Department of Information Studies. (2017). About us. Retrieved October 7, 2018, from <http://www.paaet.edu.kw/mysite/Default.aspx?tabid=9701&language=en-US>
- Eisenberg, M., & Berkowitz, R. (2000). *Teaching information & technology skills: the Big6 in secondary schools. Reference and*

- Grazia Melchionda, M. (2007). Librarians in the age of the internet: their attitudes and roles. *New Library World*, 108(3/4), 123–140. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03074800710735339>
- Henri, J., & Asselin, M. (2005). *Leadership Issues in the Information Literate School Community* by James Henri, Marlene Asselin - *Libraries Unlimited - ABC-CLIO*. Libraries Unlimited. Retrieved from <https://www.abc-clio.com/LibrariesUnlimited/product.aspx?pc=F2441P>
- Inskip, C. (2015). Information literacy in LIS education: exploring the student view. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 9(2), 94. <https://doi.org/10.11645/9.2.1977>
- Lloyd, A. (2010). *Information literacy landscapes: information literacy in education, workplace and everyday contexts* /. Oxford: Chandos Publishing.
- Loertscher, D. V., & Woolls, B. (2012). *Librarians-Moving from Being “The Elephant in the Room” to Becoming Central to the Learning Process*. Retrieved from <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/books/9783110281002/9783110281002.241/9783110281002.241.pdf>
- Mars, P. (2018). Gender Demographics and Perceptions in Librarianship. *School of Information Student Research Journal*, 7(2). Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/slissrj>Retrievedfrom<http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/slissrj/vol7/iss2/3><http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/slissrj/vol7/iss2/3>
- Reaves, C. . (1992). *Quantitative research for the behavioral science*. New York: Wiley.
- Rehman, S., & Alfaresi, S. (2009). Information literacy skills among female students in Kuwaiti high schools. *Library Review*, 58(8), 607–616. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00242530910987091>
- Secker, J., & Coonan, E. (2013). *Rethinking information literacy : a practical framework for supporting learning / edited by Jane Secker and Emma Coonan*. London: London : Facet.
- Shaper, S. (2015). *CILIP Guidelines for Secondary School Libraries* (Third edit). United Kingdom: Facet Publishing.
- Shields, P., & Rangarjan, N. (2013). *A Playbook for Research Methods: Integrating Conceptual Frameworks and Project management*. New Forums Press.
- The Public Institution For Social Security. (2009). *Social security guide in Kuwait 2009*.