
Information literacy developments and issues in Spain

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Abstract

The adoption of the information literacy (IL) agenda in Spain has been comparatively slow and fragmented due to cultural setbacks during the twentieth century. Since the late 1980s, however, developments in library services and staffing policies, reforms in education, and wide availability of ICTs, among other factors, have led to a brighter picture, with academic and public librarians all over the country engaged in IL activities for all types of users – though school libraries still lag far behind. The main problems still to be addressed seem to be much the same as in most comparable countries: IL as a responsibility for all learning facilitators, social awareness of lifelong learning needs, training of IL trainers, assessing the individual achievements and the institutional outcomes of IL training programmes, and a clear understanding of the remit and rationale for different literacies within the information society.

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1. Introduction

The Spanish term and concept for information literacy (IL) – “*alfabetización informacional*” – begins to appear in the library and information science (LIS) literature in Spain around 2000, but related terms, concepts and services are present in research and practice in Spain during the 1990s. IL cuts across many different disciplines and across professional and even political agendas: librarians, teachers and faculty, experts in educational technology, learning facilitators, all contribute to the training in IL of citizens, even while unaware of the concept and its implications. New trends in user education in school, public and academic libraries; information and communication technology literacy (ICT literacy) priorities within the government’s programme for the information society; recent reviews in primary and secondary compulsory education and the higher education sectors, all these are related in several ways to the IL experience.

Recording the evolution and achievements of IL in Spain is not an easy task because of its great variety, but in recent years LIS institutions in Spain have gone through an accelerated pace in development which certainly has had a strong positive influence for all IL-related activities and services and for the widespread acceptance of the concept itself.

2. Problems for the information literacy agenda in Spain

The diverse factors and problems that have contributed to the slow and disparate adoption of the IL concept and practice in Spain include the following:

- Culture in general and libraries in particular went through a particularly severe period of backwardness and deprivation in the mid-twentieth century due to Franco’s coup and dictatorship (1936-1975). This state of affairs affected all kinds of libraries – school, public and academic – up until the 1980s, with very poor collections and services and an almost universal preference for preservation rather than use. User education was almost totally absent as a library service – though for a more detailed picture of the period, the fact



that there were significant regional differences should, of course, be taken into account as well.

- At the turn of this new century, school libraries are still not very common. The main reason for this can be traced back to the widespread use of textbooks in traditional teaching methods and the corresponding, almost total absence of resource based learning. This could be said to be one of the main reasons behind the general lack of interest in using libraries and developing information skills among students and citizens, a trend that limits the performance of librarians and library services both in the public and academic sector.
- Even within the higher education sector, teaching methods have generally been focused on the “knowledge transmission model” rather than “knowledge construction model”. Thus there is a low demand amongst university students for good quality library services, which again accounts for poor accomplishments in user education activities for both university students and faculty alike.
- There is a lack of understanding and collaboration between librarians and teaching staff in the primary and secondary education sectors. Students’ use of public libraries has most often been seen as a problem, not as an opportunity, so that cooperation is very superficial and not grasped in full as inherently embedded in the curriculum.

However, this battleground has been going through a process of positive change since the 1990s:

- Library collections have improved both in public and academic libraries. These improvements include developments such as full networks and consortia of libraries, digital collections and electronic access to full-text journals, better facilities and equipment, Web page provision (among others).
- Access to digital collections and development of virtual learning environments plus availability of ICT equipment across campus and at home have led to the need for training and fluency in competencies related to IL.
- Local, regional and national programmes for the development of the information

society have resulted in a substantial increase of network resources, computers at homes, schools, and libraries, as well as specific training programmes of teaching staff in the use of ICTs for educational purposes, ICT literacy, and the like.

- LIS professionals seem to be more user-oriented and better trained for the development of value added services.
- Educational reforms have started to focus on active and lifelong learning and the development of key skills among students; and very recently national and regional employment and industry departments have set up country-wide frameworks for professional and vocational qualifications.

3. The adoption of the information literacy agenda in Spanish libraries

3.1 School libraries and the training in documentation

As forerunner to this trend, Bernal (1985) proposed a “pedagogy of information” within the first *Plan Nacional de Documentación e Información Científica y Técnica* (National Program for Scientific and Technological Information and Documentation), known as “Plan IDOC” (España, 1985). In 1989 he also sponsored a new association called *Educación y Biblioteca* and was the first editor of a monthly journal with the same title. The rationale for both ventures was the promotion of school libraries as a tool to learn how to learn.

In 1992, under Bernal’s leadership, Benito Morales proposed his formula for the “*educación documental*” as a transversal topic in the curriculum for compulsory education. In this document the contribution of the library to the educational achievements of the student is seen from the axis of thinking, information and values. In 1996 the same author (Benito Morales, 1996) offered evidence of improvements in academic achievement if learning is IL-based in his doctoral dissertation *Del dominio de la información a la mejora de la inteligencia. Diseño, aplicación y evaluación del programa Hebori (Habilidades y Estrategias para Buscar, Organizar y Razonar la Información)*[1]. Wide coverage of “*educación documental*” within the pages of the journal *Educación y Biblioteca* influenced the development of user education

programmes in several regions, and special optional courses related to IL were developed:

- “*Información documental y aprendizaje*”;
- “*El proceso de la comunicación*”;
- “*Técnicas de Documentación y Tratamiento de la Información*”;
- “*Información y Comunicación*”; and
- “*Metodología documental*”.

At present several pilot projects in schools include user education. In some regions coordination centres support school libraries in distributing materials and sharing experiences to foster IL. For example, the *Dirección Provincial in Málaga*, provides specific IL materials in their Web site for students (www.juntadeandalucia.es/educacionciencia/malaga/Bibliotecas/Documentos/monografico3.pdf); (www.juntadeandalucia.es/educacionciencia/malaga/Bibliotecas/Documentos/monografico4.pdf) (Baró and Maña, 2002a, b). And The Fundación Germán Sánchez Rupérez, a not-for-profit organization, promotes school and public libraries and reading – its programme “*Informar*” (www.fundaciongsr.es/documentos/default3.htm#fdu) was implemented in 1994.

In spite of the poor situation in school libraries in Spain, there are good examples which show how they can be converted into an effective tool for lifelong learning. The National Educational Authority fosters training in school libraries, facilitates automation of processes through free software (*Automatización de Bibliotecas EScolares/ ABIES* (School libraries automation), (www.cnice.mecd.es/recursos/abies.htm) and channels resources to schools through the *Centro Nacional de Información y Comunicación Educativa* (CNICE) (National Centre for Educational Information and Communication) (www.cnice.mecd.es)).

A good example of this is the Fray Luis de León High School in Salamanca, where the library is used as a tool for strengthening learning and compensating for inequalities of access to information as well as preventing academic failure. Teachers across different disciplines use the library to support the learning process of students (<http://centros5.pntic.mec.es/ies.fray.luis.de.leon1/Biblioteca/index.html>).

In several ICT literacy projects under development for primary and secondary

schools students, school library, digital library and even learning resource portals are interlinked in one way or another. These portals can include the digital library, software and learning resources for different levels. The *Red de Telemática Educativa de Cataluña* (www.xtec.es), within the Programme for Educational Informatics, issued a document with the basic ICT skills to be achieved by students through different educational stages (Generalitat de Cataluña, 1999). A common problem for most if not all ICT literacy programmes lies in the widespread and wrong assumption that mastering ICT tools is the same as mastering information access and use, particularly in a period of development when the issues in understanding and managing information become bigger, and mastering information challenges both teachers’ activities and students’ efforts alike.

3.2 Academic and research libraries

Opportunities for digital literacy are growing at a fast pace among Spanish university students. Higher education institutions more and more offer computing labs to a student body entering the sector with an ever growing contact and expertise in ICT. Personal e-mail addresses are quite general and faculty are increasingly successful in integrating ICTs in their teaching practice, thus forcing students to increase their mastery in computing facilities and software, network access skills, and the like. Again, there is a very strong risk of mistaking technological and instrumental literacy with IL, which involves a higher-order ability to evaluate and use information accessed for better reasons than mere plagiarism.

In spite of difficulties derived from teaching methods and curricular workloads, academic libraries regularly provide user education, both at introductory and specialized level, as well as personalized training. In addition, several universities offer optional credit courses within the curriculum for most degrees, free configuration credit courses for specialized documentation skills, and specific tutor collaboration with final year students preparing their final dissertation (Gómez Hernández, 2000). There are specialized documentation courses for several degrees and disciplines like the health sciences, chemistry, public administration and management, humanities, journalism,

psychology, but they are offered as optional courses and taught by faculty from the LIS academic area (Olvera and García Caro, 2000). Examples of free choice credit courses include those offered by the universities of Barcelona (www.bib.ub.es/bub/formacio.htm), Granada and the Polytechnic of Catalonia. Availability of basic IL courses within postgraduate programmes (Gómez Hernández, 1996b) can be taken as evidence of the failure to provide a good level of proficiency in IL as part of the curriculum and in IL outcomes for most degrees at pre-graduate levels.

Web pages of academic libraries include tutorials and user guides for database searching, answers to frequently asked questions, digital libraries and links to resources. This certainly prompts and helps students to acquire the skills required to manage the information which they have gathered. Good examples of tutorials can be accessed at Universidad Carlos III in Madrid, Polytechnic University of Catalonia and the Open University of Catalonia, including chat software applied for user education purposes.

From the organizational point of view, several relevant improvements might be noticed: user education was included in the 1997 standards for academic libraries by REBIUN (*Red de Bibliotecas Españolas*), the network for academic and research libraries in Spain – two different levels are developed, a basic one and the advanced, optional one. The section on “Facilities for study, learning technologies and research” clearly shows commitment toward the educational role of the academic library, learning styles and availability of electronic resources and spaces for individual learning (www.crue.org/web-rebiun/index.html).

In institutional evaluation and quality reviews, provision of user education is a normal feature. This leads to proposals for improvement and the establishment of IL training objectives within strategic plans. The evaluation guides available (*Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari a Catalunya; Unidad para la Calidad de las Universidades Andaluzas; Consejo de Universidades*) cater for the assessment of IL training by users through several indicators and performance measures. The Polytechnic University of Catalonia Programme “*Paideia*” for 2000–2005 (<http://escher.upc.es/sts/plaestra/paideia.pdf>) describes the library’s mission for learning as

encompassing the training of students in the skills and competencies needed for social integration and lifelong learning in a global world. It goes on to include as part of this mission the reengineering of the library as a space for faculty and students to grow in a quality information and learning environment. The IL agenda is further referred to in a rights charter for users.

In 2000 REBIUN held a workshop on the role of the library in teaching and research where new developments and focus in student learning were one of the highlights (www.crue.org/web-rebiun/jornada.htm). Again, in May 2003 REBIUN will focus on new learning models for the information society and new roles for the academic library, with IL as a strong point in the agenda. Palma de Mallorca will be the venue for this meeting on “Learning and research resource centres’ roles in innovative teaching processes” (www.uib.es/servei/biblioteca/rebiun2003/index.html).

3.3 Public libraries and lifelong learning

Public libraries in Spain always have been considered in practice as resource centres for schools; and at times they have also served as an outlet for training of illiterate adults. The Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez (www.fundaciongsr.es), a private, non-profit, autonomous and independent institution, committed to the promotion of cultural and educational activities, has developed and sponsored user education programmes in public libraries. A certain number of public libraries have been successful in integrating ICT literacy, thus improving their resources and image. Examples include the activities in the public libraries of Peñaranda de Bracamonte, Salamanca (“ICTs in Peñaranda”), San Sebastián (“Connect yourself”), Tarragona, or Murcia (“Intelligent use of Internet workshops” – the online tutorials in this library are also worth mentioning).

Availability and wide acceptance of new IFLA guidelines for public libraries, with their focus on the pedagogical role of the library, offers a strong influence on the public library contribution to lifelong learning: the public library of Badalona (Barcelona) is a partner in the programme UNET leading to the development of training activities for users of all age cohorts (Gómez Hernández, 2002; Casals, 2002).

4. The spread of the information literacy concept and research activities

Several doctoral dissertations in Spain are connected with IL (Bernal, 1985; Benito, 1996) or closely related issues like the educational role of libraries of all types, but more specifically school and academic libraries and their role in student learning (Bueno Monreal, 1993; Gómez Hernández, 1996a; Lorenzo Ramírez, 1997). The dissertation by Urbano in 1999 used a citation analysis technique to focus on the level of awareness and use of information sources by computing researchers in the University of Barcelona. In mid-2003, a first IL dissertation will be presented by Eva Ortol. Entitled "Information competency in the health sciences: proposal for a training model" and starting from the IL construct and models developed for IL instruction mainly in the health care sector, this work analyses the approach to IL issues in the Spanish higher education setting related to the biomedical sciences. It proposes an integrated model to be used as a reference framework for the design and implementation of IL programmes aimed at the development of information competencies among health care professionals. Professor Judith Licea from Mexico, while on sabbatical leave in the University of Murcia, has carried out a research programme funded by the Spanish Department of Education on the information skills of all academic communities of that university. First results were presented in Barcelona during the 8th Congress of Fesabid 2003 (www.fesabid.org/barcelona2003/pdf/Alfabetizacion%20informativa/JUDITHfesabid2003.PDF).

Since the early 1990s presentations on user education begin to be a common feature in all professional conferences and meetings: *Jornadas de la Asociación Andaluza de Bibliotecarios*, *Jornadas Catalanas de Documentación*, *Jornadas Españolas de Documentación* (1998 in Valencia; 2000 in Bilbao; 2003 in Barcelona). Thus, in 2000, during the *XI Jornadas Bibliotecarias de Andalucía*, a brief summary of the new IL model was presented by Pasadas Ureña, while in 2002, during the *XII Jornadas Bibliotecarias de Andalucía*, Gómez Enrich *et al.* (2002) focused on IL tutorials for self-training, Puertas *et al.* (2002) discussed the effects of off-campus and distance training on the

services provided by academic libraries, while Pasadas Ureña (2002) offered a first approach to the challenges of IL accreditation and certification. There were also presentations about IL during the last *Jornadas Catalanas de Documentación* (Muntada *et al.*, 2002). At Fesabid 2003 in Barcelona, a round table was organized on IL as a library service (presentations of Gómez, Licea, Pasadas and Vives at: www.fesabid.org/barcelona2003/textos.html) and also presentations on user education as a tool for mastering access to digital resources (Checa, 2003) as well as on Web tutorials (Somoza, 2003).

In the broader Spanish-speaking community, the IL agenda has been widely spread in Mexico as well. Since 1997 several national meetings have been held at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (México) (Lau and Cortés, 2000a, b). The last one, the "III International meeting on information skills development" (<http://lyris.uacj.mx/dia/dhi>), October 2002, focused on international IL standards and several proposals for the practical application of IL models.

Main outlets for the spread of the IL agenda in Spain have been: the *Boletín de la Asociación Andaluza de Bibliotecarios* and its Web site (www.aab.es), where standards and other documents issued by the ACRL, CAUL and SCOUNL have been translated and published, as well as several papers. And the journal *Anales de Documentación* (www.um.es/fccd/anales) included right from its start in 1999 translations of seminal IL papers like Barry (1999) and Rader (2000). Later Fourie (2001), Bawden (2002), Bernhard (2000), and Bruce (2003) followed.

At the same time, the wide circulation of the IL agenda and issues among LIS students and professionals has been facilitated by the publication of several texts on user education: "Formarse para informarse" (Baró and Mañá, 1996) for school libraries; a book on information skills by Gazpio and Alvarez (1998), published in Argentina; and a full monograph published in 2000 under the title "Estrategias y modelos para enseñar a usar la información: guía para docentes, bibliotecarios y archiveros"[2] (Gómez Hernández, 2000), where three chapters deal with IL and its implications in three different educational segments.

The ever growing acceptance of the IL debate in the Spanish setting can be seen in

the activities of a working group on IL issues that was recently set up under the name ALFINCAT in Cataluña. It includes a wide membership from other regions, which eventually could develop into a working group of wider national remit for the exchange of ideas, approaches and good practices, and the advancement and promotion of the IL agenda. At the same time, more and more higher education institutions include specific user education and even "information skills" courses within the curriculum for specific disciplines and degrees: a good case is the course "Information skills and strategies" at the Universidad de Murcia.

This development and gradual acceptance of IL in the mainstream of Spanish LIS research and practice is evidenced by the fact that in 2000 the translators of the Competency Standards (ACRL, 2000) still selected a description such as "*aptitudes para el acceso y uso de la información*" (abilities for information access and use) instead of "*alfabetización en información*" (information literacy); but already by 2001 they used it in full for the translation of the new objectives (ACRL-IS, 2001) and the Australian IL Standards (CAUL, 2001). From this year onwards more and more print and electronic documents become available, with a clear picture of the worldwide IL agenda. Currently it is quite easy for any Spanish-speaking professional to know what IL is about (Benito Morales, 2000a); the differences from other related literacies (Bawden, 2002); models (Bruce's (1997) Seven Faces of IL; SCONUL, 1999; Benito Morales, 2000a) and standards (ACRL; CAUL) available; which learning objectives have been established for different educational cycles (Benito Morales, 2000b; SCONUL, 1999); good IL education programmes implemented with success (Gómez Hernández, 2000; Bernhard, 2000); how to assess the IL programmes as outcomes (Lindauer, 1998); and the challenges of an International Information Literacy Certificate (Pasadas Ureña, 2002; 2003).

5. Conclusions: problems and challenges for the way ahead

We can conclude that the IL agenda in Spain is already well beyond the mere starting point – it is already a well-known concept among LIS professionals and a number of good

programmes are under development in several locations and settings. However, there are still many problems to be solved and issues to be addressed if the IL agenda is to be improved in a significant way:

- (1) All learning facilitators, but especially teaching staff of all levels and librarians, must overcome their long-lasting tradition of selfishness and unwillingness to cooperate for the benefit of society.
- (2) The lack of school libraries, which are the basis for any really effective IL programme, must be addressed by the educational authorities.
- (3) The IL agenda and its implications must be integrated into the curriculum for all categories of degree-level teaching staff, so that they can integrate IL into their own curricular developments in a way that accords with the needs and specifications of their disciplines.
- (4) The lack of awareness about lifelong learning and its benefits for society at large should be addressed by all concerned – political and social leaders, employers, local, regional and national authorities – so that the current scepticism about continuing professional development and re-skilling can be overcome.
- (5) The lack of facilities, equipment and resources for public libraries still severely limits the potential of these institutions as agents for social inclusion and social change, and as first choice resource for lifelong learning.
- (6) The lack of training and updating of all types of LIS professionals in sound teaching and learning techniques should be addressed by the library schools in their curricula, since the IL agenda can not be advanced in a meaningful way without these skills.
- (7) The lack of ability-based curriculum and problem-based learning and critical thinking approaches for most academic degrees is a significant weakness in the Spanish higher education sector which must be dealt with through programme accreditation and review exercises. Librarians should develop mechanisms of participation in these evaluation programmes in order to try to make the IL agenda a really important institutional priority, since IL does make a real difference both for the individual and for society.

Notes

- 1 From mastery of information to improvement of the intellect. Design, implementation and assessment of HEBORI (skills and strategies for searching, organizing and reasoning information).
- 2 Models and strategies to teach the information use: a guide for teachers, librarians and archivists.

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