EXPLORING INFORMATION LITERACY TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Information literacy is a critical skill in today's knowledge-driven world, and its significance is magnified in the context of sustainable development. This paper explores the information literacy towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. Information literacy empowers individuals to access, evaluate, and utilize information effectively, which is pivotal for making informed decisions and fostering sustainable development. In Nigeria, a country with diverse challenges and opportunities, information literacy plays a central role in addressing the complex issues outlined in the SDGs. As Nigeria strives to achieve the SDGs, information literacy must be integrated into national development strategies. Enhancing information literacy skills across all sectors of society will empower individuals to make informed decisions, contribute to economic growth, and participate meaningfully in the democratic process. Furthermore, information literacy is a key driver for innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development, aligning with the broader global goals of leaving no one behind and creating a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. It was highly recommended that, government should collaborate with educational authorities to integrate information literacy into the national curriculum from primary to tertiary levels. Government should provide training and professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their own information literacy skills and teaching methods. They should equip teachers with resources and tools to incorporate information literacy into their classrooms effectively.

Keywords: Information literacy, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nigeria

Introduction

Information literacy is increasingly recognized as a fundamental skill in the digital age, with significant implications for education, economic development, and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2013). Information literacy, as defined by the American Library Association (ALA), is the ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (ALA, 2009). In today's information-rich environment, information literacy has become essential for individuals to navigate and make informed decisions in both personal and professional contexts.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the United Nations in 2015, represent a global framework for addressing pressing challenges related to poverty, inequality, environmental sustainability, health, education, and more (United Nations, 2015). These goals are designed to guide national and international efforts towards a more sustainable and equitable future. Achieving the SDGs requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses various sectors, including education, healthcare, economic development, and environmental conservation.

The nexus between information literacy and the SDGs is particularly relevant in the context of Nigeria, a country with a rapidly growing population and a range of socio-economic challenges. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with a diverse population of over 200 million people (World Bank, 2021). Despite its vast human and natural resources, Nigeria faces significant hurdles in achieving the SDGs, including widespread poverty, inadequate healthcare, and limited access to quality education.

One of the key challenges hindering progress towards the SDGs in Nigeria is the lack of information literacy among its citizens. Information literacy deficits can impede access to critical information related to healthcare, education, agriculture, and employment opportunities. Furthermore, information illiteracy can exacerbate social inequalities and hinder participation in democratic processes (UNESCO, 2015).Given the importance of information literacy in accessing and utilizing information for personal and societal development, it is crucial to investigate the current state of information literacy in Nigeria and its impact on the country's progress towards the SDGs. This study aims to explore the information literacy towards sustainable development goals in Nigeria.

Information Literacy

Information literacy, as defined by the American Library Association (ALA), is a multifaceted skill that has gained increasing recognition in the context of the digital age. It refers to an individual's capacity to recognize when information is needed, the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the required information, and the competence to engage in lifelong learning (ALA, 2009). Information literacy is not limited to traditional library research but extends to the critical evaluation and responsible use of information from diverse sources, including digital platforms, in today's information-rich society.

Information literacy plays a pivotal role in education, supporting students and scholars in their pursuit of academic excellence. It empowers individuals to engage with scholarly literature, navigate research databases, and critically assess the credibility and reliability of sources, thereby enhancing their ability to synthesize and contribute to knowledge (Bruce, 2008). Moreover, information literacy fosters independent and lifelong learning, which is essential in academic and professional contexts.

In addition to its significance in education, information literacy has broader implications for societal development and participation in the digital age. It empowers individuals to make informed decisions in various aspects of life, including healthcare choices, financial planning, and civic engagement (UNESCO, 2015). In the era of "fake news" and information overload, information literacy equips individuals with the skills to discern accurate information from misinformation and disinformation, contributing to a more informed and resilient society (UNESCO, 2013).

The concept of information literacy is dynamic and continually evolving as information technologies and sources change. In the scholarly and professional landscape, researchers rely on information literacy skills to conduct literature reviews, access primary and secondary data, and disseminate their findings effectively. Moreover, the ability to critically evaluate information is crucial in conducting rigorous research and ensuring the integrity of scholarly publications (ACRL, 2015). According to Tunmibi and Akah (2023), data or information literacy skills can also help administrators to ease their jobs and enhance their performance. For policymakers and educators, understanding and promoting information literacy is essential for equipping citizens and students with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of the digital age. Initiatives that promote information literacy can enhance access to education, reduce information inequalities,

and contribute to achieving broader societal goals, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), officially known as the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," represent a comprehensive and ambitious framework for addressing global challenges and achieving a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous world by the year 2030. Adopted by all United Nations Member States in September 2015, the SDGs build upon the successes and lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to address a broader range of interconnected issues (United Nations, 2015).The 17 SDGs encompass a wide spectrum of economic, social, and environmental dimensions, with each goal accompanied by a set of specific targets and indicators. These goals include:

No Poverty (Goal 1): End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Zero Hunger (Goal 2): End hunger, achieve food security, and promote sustainable agriculture.

Good Health and Well-being (Goal 3): Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Quality Education (Goal 4): Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Gender Equality (Goal 5): Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Clean Water and Sanitation (Goal 6): Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Affordable and Clean Energy (Goal 7): Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.

Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8): Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (Goal 9): Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.

Reduced Inequality (Goal 10): Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11): Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Responsible Consumption and Production (Goal 12): Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Climate Action (Goal 13): Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Life Below Water (Goal 14): Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.

Life on Land (Goal 15): Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (Goal 16): Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17): Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

These goals are interconnected and recognize that addressing one challenge often requires progress in multiple areas. Achieving the SDGs necessitates collaboration and partnership among governments, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations (United Nations, 2015).

Information Literacy in Nigeria

Information literacy is a critical skill in the digital age, and its presence in Nigeria is of utmost importance for the country's development and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Nigeria, like many other countries, the state of information literacy is influenced by various factors, including educational systems, access to technology, and the level of awareness among the population.

1. **Educational System**: Nigeria's educational system is a significant factor influencing information literacy. Initiatives to promote information literacy often start within educational institutions. Information literacy programs within schools and universities play a vital role in equipping students with the skills needed to access and evaluate information effectively (Ogbomo, 2016).

2. **Digital Divide**: Nigeria, like many developing countries, faces a digital divide. Access to technology and the internet is unevenly distributed, with urban areas having better access than rural ones. Bridging this divide is essential for ensuring that all Nigerians have the opportunity to develop information literacy skills (Ajuwon, 2010).

3. **Libraries and Information Centres**: Libraries and information centres serve as hubs for information literacy efforts. These institutions are instrumental in providing access to

resources and information literacy training, particularly in universities and larger cities (Okojie, 2009).

4. **Government Initiatives**: The Nigerian government has recognized the importance of information literacy in national development. Initiatives such as the National Library of Nigeria's promotion of information literacy programs and the establishment of digital libraries aim to enhance information literacy across the country (National Library of Nigeria, n.d.).

5. **Challenges**: Nigeria faces challenges in information literacy development, including a lack of awareness, outdated curricula, and inadequate infrastructure. These challenges hinder progress in building a population with strong information literacy skills (Idowu, 2015).

6. **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**: NGOs and civil society organizations also contribute to information literacy efforts in Nigeria. They often focus on marginalized communities and rural areas to improve access to information and develop information literacy skills (Ani, 2018).

7. **Language and Cultural Diversity**: Nigeria's linguistic and cultural diversity can pose challenges to information literacy efforts. Effective programs must consider the linguistic diversity and cultural context of the country to ensure that information is accessible and relevant to all (Iyoro, 2015).

8. **Roles of Universities**: Nigerian universities have a vital role in advancing information literacy. Many universities have established information literacy centres and programs to equip students with the skills needed for research and lifelong learning (Idowu, 2015).

Information literacy is a crucial component of Nigeria's development and progress toward the SDGs. While there are challenges to overcome, including the digital divide and infrastructure limitations, various stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, and NGOs, are working to enhance information literacy in Nigeria.

The Intersection of Information Literacy and SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and information literacy are interconnected in several ways, as information literacy is recognized as a critical enabler for achieving the SDGs. Information literacy empowers individuals and communities with the knowledge and skills to

access, evaluate, and utilize information effectively, which is essential for making informed decisions and contributing to sustainable development efforts (UNESCO, 2015).

1. **Access to Information**: Information literacy is a key factor in ensuring that individuals have equitable access to vital information, including educational resources, healthcare information, and opportunities for economic advancement. This aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

2. **Economic Empowerment**: Information literacy contributes to economic growth and poverty reduction, supporting the objectives of SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Informed individuals are better equipped to participate in the workforce, entrepreneurship, and financial decision-making (UNESCO, 2017).

3. **Healthcare and Well-being**: SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) emphasizes universal health coverage and access to healthcare information. Information literacy is crucial for individuals to understand health-related information, make healthy choices, and access healthcare services effectively (WHO, 2013).

4. **Gender Equality**: Information literacy is linked to gender equality (SDG 5) by empowering women and girls to access education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, thereby reducing gender disparities (UNESCO, 2015).

5. **Environmental Sustainability**: SDGs 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 13 (Climate Action) emphasize responsible resource use and climate mitigation. Information literacy can promote responsible consumption patterns and increase awareness of environmental issues (UNESCO, 2017).

6. **Inclusive and Sustainable Communities**: Information literacy supports SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by promoting informed civic engagement and participation in local governance, contributing to sustainable urban development.

7. **Global Partnerships**: SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) emphasizes global cooperation. Information literacy fosters understanding, communication, and collaboration across borders, facilitating international partnerships for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015).

8. **Monitoring and Evaluation**: Information literacy is essential for tracking progress toward the SDGs through data collection, analysis, and reporting (SDG 17). Informed individuals and institutions can contribute to evidence-based decision-making (UNESCO, 2015).

The intersection of information literacy and the SDGs highlights the importance of promoting information literacy as a cross-cutting skill that underpins progress across all goals. Initiatives and policies that strengthen information literacy can empower individuals and communities to actively participate in sustainable development efforts, bridge information inequalities, and contribute to achieving the SDGs (UNESCO, 2015).

Strategies and initiatives that can promote information literacy

Promoting information literacy requires a multifaceted approach that involves educational institutions, libraries, government bodies, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Here are strategies and initiatives that can be implemented to promote information literacy effectively:

1. **Integrate Information Literacy into Educational Curricula**:
   - Collaborate with educational authorities to embed information literacy skills into the national curriculum at all levels of education, from primary to tertiary.
   - Develop age-appropriate information literacy standards and guidelines for educators.

2. **Teacher Training and Professional Development**:
   - Offer specialized training and ongoing professional development for educators to enhance their own information literacy skills and teaching methods.
   - Equip teachers with resources and lesson plans that integrate information literacy into subject areas.

3. **Library-Based Initiatives**:
   - Strengthen and modernize libraries to serve as hubs for information literacy education.
   - Offer information literacy workshops, training sessions, and resources to library patrons of all ages.
   - Collaborate with schools to provide library programs that support information literacy skills development.

4. **Digital Literacy Programs**:
   - Develop digital literacy programs that teach individuals how to use digital tools and platforms effectively.
   - Provide access to digital devices and the internet in underserved areas to bridge the digital divide.

5. **Community Outreach**:
   - Conduct community-based information literacy workshops and awareness campaigns, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

- Engage local leaders and community organizations to promote information literacy.

6. **Public Awareness Campaigns**:

- Launch nationwide public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of information literacy in daily life, education, and employment.
- Use media, including television, radio, social media, and community events, to reach a wide audience.

7. **Online Learning Resources**:

- Develop and curate online learning resources, tutorials, and courses that are accessible to individuals of all ages and backgrounds.
- Provide free or low-cost access to reputable online databases and information sources.

8. **Government Policies and Funding**:

- Advocate for government policies that prioritize information literacy and allocate budgetary resources to support related programs.
- Establish national agencies or bodies responsible for coordinating information literacy efforts.

9. **Empower Libraries and Librarians**:

- Invest in professional development for librarians to enhance their information literacy expertise.
- Encourage libraries to collaborate with schools, universities, and community organizations to expand their reach.

10. **Incorporate Critical Thinking**:

- Emphasize critical thinking skills in information literacy programs, teaching individuals how to evaluate sources for credibility, bias, and accuracy.

11. **Promote Lifelong Learning**:

- Encourage a culture of lifelong learning by offering information literacy programs for adults and seniors.
- Emphasize the value of continuous skill development in a rapidly changing information landscape.

12. **Monitoring and Evaluation**:

- Establish mechanisms for regular assessment of information literacy levels across demographics.
- Use data to identify areas needing improvement and measure the impact of information literacy programs.

Conclusion

Information literacy in Nigeria plays a pivotal role in the country's journey toward sustainable development and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This critical skill empowers individuals, communities, and institutions to access, evaluate, and effectively use information for various aspects of life, including education, health, economic development, and civic engagement. Nigeria, a diverse and dynamic nation, faces both opportunities and challenges in promoting information literacy across its population.As Nigeria strives to achieve the SDGs, information literacy must be integrated into national development strategies. Enhancing information literacy skills across all sectors of society will empower individuals to make informed decisions, contribute to economic growth, and participate meaningfully in the democratic process. Furthermore, information literacy is a key driver for innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development, aligning with the broader global goals of leaving no one behind and creating a more just, equitable, and sustainable world.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

1. Government should collaborate with educational authorities to integrate information literacy into the national curriculum from primary to tertiary levels.
2. Government should provide training and professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their own information literacy skills and teaching methods. they should equip teachers with resources and tools to incorporate information literacy into their classrooms effectively.
3. Government should provide access to digital devices and technology training to promote digital literacy alongside information literacy.
4. Government should allocate resources to upgrade and modernize libraries, ensuring they serve as hubs for information literacy training and access to diverse information resources.
5. Government should launch nationwide awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of information literacy in education, employment, healthcare, and civic engagement.

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