NILA : A NATIONAL INFORMATION LITERACY AGENDA FOR MALAYSIA

N.N. Edzan[1] and Mohd Sharif Mohd Saad[2]
[1]Faculty of Computer Science & Information Technology,
[2]University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
MARA University of Technology, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
e-mail: [1]edzan@um.edu.my ; [2]mohdshar@salam.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Information literacy is defined as the ability to recognize when information is needed and the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. It has been a subject for discussion amongst librarians and information professionals since the 1970's and there are numerous information literacy initiatives that are in place in educational institutions worldwide. This paper attempts to look at the information literacy initiatives in Malaysia and proposes a framework for the implementation of a National Information Literacy Agenda (NILA).

Keywords: Information literacy; Information literacy initiatives; Schools; Higher education; National information literacy agenda; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The Information Age has brought with it enormous amount of information and in order to reap the benefits of the Information Age, individuals have to be information literate. An information literate person is one who must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information (ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, 1989). These are individuals who know how to find and use information throughout their lifetime. Information literate individuals are equipped with a lifelong learning skill, which enable them to satisfy their information needs any time, anywhere.

Edzan, N.N. & Mohd. Sharif M.S.

INFORMATION LITERACY INITIATIVES WORLDWIDE

Numerous information literacy programmes are in placed in the United States and these programmes use the American Library Association's (ALA) definition of information (Rudasill, 1998). Most of the literature on information literacy emanates from the industrialized English-speaking countries (Virkus, 2003) Information literacy initiatives in the United States, Australia and Europe are well documented and several references have also been made to information literacy developments in Canada, China, Japan, Mexico, Namibia, New Zealand and South Africa. However, similar initiatives in Asia are normally included in documentation about literacy or libraries. The Asia Regional Literacy Forum and various conferences on libraries, librarianship and the information professionals have always included papers and discussions on information literacy. However, in October 2004, the University of Brunei Darussalam Library with the cooperation of the Brunei Darussalam Library Association organized the Conference on Information Literacy, the first of its kind in South East Asia, and this provided a venue for libraries and librarians from this region to showcase their information literacy initiatives.

Initiatives and collaborations at the international level are taking place through the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and UNESCO. During the IFLA 2001 meeting in Boston, USA, the IFLA Round Table on User Education officially changed its name to the Information Literacy Section. The change was deemed necessary because the committee felt that the term "information literacy" would reflect a more learning oriented information education. One of the objectives of this Section is to promote information literacy as a foundation for life long learning within the different sectors of society and in all countries worldwide. Subsequently, during the IFLA 2003 in Berlin and IFLA 2004 in Buenos Aires, many sections had open sessions and workshops relating to information literacy and lifelong learning. The Information Literacy Section at the IFLA Conference in Berlin in 2003 discussed the possibility of implementing an international Information Literacy Certificate

UNESCO had always been interested with the promotion of information literacy. The years 2003 – 2013 were declared as the United Nation Literacy Decade. Many programmes have been planned for the promotion of information literacy worldwide. UNESCO under the Information Society Division in cooperation with the Education Sector and the field offices will be launching an international awareness campaign and an international alliance for information literacy between 2004 and 2005 (Abid, 2004). *The Prague Declaration: Towards an Information*

Literate Society was formulated in September 2003 at the Information Literacy Meeting of Experts, which was organized by the US National Commission on Library and Information Science and the National Forum on Information Literacy, with the support of UNESCO. A total of 40 participants representing 23 countries from seven major continents met to share ideas and experiences to help develop the information literacy concept in their respective countries and regions. The meeting aimed to strategize ways to raise awareness of the importance of information literacy worldwide. In essence, the Prague Declaration officially acknowledges the importance of information literacy and the role it plays in any society. The various governments, civil societies and international community as a whole must now look into the declaration and adopt it accordingly.

INFORMATION LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA

Information literacy was initially raised synonymously with the development of information technology (IT) literacy. In their research findings on information literacy among undergraduates in South African universities in 1998, the INFOLIT team from the University of Cape Town, South Africa mentioned about information literacy development in Malaysia. Their findings noted that the Malaysian authorities were aimed at ensuring that university graduates are IT literate in tandem with the effort to modernize the Malaysian workforce. Information and knowledge applications will provide the basis to further enhance the quality of work and life. Information technology will be used as an approach to literacy learning. The emphasis is to develop information literate people and knowledge workers, enabled by IT. The National Information Technology Agenda (NITA) formed in December 1996 chaired by the Prime Minister of Malaysia envisaged that by year 2020, all Malaysians would have access to information and learning through an info-structure for personal, organizational and national advancement. Information and knowledge applications will provide the basis to further enhance the quality of work and life.

Tengku Mohd. Azzman Shariffadeen (1997), the President and CEO of the Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic Systems or MIMOS, made a reference to an information literate society during an interview. He stressed that an IT-literate society must attain a higher level of information literacy so that one can identify, use and manipulate information. He also emphasized that IT literacy should not stop at information literacy but should extend to a level of knowledge literacy. Reid (1998) observed that except for training conducted by some Malaysian librarians, most IT training programmes do not include information literacy. She reiterated the need to

increase IT and information literacy skills, to train faculty and students to become critical users of electronic services in order to deal with electronic information overload and to support the information have-nots. She suggested that librarians should be the end user trainer and technology coordinator.

Efforts are also being made to create an information literate Malaysian society. The National Library of Malaysia has played and is playing an active role in literacy programmes, which focus primarily on reading since the national objective is to achieve 100% literacy by 2010 (Siti Aishah, 2003). The National Library has now begun to include information literacy in its short and long term plans (PNM, 2005). Within these plans, there is a proposal to jointly organize with the Librarians' Association of Malaysia or PPM, an information literacy seminar during the Reading Month. Following from that, the National Library hopes to develop information literacy packages at the basic, intermediate and advanced levels that will be used by trainers in information searching workshops. The National Library has also initiated the Reading Promotion Policy within which they have outlined nine programmes and a series of activities. Out of the total number of 33 activities, six activities are directly related to information literacy

Similarly, public libraries in Malaysia are also actively inculcating information literacy skills to the public through various means. Programmes such as information skills or information literacy workshops and related activities such as information hunt and talks have been organised and targeted for schools, government and private agencies and the general public.

INFORMATION LITERACY IN MALAYSIAN SCHOOLS

It is evident from the literature that information literacy is firmly embedded within the Malaysian primary and secondary educational system. Whilst officiating the 31st Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship incorporating the 6th International Forum on Research in School Libraries, the then Minister of Education, Yang Berhormat Tan Sri Dato' Musa Mohamad, outlined several measures that have been implemented by his Ministry to promote and enhance the reading culture in schools. One of these measures is "reading and information literacy courses for state resources centre personnel to expose them to effective reading and information skills for them to carry out such courses in localised situations". Fatimah Jusoh (2002) in her paper on school libraries in Malaysia reiterated this statement.

Chan Foong Mae, a Senior School Pilot Project Team of the Educational Technology Division with the Ministry of Education, discussed the convergence of information literacy and the Malaysian Smart School. She defined information literacy as the ability to find, interpret, use and communicate information from a variety of sources (Chan, 2002). She felt that "it is critical that school librarians, teacher librarians, or media coordinators, as important stakeholders in the Malaysian Smart School, help promote the Smart Schools as a vehicle for the realisation of the goals of information literacy in schools". However, the term information literacy is not presented formally in the Smart School Conceptual Blueprint and librarians as well as teacher librarians or media coordinators are wholly responsible for it. Chan went on to say that "the understandings and skills that form information literacy have yet to be embedded into the classroom practices of teachers, the outcomes of the education in the Information and Communications Age and the Malaysian educational system". Information literacy has yet to become a part of the general curriculum. The Malaysian Smart School Conceptual Blueprint discusses the use of information literacy as contributing towards personal empowerment and the students' freedom to learn. Thus, she sees this as an opportunity for teacher librarians to implement the goals and objectives of information literacy in schools. One of the guiding principles of the Malaysian Smart School is that "students will learn to process and manipulate information. They will be trained to think critically and to reflect on what they have learned, as well as to transfer and apply knowledge from one discipline to another and to daily life" (Ministry of Education, 1997).

The Communications and Information Unit of UNESCO Bangkok is currently involved in looking at the status and incorporation of information literacy within the school curriculum in South East Asian countries (UNESCO, 2005). The Unit is co-coordinating an information literacy survey in seven South East Asian countries and a seminar on information literacy education was held in 2004 in Bangkok with a follow-up seminar, which will be held in September 2005. Results of the information literacy survey among selected schools in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam will be presented and representatives from these countries will jointly plan activities to promote information literacy education in their countries. The entire project is funded by the Information for All Programme Special Funds. Malaysia's participation in this project is a clear indication of the direction in which the Ministry of Education is taking to inculcate information literacy within the school system.

Edzan, N.N. & Mohd. Sharif M.S.

INFORMATION LITERACY IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Kim Phaik Lim made the earliest reference to information literacy and higher education in 1998 in a paper she presented at the 2nd Asia Regional Literacy Forum in New Delhi. She explored the notions of information literacy and its role in literacy education. BERU (Basic Education Research Unit), a unit in Universiti Sains Malaysia, initiated a programme known as InfoLit-Telelearning in 1996. This programme involves the delivery of information literacy skills via telelearning. No literature on information literacy in higher education emerged but at the same time academic libraries were conducting some form of information literacy programme via their library orientation programmes, library skills programmes, library research programmes, information skills programmes, and other similar programmes whose ultimate aim is to educate the user on information use.

The 21st century brought renewed interest in information literacy in higher education. Juhana (2000), Mohd Sharif and Zainab (2002), Yushiana (2003), Chan Sai Noi (2003), Che Norma (2004), Edzan (2004), Maimunah and Mohd Sharif (2004), and Mohd Sharif and Edzan (2005) had looked at and written about various information literacy initiatives that are in place in the various public and private institutions of higher learning (Table 1). These programmes are mostly planned and conducted by librarians themselves. Malaysian academic universities conduct four types of programmes for their students, namely:

1. Orientation for all new undergraduates/post graduates
2. Information skills programmes for their final year undergraduates which are optional
3. Specialised information skills programmes such as use of databases, Internet searching skills
4. Information literacy / skills courses which are credited and compulsory or offered as an elective

The orientation programmes are compulsory for all new students and are usually held at the beginning of every academic year or semester. Throughout the year, the libraries will organise other programmes with the aim of familiarising the students with the various tools available within the libraries. Special programmes are organised for final year and postgraduate students who are embarking on research projects or academic exercises with the aim of preparing them for their research. University of Malaya offers a one credit hour information skills course for all first year undergraduates while others do offer credit hour courses as optional. In addition

to these initiatives several research are being conducted in the area of information literacy and higher education. An IRPA funded project is on going to measure the information literacy levels of final year undergraduates.

THE NATIONAL INFORMATION LITERACY AGENDA

Malaysian librarians and information professionals do realise the importance of information literacy. They clearly understand the roles that they have to undertake and the responsibilities that they have to shoulder in order to realise the information literacy programmes. However, there is a need to have a clearer vision and a blueprint to make information literacy programmes acceptable and feasible to students, teachers, academics, administrators and policy makers. There is a need to formulate a National Information Literacy Agenda or NILA, which could be used to plan, implement and evaluate information literacy programmes. NILA will be able to provide a framework that will include the principles, standards and practices that will support information literacy education in all sectors. All parties or stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved with any form of information literacy initiatives at any level must come together and establish NILA and a task group must be form to implement this The Ministry of Education can represent the schools, the Ministry of Higher Education can represent the higher institutions, the National Library of Malaysia and public libraries can represent the libraries, and the Malaysian Librarians' Association can represent the librarians who are primarily responsible for the delivery of information literacy programmes.

Within NILA, the followings have to be established (Figure 1):
1. A national information literacy standard with the pertinent performance indicators and learning outcomes. The standard must define the performance indicators for each competency level. It must also address the information literacy competencies that should be attained at the primary, secondary and higher educational levels and each of these levels must have a national assessment tool. Within higher education, the standard can be further refined to distinguish between information literacy competencies required for science and technology and the arts and social sciences with their appropriate assessment tools.
2. A compulsory information literacy programme for all schools and institutions of higher learning with contents, which comply with the agreed standard.
3. Information literacy programmes at the national and all public libraries.

4. An Information Literacy Interest Group with the Malaysian Librarians' Association to be used as a platform for discussing issues related to information literacy
5. A National Information Literacy Institute to act as a centre for reference, research, training and promotion as well as coordinate the activities of NILA. The Institute should also be given the responsibility to organise national and regional conferences on information literacy.
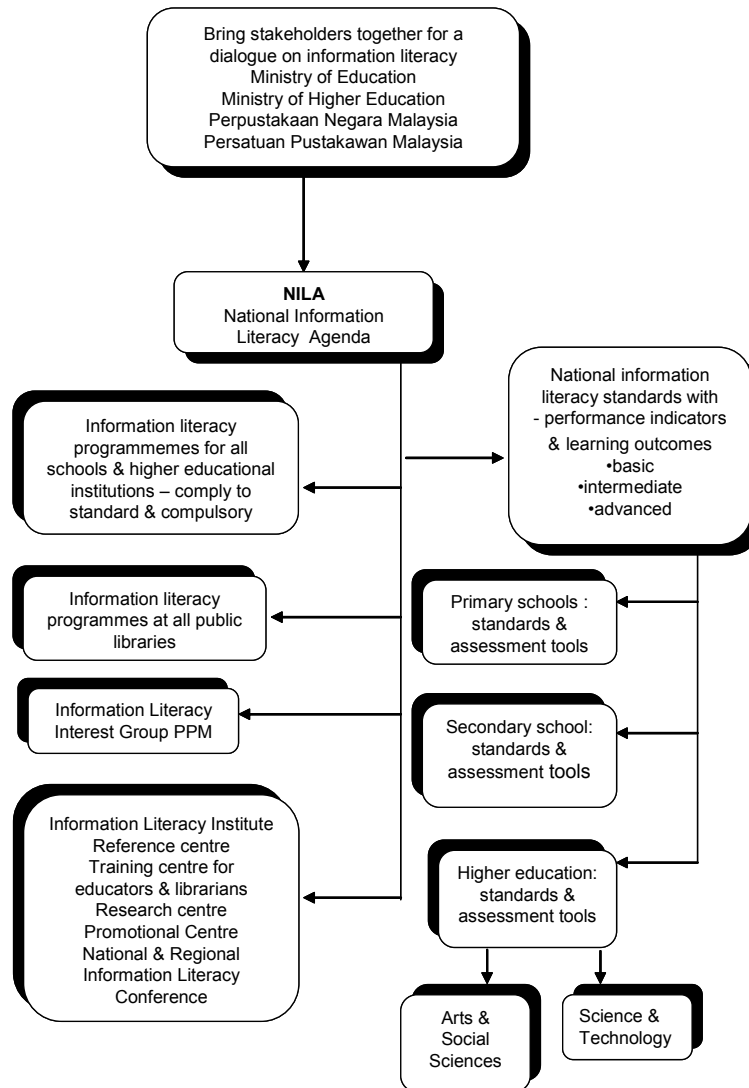
CONCLUSION

Malaysia needs to keep pace with information literacy initiatives that are underway worldwide. Stakeholders who are directly and indirectly involved with information literacy programmes in Malaysia must come together in order to determine the direction we must take with regards to information literacy. The proposed National Information Literacy Agenda or NILA would provide the basis for us to work from.

Table 1: Information Literacy Programmes in Malaysian Higher Education

PROGRAMME	Orientation	Miscellaneous	Final Year/ Students doing research	Credit Hours
STATUS	Compulsory	Optional	Optional	Compulsory or Optional
AUDIENCE	New students	All students	Final year students and postgraduates	First year or others
DURATION	1 - 2 hours	1 - 2 hours	A few periods from the class time table	1 semester (14 weeks)
PROGRAMME CONTENT	- Basic Library Skills - Library Skills Course - Library Orientation / Instruction Programme - Basic Library Skill Classes - Library Orientation Programme - Introduction To Library Use - Library Usage Workshop - Skills In Using Academic Resources - Orientation Programme For New Students	- Information literacy skills classes / workshop - Information search skills training sessions / workshops - Information search skills - Information search strategy - Library catalogue - Library usage workshop - Navigating the Internet - CD-ROM databases searching skills - Online databases searching skills - Research information service - Using in-house databases	- Advanced information skills programme - Advanced library skill classes - Library research skills - Online databases searching skills - Research guidance services - Workshop on information skills	- Bibliographic databases and information skills (1 credit) - Information skills course (1 credit) - Information literacy (2 credits) - Managing resources centres (1 credit)
DELIVERY METHOD	- Lecture - Guided tour - Instructional session - Video presentation - Exercises - Multimedia presentation	- Lecture - Instructional sessions - Exercises	- Lecture - Instructional sessions - Exercises	- Lecture - Instructional sessions Exercises
ASSESSMENT METHOD	Evaluation sheet	Evaluation sheet	Evaluation sheet	- Assignment - Test - Project - Final examination

Figure 1: Information Literacy Framework for Malaysia

REFERENCES

American Library Association. *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy* 1989. *Final report.* Chicago: ALA

Abid, Abdelaziz. 2004. Information literacy for lifelong learning. 70th. *IFLA General Conference and Meeting*, 22 – 27 August 2004, Buenos Aires.

Chan Foong Mae. 2002. Developing information literacy in Malaysian Smart Schools: resource-based learning as a tool to prepare today's students for tomorrow's society In: Singh, D et al. (Ed.): *School Libraries for a Knowledge Society.* Proceedings of the 31st Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship, Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (4-9 August, 2002). Seattle, WA, IASL: 203-215

Chan Sai Noi. 2003. Making information literacy a compulsory subject for undergraduates: the experience of the University of Malaya. *World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council*, 1 – 9 August 2003, Berlin.

Che Norma Bahri. 2004. Program literasi maklumat di perpustakaan akademik : satu tinjauan kaedah dan pencapaian. *Seminar Kebangsaan Perpustakaan di Malaysia,* 25 – 27 Mei 2004, Langkawi.

Edzan, N.N. 2004. Information literacy initiatives in academic libraries: a Web's view In: *Prosiding Seminar Kebangsaan Sosio-Ekonomi dan IT Ke-2*. Sintok: Pusat Penyelidikan & Perundingan UUM, 2004. pp.515-528.

Fatimah Jusoh. 2002. School libraries in Malaysia. In: Singh, D et al. (Ed.): *School Libraries for a Knowledge Society.* Proceedings of the 31st Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship, Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.(4-9 August, 2002). Seattle, WA, IASL: 193-201

International Information Literacy Conferences and Meetings. 2003. *The Prague Declaration : Towards an Information Literate Society.* Available at: http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitconf&meet/post-

Juhana Salim. 2000. Program literasi maklumat di institusi pengajian tinggi dalam era digital. *Seminar Kebangsaan Perpustakaan di Malaysia: Anjakan Para*digma, 23 – 24 Ogos 2000, Kuala Lumpur.

Kim Phaik Lim. 1998. Linking higher education to information literacy education in Malaysia: a focus on diversity. *2ⁿᵈ Asia Regional Literacy Forum*. Available at: http://www.literacyonline.org/products/ili/webdocs/kin.html

Maimunah Kadir & Mohd Sharif Mohd Saad. 2003. Developing life long learners through information literacy programmes: a view from academic libraries. *Conference of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL XII)*, 20 – 23 October 2003, Brunei Darussalam.

Malaysia. Ministry of Education. 1997. *Malaysian Smart School Conceptual Blueprint*. Kuala Lumpur : The Ministry**.**

Mohd Sharif Mohd Saad and A.N. Zainab. 2002. Information literacy programmes in Malaysian public universities : an observation. *68ᵗʰ IFLA Council and General Conference*, 18 – 24 August 2002, Glasgow, Scotland.

Mohd Sharif, N.N. Edzan and A.N. Zainab 2005. Assessing learning outcomes of information literacy programmes : Malaysian academic libraries. *International Conference on Libraries : Towards a Knowledge Society*, 14 – 16 March 2005, Penang.

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia. 2005. *Reading Promotion Policy*. Available at: http://i-baca.pnm.my/dasar/dasar en.asp

Reid, Edna. 1998 Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor and roles of information professionals. *IATUL Conference Proceedings 1998*. Available at: http://www.iatul.org/conference/proceedings/vol08/papers/reid.html

Rudasill, Lynne. 1998. Global literacy initiatives : the United States and developing nations. *IATUL Conference Proceedings 1998*. Available at: http://www.iatul.org/conference/proceedings/vol08/papers/rudasill.html

Siti Aishah Sheikh Kadir. 2003. *Experience and Efforts in Literacy Programmes: Brief Country Report*. Kuala Lumpur : Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia.

Tan Sri Dato' Seri Musa bin Mohamad. 2002. Speech. *31ˢᵗ IASL Conference*, 4 – 9 August 2002, Petaling Jaya.

UNESCO Bangkok 2005. Communication & Information Unit. *Programmes: Information Literacy*. Available at: http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=1897

Virkus, Sirje. 2003. Information literacy in Europe: a literature review. *Information Research*, 8(4). Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/8-4/paper159.html

Yushiana Mansor. 2003. Beyond IT savvy: developing information literacy competency among students of higher learning institutions in Malaysia. *The Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL) International Conference 2003*, 15 – 18 June 2003, Sabah.