

Students' perceptions of librarians as teachers of information literacy at a large African university

Teachers of
information
literacy

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to determine the students' perceptions of librarians as teachers of information literacy at the North-West University in South Africa.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used a survey research method in which online questionnaires were used to gather data from students who would have attended information literacy classes.

Findings – Students found librarians to be effective teachers of information literacy, and they found the subject to be very useful. However, some of the surveyed students felt that a lot of the subject was presented in a short period, which could easily result in exhaustion and information overload. The use of local or vernacular languages was also indicated as an area requiring the librarians' attention for the teachers to be more effective.

Practical implications – The results of this study support the assessment of librarians as teachers by students to assist them (librarians) to refine their teaching methods and to make the conduct of information literacy worthwhile for the students.

Social implications – The outcomes of this study may be used to advocate for more information literacy (IL) contact time with the students by librarians when negotiating with faculty. Further, these results may be used to showcase the value placed by students to IL.

Originality/value – This study is a welcome addition to the scant literature on the quality of teaching delivered by the librarians and the assessment mechanisms used to provide feedback on students' learning of IL. This study is a first of its kind comparing the perceptions of librarians' teaching abilities by postgraduate and undergraduate students.

Keywords Academic libraries, Assessment, Information literacy, Undergraduate students, Postgraduate students, Library instruction, Librarians as teachers

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution require information literate individuals (Juskuv and Keating, 2019). The Fourth Industrial Revolution is characterised by information overload, big data, artificial intelligence and technological advancement and discoveries that were never seen before (Xu *et al.*, 2018). In this period, higher education is



The results of this paper were first presented at the International Conference on Information Literacy held at the North-West University on 23 to 26 September 2019. The questionnaire can be found in this link: <https://nwu-za.libsurveys.com/mc-training-evaluation>.

shaped by new modes of curriculum, and teaching is shaped from a teacher-centred curriculum to a learning-based one (Xu *et al.*, 2018). It is precisely this information explosion and overload and technological advancements accompanied by changes in higher education modes of teaching and learning that necessitate information literate individuals (Nilsen, 2012). Information literacy (IL) is often defined as skills and abilities used to discover, access, interpret, analyse, manage, create, communicate, store and share information in an ethical manner (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2018). It involves the ability to find, retrieve, analyse and use information (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2019). Once acquired, IL skills are not only useful for the academic lives of the students but also used in their professional and personal lives to assist them to make informed choices. IL skills are not transferred by a process of osmosis. They require a deliberate effort of teaching and learning. IL requires effective teachers who are able to transfer their knowledge to different user groups (Lockhart, 2016). Librarians play a critical role in the provision of IL at many universities in South Africa (Mugwisi, 2015; Moyo and Mavodza, 2016; Davids and Omar, 2018; Noll and Brown, 2018) and other countries (Chang and Wu, 2012; Kanguha, 2016). As such, librarians are involved in all aspects of IL including curriculum design, liaison with academic departments, preparation for classes, classroom management and the teaching of IL content to the students (Chang and Wu, 2012; Mugwisi, 2015). Despite the expectation for librarians to teach IL, there is scant literature on the quality of teaching delivered by the librarians and the assessment mechanisms used to provide feedback on students' learning of IL (Noll, 2017). Most studies choose to focus on the assessment of students' IL skills before and after IL training. Most of these studies ignore the quality of teaching that took place during the IL classes. This is surprising as effective teaching skills are critical for the success of IL training (Sele matsela and Du Toit, 2007). One of the measures used to assess the quality of teaching is students' evaluation of teachers (SET). SET relies on students' perceptions of the quality of teaching, abilities and competency of their teachers (Hajdin and Pažur, 2012). Students' feedback can be an effective way to gauge the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning that took place in classes (Hajdin and Pažur, 2012). Students' evaluation can help institutions to measure whether librarians are being effective in teaching students. Further, SET can provide librarians with valuable information on areas they need to adjust or improve in their lessons to better serve the students (Hajdin and Pažur, 2012). That way, students' evaluation can benefit the students and librarians alike. Students' evaluation is not a tool to punish teachers (librarians) but a tool to assist them to better their performance.

The purpose of this paper is to examine students' perceptions of librarians as teachers of IL at the North-West University (NWU) in South Africa. This study has three specific objectives, which are to:

- (1) establish the perceived usefulness of IL training by students at NWU;
- (2) determine the perceptions of students about the effectiveness of librarians as teachers of IL at NWU; and
- (3) analyse the general learning experiences of students from IL training at NWU.

The findings reveal the views and perceptions of students on their experience of IL training and the quality of teaching that took place during classes. The study will assist librarians to use effective strategies to teach information literacy to the students. It will further assist the librarians to determine the level of satisfaction of students with their ability to teach. This study will add to the body of literature concerning the assessment of IL and its impact in academic institutions. It is hoped that this study can be used as a springboard for the similar practice and can lead to more studies in this area.

2. Context of the study

The NWU was founded in 2004 after a government-imposed merger of the then University of North West and the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education together with the Sebokeng Campus of the then Vista University (NWU [North-West University], 2019). The university has three campuses, namely, Mafikeng, Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle (NWU [North-West University], 2019). NWU seeks “to be an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, social responsiveness and an ethic of care”. According to its own audited figures, the university had more than 72,000 students in 2017 of which more than 16,000 of those were postgraduates. Like all universities in South Africa, this university fulfils four primary functions, namely, teaching, learning, research and community engagement. The university has three campus libraries and four branch libraries situated in the Potchefstroom Campus. Collectively, these campus and branch libraries are called NWU Library and Information Service (NWU LIS). NWU LIS’ main task is to support the mission of the university. It seeks “to be distinguished as a leading university library in Africa and beyond, known for commitment to partnership in student success, esteemed scholarship and research” (NWU LIS [North-West University Library and Information Service], 2018). Among NWU LIS’ strategies is the strategy to support teaching, learning and researching through provision of information and digital literacy to library users (NWU LIS, 2018). Similar to the majority of universities in South Africa, most of the IL training offered at NWU is *ad hoc*, “once-off” and at the mercy of academics (Moyo and Mavodza, 2016; Noll and Brown, 2018). However, some faculties such as law are prepared to offer the library at least three contact sessions with their students including library orientation, although this has not been officially agreed upon. In South Africa, IL is recognised by quality assurance and control bodies such as the South African Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as critical for the support of teaching and learning (SAQA, 2000; HEQC, 2004). In particular, SAQA identified the ability to collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information as one of the critical cross-field outcomes, while Criterion 7 of the HEQC identifies library training as one of the requirements for programme accreditations (SAQA, 2000; HEQC, 2004). The LISs Charter of South Africa maintains that the country relies on librarians to provide IL for its citizens to participate fully in the knowledge society and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Nkondo *et al.*, 2014).

3. Literature review

The literature review of this study is divided into two subsections, namely, librarians as teachers and their evaluation as teachers of IL.

3.1 Librarians as teachers of information literacy

Most librarians are not schooled in pedagogy, teaching methods and theories and learning styles required of a certified teacher, and as a result, they lack the necessary skills to teach (Selematsele and Du Toit, 2007; Davids and Omar, 2018; Noll, 2017; Chigwada, 2019). Noll (2017) mentions that according to the restrictive definition of teaching, librarians are not teachers, rather, they are IL instructors. This study, however, has adopted the expansive definition of McCulloch and Crook (2014) which defines teaching as the process of transferring knowledge or skill from one person to the other. In this context, teaching need not be conducted only by educational specialists with certified expertise as teachers but also those who think of themselves as teachers and are involved in transfer of knowledge (Chigwada, 2019). As such, the practice and conduct of librarians, as they transfer IL skills to the users, are construed as teaching (Chigwada, 2019). The content of teaching IL can be

summarised into five levels, which are: accessing information, evaluating information, organising information, retrieving information and ethical use of information (Moyo, 2014; Mugwisi, 2015; Noll, 2017; Mofana and Jacobs, 2018; Davids and Omar, 2018; Chigwada, 2019). By 2002, the University of New Mexico Library developed a set of competencies of effective library teachers or instructors. These can be summarised as follows:

- Good IL teachers must be good communicators with particular emphasis to volume and tone of voice.
- They should demonstrate high degree of interest and knowledge.
- They should be approachable to students.
- They should be flexible and receptive to change.
- They should show interest to the field by being active members of a professional association and by attending workshops, seminars and conferences.
- They should be good motivators (Selematsela and Du Toit, 2007).

Noll (2017) reminds us that for librarians to claim to be effective teachers, IL training must be accompanied by evaluation.

3.2 Evaluation of librarians as teachers of information literacy

Murtha *et al.* (2006) contend that there are three types of assessing librarians as teachers, namely, prescriptive or diagnostic assessment used to determine the level of competency of librarians as teachers; formative assessment that is used to provide feedback to librarians as teachers about their teaching abilities to assist them improve; and summative assessment which is used to provide administrative support about teaching abilities and competency of librarians. Assessment methods that are used to evaluate the performance of librarians as teachers include interviews, personal reflections, observations, portfolios of evidence, measurements of students' outcomes, competency tests, students' evaluation surveys, peer reviews and citation analysis (Murtha *et al.*, 2006; Lockhart, 2016). The majority of studies on students' evaluation of librarians in teaching IL emanate from the USA. These include Fagan (2003), Polger and Okamoto (2010), Nilsen (2012) and McCartin *et al.* (2019). Although not by any means explicit, there are studies conducted in South Africa where certain elements can be construed to deal with evaluation of librarians as teachers by students including Selematsela and Du Toit (2007) and Mofana and Jacobs (2018).

Fagan (2003) researched the students' perceptions of academic librarians at the Morris Library in Southern Illinois University. With regard to the teaching role of librarians, Fagan (2003) found that none of the 45 students indicated that librarians are teachers, although, 20 per cent of them indicated teaching or training in one way or the other. Another study by Polger and Okamoto (2010) wanted to find out students' perceptions of librarians as teachers at two colleges in the USA (the College of Staten Island and the John Jay College of Criminal Justice) and realised that 66 per cent of students at both colleges recognise the role of librarians as teachers. The percentage of first-year students who recognised librarians as teachers was 74 per cent while that of postgraduates was 67 per cent. The percentage of students who thought of librarians as teachers however was higher (at 80 per cent) among those who had just attended an IL session conducted by a librarian, meaning that attending a class may influence the perception of librarians as teachers positively. The students indicated the teaching roles of librarians as guidance on how to find information and books as well as conduct research. Nilsen (2012) focussed on whether academics perceived librarians as teachers. One of the questions of the study, however, sought to find out if the

academics themselves attended IL instruction as students. The majority of academics rated IL skills as critical for the students, and some stated that they found IL instruction conducted by librarians “extraordinarily dull” as students which affected their perceptions of IL instruction as academics in future. Although it is not clear what caused the IL instruction to be perceived as dull in the case above, [Botts and Emmons \(2002\)](#) advised librarians that good teachers demonstrate a high degree of interest and knowledge. If librarians, or any teacher for that matter, do not demonstrate interest to the IL topic they teach, students may find them “dull” as teachers. [Mofana and Jacobs \(2018\)](#) conducted a study which sought to find out students’ perceptions of IL using a cooperative learning intervention strategy at The Independent Institute of Education in South Africa. Among the findings were that 19 out of the 21 respondents agreed that the programme was engaging because of interaction with their peers. This means that millennials would rather engage in a learner-centred approach to learning rather than a traditional teacher-centred approach. [McCartin et al. \(2019\)](#) conducted a study at the University of Northern Colorado about the perceptions of IL skills by students. Although this study did not specifically ask about the librarians as teachers, in the comments section students made some comments that could be construed to be an assessment of the teacher. Out of 121 students who provided additional feedback and comments, 38 students made positive responses, some of which had a bearing to the instructor, while 21 felt that the content of the workshop was limited, while others yearned for an interactive and fun workshop. In a way, the comments made by students vindicate the results of [Mofana and Jacobs \(2018\)](#) who found that students prefer an engaging interactive IL training. This is something librarians who teach IL should take into account.

3.3 Methodology

The study used a survey method which relied on a self-administered online questionnaire created using Springshare’s LibWizards platform. The platform is known to assist with creating online surveys, forms and tutorials ([Springshare, 2019](#)). In total, 1,144 students (810 undergraduates and 334 postgraduates as shown in [Figure 1](#)) filled the online questionnaire after IL classes at the Mafikeng Campus of NWU from June 2018 to June 2019. The questionnaire was in three sections with the first section dealing with the learning experience of students, the second dealt with the facilitator or librarian as a teacher and the third provided students an opportunity to make comments, suggestions or give any feedback they may have about the training. The first section of the questionnaire had three questions (two open-ended and one closed). Question 1.1 of the first section required students to state the most important aspects of the training. Question 1.2 was about the perceived usefulness of IL training using a Likert scale consisting of five points from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree to strongly disagree. Question 1.3 was an open-ended question that provided students an opportunity to indicate the part of IL training that they

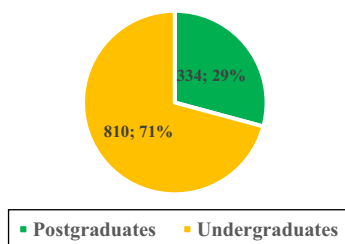


Figure 1.
Participants by
academic degree level

felt needed more explanation. The second section of the questionnaire was composed of four multiple choice questions that used a Likert scale similar to the one in Question 1.2. The questions in this section reflected on the teaching abilities of the librarians. Springshare's LibWizards platform allowed the researchers to create tables and graphs for easy analysis of the quantitative results of the survey. The qualitative data were divided into four topics based on the themes covered in the students' comments. To ensure validity of the coding, three of the researchers identified the themes separately before they met to discuss them. In the main questionnaire, the themes identified were similar except for a few minor differences which made the researchers to be confident of their reliability and validity. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data.

4. Findings and discussions

The findings of this study are aligned to the objectives stated in the introduction.

4.1 Perceived usefulness of information literacy training by students at North-West University

Figure 2 shows that a total number of 891 (77.9 per cent of 1,144) students strongly agreed that IL training is useful. Out of the 891 students, 616 (76 per cent of 810) were undergraduate students (UG) and 275 (82.3 per cent of 334) were postgraduate students (PG). All in all, there were 1,095 (95.7 per cent of 1,144) students who either agree or strongly agree that IL is either useful or very useful. There were 35 (3.1 per cent of 1,144) neutral responses from 28 UG and 7 PG, while 14 (or 1.2 per cent of 1,144) students did not find IL useful at all. The differences between the perceived usefulness of IL by PG compared to UG could be attributed to the fact that PG training is often targeted at a specific need rather than general, while UG IL training is oftentimes generic with no specific need. Literature also shows that students appreciate IL training that targets a specific need such as the need for information for assignments rather than generic training (Mofana and Jacobs, 2018). These results compare well to those of Moyo (2014) who found that 89.2 per cent of students at Rhodes and Fort Hare Universities perceived IL as either relevant or very relevant. However, the UG–PG division of students who perceived IL training as relevant or very relevant in the Moyo (2014) study was not clearly indicated. These results slightly undermine those of Toteng *et al.* (2010) and Noll and Brown (2018). While researching the perceived usefulness of IL by UG law students at the University of Botswana, Toteng *et al.* (2010) found that 57.9 per cent of UG law students perceived IL as either useful or very useful. However, Toteng *et al.* (2010)

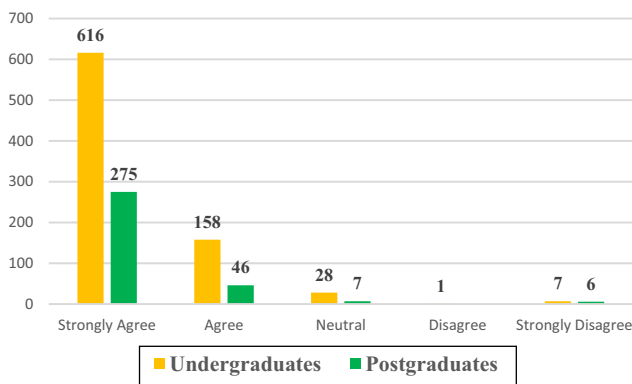


Figure 2. Students' level of agreement with the usefulness of IL training

reported a higher percentage of more than 20 per cent neutrals compared to 3.1 per cent in this study. The other difference between this study and Toteng *et al.* (2010) is the fact that this study's questionnaire was filled only by students who attended IL training, while 75 per cent of students who completed Toteng *et al.*'s (2010) questionnaires attended IL training. In Noll and Brown (2018), 63 per cent of information systems PG's at the University of Cape Town (UCT) indicated that IL skills are good to have.

Students were asked to rate the IL training they had just attended. Figure 3 shows that 1,092 (95.5 per cent of 1,144) students rated IL training as either good or very good. Just more than 94 per cent (or 764 out of 810) of UG and 98.2 per cent (or 328 out of 334) of PG thought that the library training was either good or very good. There appears to be a consensus between UG and PG students in rating IL training as very good. There were 48 students (or close to 4.2 per cent of 1,144) students that rated the training as average with 43 of those UG and five at PG level. A total of four (0.3 per cent of 1,144) students rated the training as either poor or extremely poor. Although it would be easy for librarians to take solace from the fact that an overwhelming majority of students rated IL training highly, the fact that some sections of the students' population felt that the IL training was poor or extremely poor should be a worrying sign for librarians. The results of this study agree with those of Moyo (2014) and Selematsela (2005). Moyo (2014) found that library workshops, demonstrations and small group interactions are among the most popular methods of IL training by students. On the other hand, Selematsela (2005) found that structured group sessions ranked favourable at the University of Johannesburg. These are the methods that were used by the librarians in this study and rated by students. Noll (2017) found differently from this study as information systems PG students at UCT indicated that a once-off library training was not effective at all.

4.2 Perceived effectiveness of librarians as teachers of information literacy

There were three levels that the students rated librarians as teachers on. In the first level, students rated librarians on the basis of how audible they were during classes. The second level dealt with the easiness with which the librarian as a teacher could be understood, and the third level was concerned with the librarians' ability to interact with the students.

Figure 4 depicts the levels of agreement among students on whether the librarian as a teacher was audible during an IL training session. Overall, 1,051 (or 91.9 per cent of 1,144) students either strongly agree or agree that the librarians were audible during classes. There were slight differences between the percentage of PG and UG students who indicated that

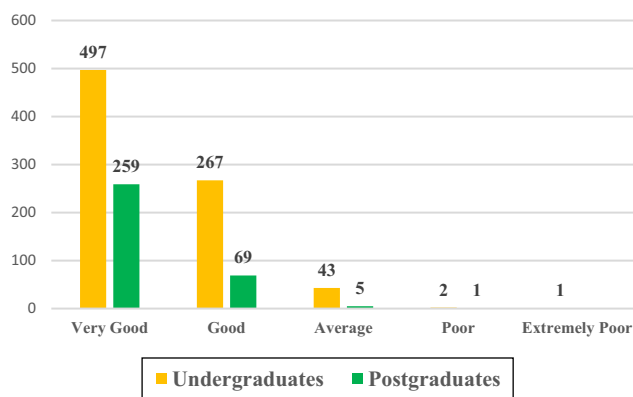
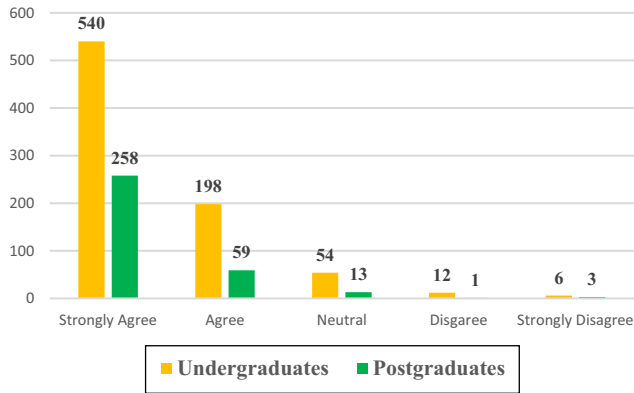


Figure 3.
Rating of IL training
by students

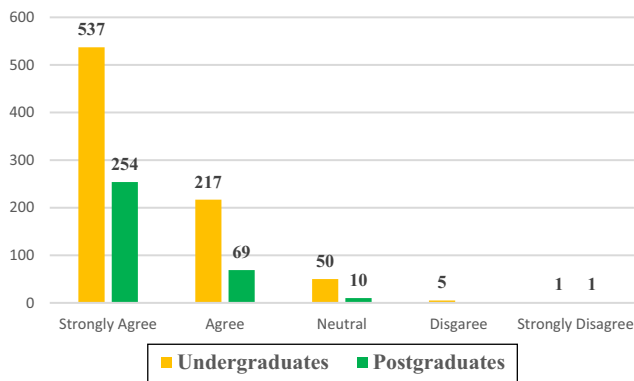
Figure 4.
Agreement with the
audibility of the
librarian



they could hear the librarians. Just more than 91.1 per cent (738 out of 810) of UG and 94.9 per cent (317 out of 334) of PG students agreed or strongly agreed that librarians were audible. The differences between the ability to hear the librarians during classes between UG and PG could be attributed to the fact that UG classes tended to be attended by more students compared to PG classes. Close to 2 per cent (22 of 1,144) of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the librarians were audible enough. While a large number of students are satisfied with the audibility of the librarians, it is worth noting the number of students who report not hearing the librarian clearly. This is an area that can be addressed through raising awareness among librarians to project their voices more during IL classes. To this effect, librarians must heed [Moyo's \(2014\)](#) advice that students engage with information through reading, hearing and viewing. It is critical that librarians project in such a way that they can be heard and understood by the students during IL classes. [Blackburn and Hays \(2014\)](#) point out that classroom management skills are vital for librarians involved in IL training to ensure that everybody is accommodated. Librarians, for example, can ask those who struggle to hear them to sit in front of the classes.

[Figure 5](#) shows that overall 1,077 (94.1 per cent of 1,144) students either strongly agree or agree that the librarian was easy to understand. Close to 93.1 per cent (734 of 810) of UG and 96.7 per cent (323 of 334) of PG either agree or strongly agree that they could easily understand the

Figure 5.
Degree of easiness to
understand and
follow the librarian



librarian. Seven respondents (or less than 1 per cent of 1,144) indicated that they either strongly disagree or disagree with the statement that they could understand the lesson. The differences between students who indicated that the librarians were audible in Figure 4 and those who indicated they could understand in Figure 5 were rather confusing. It was difficult to discern how some of those who could not hear could perceive themselves as having understood the librarians. It is possible that certain students interpreted the question dealt with in Figure 4 as referring to hearing everything the librarian was saying. In cases where they could have heard, they may have understood fairly well what was being conveyed. Selematsela and Du Toit (2007) accept that not all students would be able to follow librarians during IL lessons. However, they advise librarians to be proactive by always identifying students who did not understand and solicit assistance from their peers who understood to explain to them. Mofana and Jacobs's (2018) study agrees pointing out that this encourages learners to take ownership of their learning rather than being dependent on the teacher (librarian).

Figure 6 shows that just more than 94.2 per cent (1,078 of 1,144) of students either strongly agree or agree that librarians interacted with the students during IL sessions. The perceptions on the ability of librarians to interact with students differ between PG and UG students. There were 752 (92.8 per cent of 810) UG students and 326 (97.6 per cent of 334) PG who perceived that the librarians interacted with students during IL classes. The percentage of those who felt that librarians did not interact with the students stood at 1.3 per cent (15 out of 1,144). Mofana and Jacobs (2018) maintain that the majority of millennials value interactive learning. These students value engagement and interaction during classes. Moyo (2014) concurs pointing out that interaction helps to improve students' understanding as they (students) are able to pose questions and receive feedback from the librarians. Kanguha (2016) determined that students' interaction with librarians is a key component that enhances IL learning. In Kanguha (2016), 72.3 per cent of students expressed a need for more interaction between librarians and students. It is therefore imperative for librarians to interact and engage effectively with the students during IL training so as to ensure that all students understand and follow the training sessions.

4.3 Learning experiences of students from information literacy training at North-West University

To respond to the third objective of the study, students' comments and suggestions in the comments/suggestions section of the survey questionnaire were analysed. Although students do not refer to the librarians as teachers and prefer to use the vocabulary used

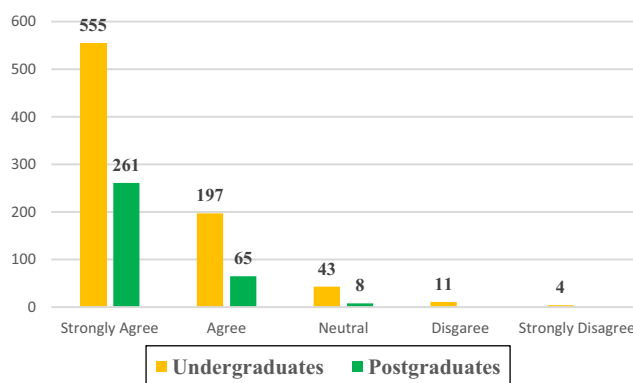


Figure 6.
Degree of agreement
with the librarian's
ability to interact
with the students

in the questionnaire which refers to them (librarians) as facilitators, the importance of the librarians as teachers comes out strongly in the word cloud in Figure 7 where the font size is proportionate to the frequency of mentions. Facilitator(s)/trainer (s) were mentioned for 141 times in the comments which show that many students see the role of the librarian as a teacher in IL training as a critical one. The issue of the length and frequency of training sessions also came out prominently in the students' comments. "More" and "Training" were mentioned about 218 times, while the length of time was mentioned for 131 times.

To further understand the learning experiences of students, the comments were divided into four topics which are comments about the timing and length of training, comments dealing with the content of the IL training, comments dealing with training material and facilities and comments about librarians as teachers.

4.3.1 Students' comments on timing and length of training. The timing and length of training can have a bearing on how librarians are perceived as teachers. Many students complained about the short time allocated to the training which in turn had a bearing on the pace with which the librarians taught them. Students wanted more time and more sessions to be allocated to IL training. Another group of students pointed out that training should be offered from first year onwards as reflected by the comments below:

Give students more time maybe the services must be done two or three times.

Allocate at least 2 hours for training so that it (sic) the facilitator is not going at a very fast pace.

The time is not enough so the facilitator must be given more time.



Figure 7.
Word cloud
representing
students' comments
(the font size is
proportionate to the
frequency of
mentions)

I needed more time for EndNote.

Give more time on how to search for information.

This training should be offered to students in their first year.

Make students strongly aware of the programme from first year.

I wish this information was delivered to students since their first years.

I only attended this training on my fourth year, I feel like, if I could have attended it earlier, I could have never struggled in the previous years.

While interviewing students, librarians and lecturers at the Department of the Arts at Ben-Gurion University in Israel, [Yevelson-Shorsher and Bronstein \(2018\)](#) also found that timing of the IL training was very important to the students. Similar findings were made by [Moyo \(2014\)](#), [Kanguha \(2016\)](#), [Moyane et al. \(2015\)](#) and [McCartin et al. \(2019\)](#) at the Fort Hare and Rhodes University, University of KwaZulu-Natal and University of Northern Colorado, respectively. In the current study, students suggested that the timing of the training could be improved and aligned to an assignment. With regard to the number of students who showed lack of awareness about IL being offered to all levels of students at NWU, these results were surprising but not peculiar to NWU. [Moyo \(2014\)](#) and [Moyane et al. \(2015\)](#) also identified lack of awareness of IL training as a challenge for UG and PG at three universities (Fort Hare, Rhodes and Kwazulu-Natal) in South Africa. [Yevelson-Shorsher and Bronstein \(2018\)](#) also found that many students at the Department of the Arts at Ben-Gurion University in Israel were not aware of most library services and resources. This calls for marketing of IL and other services by NWU. As early as 2001, Rockwell-Kincano advised librarians to adopt marketing strategies that are meant to be attractive and memorable to users. Some marketing of IL is conducted at NWU. IL training schedules are advertised in several media around campus including notice boards, LED screen display, library website, NWU LIS Facebook, NWU LIS Twitter and campus e-post. Additionally, librarians visit academics during vacations to encourage them to send students for IL training. IL training also forms part of all library reports for faculty board meetings. Despite this effort, it is clear that the message does not reach everybody. There is a need for more marketing strategies to be considered for IL training to reach as many people as possible ([Rockwell-Kincanon, 2001](#)).

4.3.2 Students' comments on content of the information literacy training. Students generally expressed happiness with the content of the training, but some felt that there was a need to split the information provided into different sessions. There were also views that the library can cover other referencing software besides EndNote. Some of the comments of the students were that:

Information should be split into different sessions instead of overloading us in one session.

Have session on specific aspects only.

To dissect the information into smaller sessions to avoid information overload.

I would like training on Zotero and Mendeley.

These comments are almost similar to those made by academics at the Ben-Gurion University in Israel who preferred IL training to be gradual and relevant to the different stages of the degree ([Yevelson-Shorsher and Bronstein, 2018](#)). To deal with the issue of information overload raised by the students, the NWU Campus Library decided to divide the booked sessions into five different sessions. Students can book one session or several

sessions based on their needs. The comments about splitting the session were made before the division of IL sessions into smaller segments.

4.3.3 Students' comments on training material and facilities. With regard to training material, students requested for more computers to be made available so that everybody can sit next to a computer. Related to that was also a request for computers that were not working to be fixed and the internet strength to be improved. Other comments show that students would have appreciated a guide or presentation that could be used after the training. There were also calls for the presentations to be made into a video for students to view at the time of their own convenience. Students also complained about a projector that was not working and the Aircon that was either too cold or warm. Some selected comments of students are below:

More computers should be available for training.

Add more computers.

All computers in the venue should be working.

Computers are slow.

Try to email the presentation to the students.

The slides of the lesson can be made available to the students.

We can be offered the slide used for presentation to read and understand it ourselves.

Video demonstration.

Videos or materials to be made accessible for students to access at their own time.

The only challenge we experienced was that the projector the facilitator had to use was not working.

The aircon should be off.

Students' comments show that students value hands-on practice on the computers as they wanted to be able to sit next to a computer and practice what was being taught by the librarians. This is similar to the findings of studies by [Yevelson-Shorsher and Bronstein \(2018\)](#) and [McCartin et al. \(2019\)](#) where students also stressed the importance of hands-on practice. These comments challenge librarians to take into account the different preferences and learning styles of students in conducting IL training ([Selematsela and Du Toit, 2007](#); [Davids and Omar, 2018](#); [Noll, 2017](#); [Chigwada, 2019](#)). The comments remind librarians that in teaching there is no one size that fits all. Therefore, librarians as teachers should strive to accommodate all groups of students.

4.3.4 Students' comments on librarians as teachers. The majority of comments were positive about the teaching abilities of librarians. However, there were also concerns about the fast pace at which the training was conducted, lack of interaction between the students and the librarian as well as among students and the language used to conduct the training. Positive comments included the following:

The library trainer could not be more improved, he was very helpful.

The facilitator is very clear enough, audible and friendly to every trainee.

The lady (librarian) was perfect in all aspects.

It (training) is well facilitated. I am absolutely satisfied.

The facilitator is incredible, she shares very useful information.

Everything was clear to me the facilitator did a really good job.

I think the facilitator was good in explaining all the important aspects of session.

The facilitator did a great job and made the interactions to be fun and enjoyable.

The session was very wonderful, the facilitator does not need any other training. This session was very helpful.

The training was done at an exceptional level and the facilitator knew what she was talking about.

These comments show an appreciation by the students that the teacher or facilitator (librarians) can make or break a lesson. The comments also show that students appreciate that the teacher has to be knowledgeable with a good grasp of what he/she is teaching, hence the comment that the librarian knew what he/she was talking about. It is clear that students also appreciate a teacher who is able to share knowledge, who is friendly, helpful, audible, who encourages interaction and ensures that students have fun and enjoy the lesson in the process. Students' comments in this study agree with [Mofana and Jacobs's \(2018\)](#) findings which also determined that students prefer interactive classes. These results confirm that it is not only librarians who see themselves as teachers ([Chigwada, 2019](#)) but students themselves also see librarians as teachers as shown by their reference to the teaching role of librarians in the comments. [Yvelson-Shorsher and Bronstein's \(2018\)](#) study was also found to be similar to this study as some students at the Department of the Arts at Ben-Gurion University in Israel indicated that they prefer librarians to teach IL meaning that they recognise teaching as one of the librarians' roles. Students also pointed several areas where librarians as teachers could improve in their teaching abilities. With many students complaining about the pace of the training, the voice projection of librarians in classes, not taking into account different learning styles and differences in age groups. A sample of comments to this regard can be found below:

The pace of facilitating should be a bit slow to cater for slow learners.

The facilitator could at least try to be slow so that no one is left behind.

They must teach it slow for those who cannot hear clearly.

The facilitator should speak more loudly.

Pacing of certain information, not be too fast especially when doing examples.

The lecturer should explain things slower for students who take long to understand.

The use of a microphone would be useful to the instructor and the students who are usually at the back because that would make the instructor audible enough.

Facilitator should slow the pace in order to ensure that we are all moving together.

Be a bit slow to accommodate all people more especially elderly people.

It was clear from the comments that the librarians were trying to give students a lot of information within a short period perhaps because of time constraints which made them to lose slow learners in the process. This is a reflection of the fact that most training in South Africa and NWU is once-off ([Moyo and Mavodza, 2016](#); [Noll and Brown, 2018](#)). In this situation, librarians are also expected to cover a lot of information within 45 min to an hour. These comments challenge librarians to try to balance the need to cover everything within a

short period and losing some users in the process and the need to cover some topics well and manage to impart certain IL skills to all the students in the process. These are often the choices that librarians as teachers of IL face. It is also apparent from one of the responses that some students may be difficult of hearing or consider themselves elderly. If the comments are anything to go by, the librarian(s) did not take into account those with disabilities. Not taking into account those with disabilities also emerged in [McCartin et al. \(2019\)](#) where one of the students reminded the librarian as a teacher to take into account students with disabilities.

Many students also wanted more interactive classes and pointed out that to make classes more interesting, there should be more interaction with the students and among students. A sample of their comments can be found below:

Allow students to take part in the session.

The facilitator could take more time to explain or ask students questions.

Facilitator must interact strongly with learners to ensure that they fully understand.

A little bit of more interaction with trainees.

The facilitator must decrease the speed when talking to us.

The facilitator could move around more often to give students a sense of interest in them.

Be more interactive.

The fact that students want classes with more interaction is a vindication of [Mofana and Jacobs \(2018\)](#) who pointed out that the majority of millennials prefer interactive classes to teacher-centred classes.

With regard to language, there were two groups of students who complained about it. There were those who felt that the language used during the sessions was difficult presumably referring to use of library jargon. Some students pointed out that the IL training can also be conducted in Setswana, the language that is spoken by the majority of students at NWU and the North West Province generally (NWU, 2018). The statements below reflect students' views about language:

Some of the words were not clearly pronounced.

The trainer must sometimes use home languages for students who don't understand English.

The facilitator show (sic) use of more (sic) easy language for students to understand better.

I think the facilitation can be done in Setswana as some of the research topics are in Setswana.

Ke kopa fela le re kwalele ka Setswana. (I kindly request you to write in Setswana.)

I think we still need more platforms that will allow Setswana to be visible.

Although NWU has four official languages, only Afrikaans and English are developed languages of curricula and research (NWU 2018). Because of the history of marginalisation of African languages in South Africa and the imposition of Afrikaans and English, language remains a contested issue at universities especially in former Afrikaans universities or universities with former Afrikaans campuses ([Selematsela and Du Toit, 2007](#); [Dube, 2017](#)). The calls for the recognition of Setswana by the students should be taken with that context in mind. It is possible that students are aware that IL classes in the other two campuses of the University (Potchefstroom and Vaal) are conducted in both Afrikaans and English. The request for classes to be conducted in Setswana should be understood as a cry for the

recognition of the most spoken language at the NWU and North West Province at large. However, challenges associated with language in relation to IL training in South African universities do not appear to be unique to NWU. Moyo (2014) also found that the non-use of vernacular language (isiXhosa in this case) was one of the challenges identified by students at Fort Hare and Rhodes Universities. Selematsela and Du Toit (2007), therefore, advise librarians to take into account and accommodate students' language and culture when conducting IL training.

5. Conclusion

The importance of the study lies in the fact that IL skills once acquired enable students to be effective and independent users of information to succeed in academia and to make good decisions in life. On the whole, the students, both at the UG and PG levels of study, found librarians to be effective teachers of IL, and they found the subject to be very useful. However, some of the surveyed students felt that a lot of the subject was presented in a short period, which could easily result in exhaustion and information overload. The use of local or vernacular languages was also indicated as an area requiring the librarian's attention for the teacher to be more effective. Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that the IL provided at the NWU was effective. It can also be concluded that there is room for improvement in terms of time allocated for teaching and the use of the university's official languages for students' instruction, among other identified weaknesses.

The outcomes of this study support the assessment of librarians as teachers by students to assist them (librarians) to refine their teaching methods and to make the conduct of IL worthwhile for the students. These results may be used to advocate for more IL contact time with the students by librarians when negotiating with faculty. Further, these results may be used to showcase the value placed by students to IL. A more open study involving all South African universities and beyond, may be required to determine the overall students' perceptions of librarians as teachers of IL. Overall, the study acts as a building block to the growing literature on assessment of librarians as teachers in general and of IL in particular.

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