

Section 7

Communications networks

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Information literacy communications networks: An overview

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Introduction

Scholarly communications networks for information literacy (IL) have been very valuable in highlighting the growing importance of IL as a maturing discipline. IL is an area that has been in the limelight for a very long time now due to its importance in enhancing access to information. In certain spheres, IL is well entrenched, while in some countries the struggle for its recognition continues, despite its relevance in both academia and everyday life (Ilett, 2019; Mercado-Sierra & Northam, 2023). With regards to academia, IL has been provided with varying degrees of success. While in most cases IL is offered as a standalone course, it is also a fact that elsewhere it is embedded in other modules, such as academic literacy, computer/digital literacy and many other such courses or modules, which usually cut across disciplines. IL is required in other courses or modules in order to enhance students' information-handling skills. Similarly, in other settings such as the work environment and social spaces, IL is required to make decisions and informed choices, among other reasons (Munatsi, 2023).

The interest in IL has led to people who believed in it forming formal gatherings which may be in the form of conferences, symposia, or seminars for the purposes of advancing and sharing research. Similarly, the interest in IL has led to growth in manuscripts ready for publishing, which has resulted in the establishment of journals such as the *Journal of Information Literacy (JIL)* (see Chapter 7.6), *Communications in Information Literacy (CIL)* (Chapter 7.2), and the *Nordic Journal of Information Literacy in Higher Education*. These peer-reviewed journals are published open-access in order to enhance wider access to knowledge in IL. In addition, since the renowned coining of the phrase "information literacy" by Paul Zurkowski in 1974 (Badke, 2010; Machin-Mastromatteo & Lau, 2015), monographs have been authored and published. A search on WorldCat Discovery Tool, limited to books only in libraries worldwide, resulted in more than 36,000 titles. The results included both print and electronic books with a wide range of foci, including kindergarten to higher education, and more broadly on the role of IL in the information society or the digital age. The monographs have been published by various and reputable publishers such as Facet

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Publishing, Springer, and Chandos Publishing, among others. This demonstrates the importance of IL as a discipline.

The following parts of the section overview presents an overview of the entries presented in this section and their contributions to the discipline of IL.

Conferences

An ordinary search on the internet reveals that there are many conferences on IL. Some are standalone, such as the European Conference on Information Literacy (ECIL), the Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC), the Western Balkan Information and Media Literacy Conference, and the International Conference on Information Literacy (ICIL). Others embed IL into bigger conference labels such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) (see Chapter 2.5) World Congress, the American Library Association (ALA), the International Association of University Libraries (IATUL), and many more. The frequency at which these conferences are held range from yearly to once every two years or more. This section of the *Handbook* includes entries on four IL conferences: ECIL (Chapter 7.3), ICIL (Chapter 7.5), Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy (GICOIL) (Chapter 7.4), and LILAC (Chapter 7.7). All these conferences are international. However, the scope of the ECIL and ICIL conferences primarily focuses on catering to attendees from various countries in Europe and Africa respectively.

GICOIL has been in existence for the past two decades and thus has contributed to the development of IL through research and sharing of information over the years. The conference was founded by Georgia Southern University and is supported by the library and English departments of the University. The collaboration between the two departments fosters an interdisciplinary culture which promotes diversity in IL research and provision. Various themes which advance IL, in an era marked by rapid changes due to advances in technology and pandemics, have been explored and have deepened the understanding of IL as a maturing discipline. The metrics of the conference have demonstrated wider reach and use of the conference output, which is a clear testimony of its relevance to the discipline of IL. What is more exciting about GICOIL is the participation of researchers at the K-12 level, which may be a testimony to the fact that IL is appreciated at the primary and secondary school levels, where there is great need. Submissions for the conference go through a peer-review process which enhances the quality of the conference provision. For the past two decades, the conference has focused and managed to establish itself as a strong contributor to both theory and practice of IL. Going into the third decade, the conference aspires to lead in innovative IL solutions by leading the discipline in the context of examining advanced technologies which include AI. The focus on intergenerational knowledge sharing holds promise for the continuation of the conference and its contribution to IL as a discipline.

In contrast, LILAC was formed in 2005 by a national association, one of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals' (CILIP) initiatives. This followed great

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interest in IL which grew in the UK in the 1990s. The conference draws interest from different sectors such as health, academia, and schools and public libraries. LILAC's strength lies in sharing good practice in an engaging way, as well as the promotion of writing. LILAC also enjoys support of universities in the UK, and more especially, departments of information studies, which help deepen research in IL and the sustainability of the conference. Themes discussed during conferences have developed over years from approaches of IL to generative AI and digital literacy, which is in line with the dynamic IL environment. The conference offers bursaries and awards not only to encourage wider participation but also to recognize member contributions to the field of IL. In addition, the conference attracts participants from outside of the UK, thereby further strengthening the notion of an international conference with presentations from diverse contexts. Evaluations on the impact of the conferences have been conducted with feedback being used to inform future conferences. A further evaluation has also been conducted on the impact that the conference has had on individual growth and feedback has indicated some positive contributions. LILAC turns 20 years old in 2025, and this marks a major milestone in IL work and its positive contribution to the discipline. Looking at the previous themes of the conference, there is no doubt that the conference is set to grow even further as it strives to deliberate on topical issues in the IL sphere.

ECIL launched its first conference in 2013, following the realization that most conferences were hosted in continents outside Europe. An additional motivation was that most conferences focused on the practice of IL, leaving a gap in theory or research. The conference was founded by researchers from Hacettepe and Zagreb universities in Turkey and Croatia, respectively. Over and above these key players, ECIL has extended its partner base to include the Information Literacy Association, as well as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – which are recognized for their patronage. ECIL aspires to be a global voice in IL, representing viewpoints on the subject from Europe and across the continents. The conference places more emphasis on global reach as well as the intersection between practice and research and this has helped to draw wide participation. The conference themes have evolved over years from a general approach with no specific themes to themed conferences which have reflected the developments in the IL landscape. Proceedings of ECIL are published and indexed by reputable publishers such as Springer. This has ensured wider benefit to researchers and practitioners of IL. In 2025, ECIL will host its ninth conference, which has a main focus of IL in an AI-driven world, and this is likely to generate a lot of interest not only to the IL community but also to those who follow developments in advances in technology. The partnership approach to hosting ECIL conferences enhances its future sustainability, as one party may always rely on the other for support, all for the benefit of IL as a discipline.

ICIL was founded in 2018 by the North-West University, South Africa, as a sister conference to ECIL. The first two conferences took place in South Africa, while the third took place in Egypt in 2024. The conference was formed to bridge the gap in costs of travelling from Africa to Europe for ECIL. While Africa may be rich in resources such as

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minerals, a large section of the continent still faces challenges of illiteracy and access to information with which to use for decision making in various contexts. There was therefore an urgent need to establish an IL conference that would complement existing efforts which were mostly isolated. The conference's focus is on both theory and practice of IL and has, to date, managed to bring together researchers and practitioners during its conferences. The program committee of the conference comprises renowned researchers who ensure that the conference's focus is maintained by having a balance of research-based and practical papers. Organizing a conference of ICIL's magnitude requires a lot of resources, including time; collaborating with researchers or academics who in most cases have dedicated time for research helps to ensure the sustainability of the conference. ICIL's contributions to the discipline of IL lies in its ability to generate knowledge and publish it through renowned journals for the benefit of interested communities. The decision to host ICIL in every corner of Africa and its surrounding environment will ultimately ensure that IL research and awareness are created widely.

Journals

The *Journal of Information Literacy (JIL)* is a peer-reviewed open-access journal, published in the UK but open to contributions from all over the world. It was founded in 2007 and has over the years published literature in the IL field for the benefit of both practice and theory. It is well supported by CILIP and has been run over the years under very credible and able editorial leadership. *JIL* further benefits from the proceedings of LILAC, which feeds directly into the journal. The journal promotes the work of both novice and seasoned researchers of IL, which enhances continuity. From the information shared, the journal has had positive citation metrics and is indexed by credible databases such as SCOPUS. This demonstrates the high quality of the journal's output. In addition to accepting articles from school, public and academic perspectives, *JIL* also publishes contributions covering government and workplace IL, and this is quite commendable. Additionally, *JIL* has published over 5,000 articles since it was launched, which demonstrates its popularity in IL work as well as strong commitment of the editorial teams. Its future sustainability lies in collaboration with CILIP and universities, where its editorial work is managed. It also uses an open-source software in Open Journal Systems (OJS), which helps in as far as sustainability is concerned. Its free access also guarantees wider reach.

Communications in Information Literacy (CIL) was, just like *JIL*, established in 2007 but as an independent journal without any direct affiliation to an institution. Members behind its establishment were brought together by a common interest in IL in North America. It is published as an open-access journal covering a wide range of contexts. The journal has published topical issues since its establishment, with the theme of assessment of IL as a founding issue. This theme was important to researchers and practitioners alike. IL assessment is, even today, an aspect of interest to practitioners who are in most cases not formally trained in pedagogy. Since the theme of assessment, several topical themes have been published, which demonstrates the journal's commitment to IL. Although the journal

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is managed from North America, it has received and published works on IL from different countries of the world. The journal editors also believe in the strength of collaboration, as has been evidenced by their collaboration with *JIL* during one of the ECIL conferences. One unique feature in their presentation in this section of the book is that they decline to take a standpoint on whether IL is a discipline or not, opting to leave that to researchers while they focus on publishing. The journal concedes that IL is expanding and evolving, which implies more work to publish as researchers continue to interrogate this growing area.

Monographs

The contribution of monographs to a discipline such as IL cannot be doubted. Monographs are sources of credible and reliable information of enduring value. They further serve as formal channels of communication in a discipline. The final chapter in this section of the book highlights the value of monographs both in the establishment of a discipline and in its growth. However, books take a much longer time to produce than journal publishing, hence the respect and honour that is usually accorded to authors of books. In addition, books normally contain foundational information of a discipline as well as essential theories in the area of focus. Chapter 7.8 further highlights that there is a growth in IL books which reflects the many scholars or researchers in the area. It can further be observed that growth in book publications in IL is also to an extent driven by publisher priority areas. Lately, several calls for editorial work on IL themes have been shared, which triggers interest in experienced researchers to lead such projects as editors, resulting in book publications. Whilst there is a general shift in sources of information to use, that is from print to electronic, there is no doubt that books still occupy a special place in the hearts of many of the information literacy community. The chapter has respectfully argued for the continued value of books as scholarly communication channels in the shaping and growing of a discipline such as IL.

Significance of conference, journal and monograph diversity

There is no doubt that conferences, journals and monographs, including those discussed in this chapter, have contributed to both the growth and recognition of IL as a discipline. The conferences, journals and monograph publishing discussed in this section responded to a gap that was identified before the formation of the conference or publishing outlet. The gaps may have focused on research, practice, sustainability, or geographical concerns. The conferences, journals or monographs have helped expand theoretical frameworks as well as offering new insights into the area of IL. As an example, some of the conferences have moved with the changing times and deliberated on the intersection of IL with AI, thereby making them relevant to the current times. The themes of the conferences have also focused on IL in various contexts, which include public, education, workplace, and society in general. More importantly, the conferences have generated knowledge which is published through journals such as *JIL* and other proceedings which are readily and openly available to users.

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Diversity in the channels of communication presented in this section of the book have offered researchers options with which to communicate their research outcomes. Whilst books may be characterized by slow pace of writing and publishing rate, they have remained popular. Journals of IL on the other hand, have grown at a much faster pace, resulting in an abundance of literature in IL for the benefit of the practice of IL. It is also important to highlight that journals are in some cases beneficiaries of conference proceedings, as in the case of *JIL*, which benefits from LILAC, though it is not the only source of manuscripts for publishing. Yet another significance of the outlets discussed in this section is the broadening of the discipline as gaps in focus are easily identified and filled. In any case, the outlets and labels are in different geographical areas, which helps to reach all corners of the world.

Conclusion

This overview has captured the work presented in this Section on communications networks in summary. What stands out is the different motivations for the introduction of the conferences and the impact that the final output has had on the global IL community and the society at large. The conferences are growing with the times and have entered the exciting world of AI, with a view to demonstrate the link of these important areas. Journals and monographs also have positively responded to the expanding scope of IL and have published on contemporary issues in the area for the benefit of the discipline.

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