

Iranian Public Libraries Can Improve Self-Efficacy in Information Literacy, Especially When School Library Instruction Is Not Preparing Students for Lifelong Learning Readiness

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Evidence Summary

Iranian Public Libraries Can Improve Self-Efficacy in Information Literacy, Especially When School Library Instruction Is Not Preparing Students for Lifelong Learning Readiness

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To examine the efficacy of information literacy skills instruction on the lifelong learning readiness skills of Iranian public library users.

Design – Pre- and post-test experiment.

Setting – Two public libraries in Iran.

Subjects – Thirty (30) high school students who were active users of two Iranian public libraries.

Methods – Thirty (30) participants were randomized into two groups, one of which received information literacy training for seven weeks, while the other group acted as a control. Participants were assessed via three instruments in information literacy and readiness for lifelong learning prior to and at the completion of the training program. The workshops included basic library skills, recognizing needed information skills, information source skills, Internet skills, Internet searching

skills, resource instruction, database skills, and general searching skills. Results of pre- and post-test assessments were analyzed with analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

Main Results – The group that received information literacy instruction showed increased readiness for self-directed learning, readiness to overcome deterrents to participation, and improved information literacy. The control group did not show an increase in readiness to respond to triggers for learning or an overall increase in lifelong learning readiness.

Conclusion – Information literacy instruction can improve elements of lifelong learning readiness in regular library users. Public libraries in Iran should begin long-term planning to implement this training.

Commentary

This research was appraised with the *British Medical Journal* education group's guidelines for evaluating papers on education interventions (1999). There are areas where this paper meets or exceeds the guidelines, particularly in providing a readable, well-structured manuscript with meaningful results and a study that answers the questions it poses. However, there are unfortunate omissions in this paper's methodological reporting, particularly around description of recruiting and randomization. The authors do state the experimental and control groups were homogenous in age and education level, but do not provide a summary table comparing the groups or report on other elements that could have influenced composition (for example: sex, socioeconomic background, academic standing at school), although the pre-test comparisons do not suggest any imbalance.

Participants "were active library users, based on Iran's public library rules, who had a membership card for the public library and used the library at least twice per week" and were high school students (Leili, Maryam, & Mohsi, 2020, p. 262). How these participants were identified from the library users, sampled, and invited to participate is not described, nor is any incentive they may have been offered to complete the study. Additionally, how the randomization was conducted, if any effort was made to conceal the randomization from the participants, or to blind participants or instructors, is not addressed. The authors state they "observed the performance of the participants while conducting the instruction and conducted informal interviews with them to measure their levels," (Leili, Maryam, & Mohsi, 2020, p. 262) suggesting they were aware of which students received the exposure and potentially could have biased the results, undermining the credibility of these findings.

Why high school students were selected, instead of members of the general public, is acknowledged as a limitation but the rationale is not discussed. This is particularly important, as the findings are strong and do make a case for library instruction, but the authors note that librarian positions have largely been eliminated from Iranian schools (Leili, Maryam, & Mohsi, 2020, p. 267). Thus, the findings demonstrating that high school students benefit from library instruction make a case for school librarians, or that public libraries can fill this role in the meantime, rather than demonstrating the role public libraries can have in lifelong learning readiness among the general public. Further, the assessment aspect of this experiment is based on learner perception of their skills in both the pre- and post-test instruments available in the supplementary materials. It is useful to know that learner self-perception and reported behaviour improved in those that received the training sessions. However, without an objective measure of skill growth (such as evaluating task completion), these findings really demonstrate self-efficacy.

Despite these issues, this research accomplishes several significant items of note. There are few studies testing the role of information literacy instruction in libraries in Iran and this study does that while also outlining the tangible structural challenges facing Iranian public libraries and patrons. The findings show how libraries can help and the authors make a strong case for investing in Iranian

library infrastructure, outlining what is needed. These findings are also valuable for those interested in the role of public libraries in international or lower-resourced settings.

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