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The value of information literacy skills among university students*

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed to investigate students' information literacy (IL) skills at Kuwait University. Moreover, faculty members' perspectives on students' IL skills were explored. **Method:** The study adopted the quantitative approach using the survey method to collect data and employed convenience sampling of students and faculty members. Online questionnaires were sent to students and faculty of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies to collect data. Overall, 358 student responses and 78 faculty responses were received and statistically analyzed using Microsoft Excel. **Results:** The results showed that students used limited non-academic resources, and most of them were not familiar with the IL concept. These results were confirmed by the faculty who reported that students lacked IL skills, which consequently prevented them from joining research-based courses. **Conclusion:** The lack of IL skills negatively impacts students' academic achievement. This study, therefore, recommends that IL programs are to be added to the curricula of undergraduate programs, namely, the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, to ensure that students acquire IL skills. This would help students reap the maximum benefits of the skills and become information-literate individuals who are able to find, evaluate, organize, use, and communicate information in various forms.

Keywords: information literacy skills, academic achievement, university students, faculty members, Kuwait University

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قيمة مهارات الثقافة المعلوماتية لدى طلبة الجامعة*

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ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف مهارات الثقافة المعلوماتية لدى طلاب كلية الشريعة والدراسات الإسلامية، بالإضافة إلى استكشاف وجهات نظر أعضاء هيئة التدريس حول تلك المهارات لدى الطلاب. **المنهج:** اعتمدت هذه الدراسة على المنهج الكمي لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة. استخدمت الدراسة العينة المتاحة من الطلاب وأعضاء هيئة التدريس بكلية الشريعة والدراسات الإسلامية، وقد أرسلت استبانة إلكترونية للمشاركين (358 طالباً و78 عضو هيئة تدريس) في استكمال الاستبانات التي حُلّلت إحصائياً باستخدام برنامج الإكسل. **النتائج:** أظهرت النتائج أن الطلبة يستخدمون المصادر غير الأكاديمية وأنه ليس لديهم معرفة كافية بمفهوم الثقافة المعلوماتية، وأثبت تلك النتائج أعضاء هيئة التدريس الذين ذكروا أن الطلبة يفتقرون إلى مهارات الثقافة المعلوماتية، مما منعهم من الالتحاق بالمقررات التي تحتوي على أبحاث منهجية. **الخاتمة:** افتقار الطلاب إلى مهارات الثقافة المعلوماتية يؤثر سلباً على تحصيلهم الأكاديمي. لذلك، توصي الدراسة بإضافة برامج الثقافة المعلوماتية، كجزء من التحصيل الدراسي الجامعي، وخاصة في كلية الشريعة والدراسات الإسلامية؛ لضمان اكتساب الطلبة لهذه المهارات، وهذا سيساعدهم في تحصيلهم الأكاديمي، ويصبحون أفراداً قادرين على الوصول إلى المعلومات وتقييمها وتنظيمها واستخدامها وتوصيلها بأشكال مختلفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهارات الثقافة المعلوماتية، الأداء الأكاديمي، طلاب الجامعة، أعضاء هيئة التدريس، جامعة الكويت

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Introduction

Information literacy (IL) is defined as the ability to recognize the need for information, identify relevant information, and evaluate and use information (Thompson & Blankinship, 2015). Information literacy skills have emerged globally as basic skills owing to the rapid progress in information and communication technologies (ICT). IL is a fundamental and important part of the prerequisites for general education. For university students, IL is particularly crucial as it enables them to adapt to the new educational system by giving them the ability to recognize when and where to access information effectively and efficiently. University students need to acquire information skills to continue accessing and retrieving information in light of the expansion of information sources. It also includes the technological skills required to use the electronic library as a portal for information (Kimani & Onyancha, 2015). IL skills enable university students to distinguish between primary and secondary sources and determine whether the information provided is relevant and evidence-based. The ability to analyze and assess the information empowers students to confidently use it in their coursework and academic research.

University students face significant challenges because of the uncertain quality and expanding quantity of information. Some of these challenges include students' difficulty in acquiring new skills, as they lack basic library and computer skills (Aghauche et al., 2019). In addition, most students either lack IL skills or have a limited understanding of IL applications. In today's digital world, ICT is vital for providing students with opportunities (Nwosu et al., 2018). Additionally, students also lack knowledge of vital online search tools, such as Google Scholar and online databases, which are considered richer in scholarly information resources than Google and Wikipedia. To succeed in the information age and cope with diverse learning

possibilities and challenges, it is necessary to develop new skills and strategies.

Although students can utilize a library guide to find pertinent databases to complete their tasks, alternative sources are usually used, which require various search strategies for maximum effectiveness (Zhao & Rabbat, 2013). This can lead students to believe that academic databases are unnecessary and that the Internet is the only source of information required to meet their needs. Unfortunately, incorrect source citations are a prevalent problem among students. Citing a document only by its URL or using it in lieu of crucial information, such as the publication title or conference title and dates, is a common error. It is essential to teach and remind students that those references should be appropriately cited and that readers should be provided with a permanent link to an online source so that they can find cited articles at any time in the future. Therefore, poor IL skills led to poor research, which could limit students' success.

In the absence of the complementary set of skills required to use information effectively, an enormous amount of information will not, by itself, result in a better-informed individual. In addition to other high-level IL skills, including familiarity with science publishers and an understanding of the production and dissemination of literature in this field aids their skill acquisition and helps them avoid obstacles when they complete higher education. Lifelong learning is based on IL. It is common in all disciplines, learning environments, and levels of education. An IL program that focuses on informational skills and culture should address students' needs for IL. Developing these skills has an impact on the student's future work and ability to achieve best practices (Purnell et al., 2020). Aiding students in the development of IL abilities is important for both their personal and professional lives although it can be challenging (Geary, 2021).

IL should thus be included in the curriculum to provide students with a better understanding of the effective application of ICT skills to increase their academic performance and achievement (Nwosu et al., 2018). It enables learners to master the content, expand their investigations, become more self-directed, and have greater control over their learning. We can only learn and gain knowledge if we have the IL skills required to search for, locate, and gather quality information when needed (Ilogho & Nkiko, 2014). It is not just about learning, but also about locating, recognizing, evaluating, and using acquired information knowledge, to address real-world educational issues, both inside and outside the classroom (Nwosu et al., 2018).

A large amount of information, available in both print and electronic formats, requires students at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies to be information literate to use it. However, there are no courses offered to students in different majors in the college to equip them with IL skills. Consequently, this leads to a lack of IL skills among students. In fact, students might find it challenging to locate and use vast amounts of information appropriately for their education.

Students with limited IL skills are likely to avoid research-based courses because they cannot use libraries or locate information resources. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate students' IL skills at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies. Moreover, faculty members' perspectives toward students' IL skills were explored.

The study was guided by the following study's questions:

1 - How do students at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies rate their IL skills?

2 - What are the perceptions of the faculty at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies of students' IL skills?

Literature Review

Students' IL Skills

Geary (2021) examined the IL skills of undergraduate students at the University of South Carolina. Students' knowledge of and self-efficacy in IL skills were also explored using a mixed method consisting of a questionnaire and a focus group. The results showed that information needs affected the students' search for information, and their research methods varied depending on their academic studies and social lives. Partap (2022) explored the IL perceptions of undergraduate students, particularly those who came from rural areas to obtain higher education in agricultural sciences, using a questionnaire. The results showed that the undergraduates had a moderate perception of information evaluation, literacy, ethics, and other relevant issues in the areas of ICT or social media. Aghauche et al. (2019) appraised the IL skills of undergraduate students using a survey and found that they possessed all the IL skill sets that were covered by the study. The results also revealed that undergraduate students had a positive attitude toward IL even though they faced challenges in terms of acquiring skills. Kavi et al. (2019) surveyed the levels of IL skills of first-year undergraduate students. The results showed that many students had basic ICT skills; however, they had a limited understanding of various research strategies. There was a lack of courses designed to introduce them to information retrieval skills. Flywel and Jorosi (2018) assessed IL skills among undergraduate students, focusing on second-year students. The results showed that they were highly aware of the types of information sources but had some problems identifying and using various sources of information. In addition, participants showed a lack of skills in information search and web retrieval techniques. An ethical statement was not

required as no personal information was provided. Instead, confidentiality and voluntary statements were distributed to the participants. Specifically, Novianti (2023) analyzed students' academic writing as a practice of information literacy in higher education by employing five indicators related to currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose. The results showed that students preferred using online resources rather than scholarly journal articles. Moreover, students with higher to medium scores of final essays had major issues with the currency indicator, while those with lower scores had issues with authority, accuracy, and purpose.

Toyo (2017) used a survey to examine undergraduates' IL skills and use of electronic resources. The results showed that ineffective communication channels, lack of awareness of electronic information sources, slow internet access, erratic power supplies, and excessive academic workload were some of the greatest obstacles faced by library and information science (LIS) undergraduate students. However, the results showed that the majority of respondents did not consider insufficient research skills and ICT facilities, lack of information retrieval skills, absence of availability of electronic resources relevant to information needs, or financial problems, as obstacles to the use of electronic resources. Santharooban (2016) analyzed the level of IL skills of medical undergraduates, who were engaged in problem-based learning (PBL), using a survey Information Literacy Quiz. As IL skills are the core element of independent self-directed learning, PBL must be coupled with these skills to achieve maximum benefit. The results showed that the overall mean of IL proficiency level of medical students was average. Moreover, it revealed that students did not have sufficient knowledge of concept mapping, the 5W or "what, where, who, when, and why" technique, effective reading methods, note-taking techniques, research strate-

gies, use of library catalogs, website evaluation, reports structuring, or plagiarism, nor did they know the difference between databases, search engines, scholarly work, and non-scholarly work. Kimani and Onyancha (2015) investigated IL skills and competencies among incoming first-year undergraduate students, administering a questionnaire to first-year undergraduate students. The results showed that students were familiar with both electronic and print sources; however, a large number of students did not know the differences between primary and secondary sources. The majority of the students did not know what the acronym OPAC meant, nor were they familiar with the meaning and purpose of the call number although many students knew the purpose of the catalog and what resources could be found through the catalog.

Ilogho and Nkiko (2014) investigated the knowledge of IL and search skills of students in five private universities in Nigeria. They examined students' ability to distinguish diverse information sources and assessed the effectiveness of IL programs of private universities using a questionnaire. The results showed that the students generally did not possess good IL skills, while a few students demonstrated marginal knowledge. Kousar and Mahmood (2013) assessed the IL skills of first-year undergraduate engineering students at a Pakistani university, using a survey, in order to plan instruction and provide the university with reliable data for the integration of instruction into the university curricula. The results showed that the students lacked an understanding of information resources. They did not have adequate information regarding the methods and tools to be used in retrieving the required information from these resources. Their level of IL skills was extremely low and needed to be improved to assist them in performing well in their academic pursuits.

In Kuwait, Al-Qallaf (2020) assessed the IL skills and knowledge of incoming students in the information studies graduate program at Kuwait University, using pre- and post-test methods. Furthermore, faculty's perceptions of students' skills and their opinions and beliefs on IL education were explored, using a focus group. The results showed that the students appropriately responded to questions that tested their understanding of databases, search techniques, source access, and a few legal and moral considerations related to the information ecosystem. However, students struggled to identify a need for information and comprehend the nature and possibility of the information model. Alkhezzi and Hendal (2018) also used a survey to investigate the level of IL among graduate students at the College of Education at Kuwait University, including their awareness, skills, and information needs. The results showed that graduate students had simple skills and that most library services and resources were not used effectively, which highlighted the college's responsibility for disseminating awareness of IL. Ikenwe and Aiyebelehin (2024) confirmed that the utilization of digital library resources is correlated with information literacy skills.

Effects of IL Skills on Students' Performance

Banik and Kumar (2019) explored the academic performance and IL skills of undergraduate students in Bangladesh. In addition, this study examined the impact of IL skills on students' academic performance using a questionnaire. The results showed that the students' grade point average (GPA) would likely increase if the level of their IL skills increased, reflecting their higher level of knowledge. Ekong and Ekong (2018) used a questionnaire to investigate the impact of IL skills on the use of e-library resources in tertiary institutions. The results showed that the majority of students lacked the nec-

essary computer literacy skills to use electronic library resources and other internet technologies. In addition, there was a strong positive relationship with statistical significance between the students' academic performance and the use of electronic library resources. Shao and Purpur (2016) used a survey to examine the association between students' IL skills and their writing abilities, as well as their overall performance in class. The results showed that IL skills were positively correlated with both students' writing and final course grades. While most previous studies focused on the effects of IL skills on indicators of a student's academic success, such as retention rates and GPA, this study examined not only the relationship between students' IL skills and their performance in the course, but also that between IL and writing abilities.

Karimi et al. (2015) used a questionnaire to determine the impact of IL training courses on the IL skills of Medical Sciences students. The results showed that students' IL scores before training were lower than average in the control group, whereas the IL scores in the case group increased significantly after training. The study also showed that training was effective in enhancing students' IL skills, with the greatest effect on increasing their ability to access information. Soleymani (2014) used a survey to investigate the relationship between IL and academic performance among students of medical sciences. The results showed that the level of IL for all students was well above average, except for students in the nursing and nutrition faculties. Students from the management and information sciences faculty had the highest level of IL, while the ones from the nutrition faculty had the lowest level. There was a significant positive relationship between IL and the academic performance of students in medical sciences, especially among master's students. Rehman and AlAwadhi (2011) also assessed the relevance, usefulness, and effect of IL courses on developing the

needed capabilities among students at the College of Social Science of Kuwait University using a quasi-experimental with pre- and post-test methods. The results showed that students in overall IL and the three sections of information, computing, and research performed much better. Significant differences in students' performance on IL measures were linked to their majors, the types of schools they attended, and the academic education of their mothers. Tachie-Donkor and Ezema (2023) measured the information literacy competence level of the university students using the American College and Research Library (ACRL) model. The results confirmed that information literacy had a positive influence on students' information seeking behavior and lifelong learning skills, thus their confidence was improved.

Students' Challenges and Perceptions of IL

Pinto et al. (2021) examined IL and the use of mobile technologies in the educational sphere using a sample of undergraduate social sciences students using the Mobile-APPS questionnaire. The results showed that students' perceptions were higher regarding the personal dimension of IL, most students were ignorant of the concepts of the (ACRL) framework, and the responses varied greatly with regard to the use of information commutation and mobile technologies. Shorsher and Bronstein (2018) presented three perspectives on the subject of IL in academia by examining the perceptions of students, teaching faculty, and librarians, using semi-structured interviews. The results showed that students felt that they lacked sufficient IL skills, did not obtain adequate assistance from the faculty, and were unaware of the resources and services offered by a library. However, professors measured these skills as significant, and students were expected to acquire them during their studies. The library staff were aware of the difficulties students faced in obtaining these skills and attempted

to develop programs to address the situation. However, these programs were not effective due to students' lack of awareness and the unsuitability of these programs to their instructors' requirements and expectations. Similarly, Akanbiemu and Idowu (2024) found that although university students showed high levels of IL skills, they encountered several challenges related to lack of awareness of the IL programs, insufficient training time, and lack of learning equipment.

Weiner et al. (2012) examined Biology and Nursing students' perceptions of a web-based IL tutorial, using a survey of students in first-year biology and nursing courses after they completed the Comprehensive Online Research Education (CORE) tutorial. The CORE tutorial contained seven units: "Planning Your Project", "Topic Exploration", "Types of Information", "Search Tools", "Search Strategies", "Evaluating Sources," and "Copyright, Plagiarism, and Citing Sources". The results showed that the students expressed their preferences for online tutorial learning. A limited number of students claimed to learn vital information from the "Copyright, Plagiarism, and Citation", "Resource Evaluation", and "Information Types" units. They proposed subjects for further lessons on topics, such as how to utilize Microsoft Excel and library databases, how to evaluate the accuracy of information, how to cite sources, and how to locate statistics. The findings supported the idea that tutorials should include materials that students immediately consider useful.

Lwehabura and Stilwell (2008) investigated the status and practice of IL at four Tanzanian universities to determine the best ways to introduce or improve IL programs. The study applied a survey approach using a questionnaire and interviews as research instruments, distributed to teaching staff, librarians, and students. The results revealed the challenges and opportunities that could affect the effective implementation and introduction of IL programs in Tanzanian uni-

versities. These include the newness of IL in the university curricula despite the practice of some models of IL, lack of adequate resources, IL policy, and proactive solutions among librarians, coupled with the need for adequate staff and training in libraries, and cooperation between librarians and faculty members in IL. Potential opportunities, such as support by the majority of university stakeholders, meant that it had been identified as a mandatory course. These opportunities allow for the introduction of effective and sustainable IL programs.

Measures of IL

Akor (2024) emphasized on assessing the impact of information literacy programs on student success as improving the IL skills would be reflected on students' empowerment, lifelong learning skills, enhancing their critical thinking skills, improving their information fluency, and research proficiency and consequently lead to societal development. Hussain et al. (2022) assessed undergraduate students' IL abilities in various universities in Pakistan. The results showed that approximately half of the students indicated that they had never gone to the library. The selected universities were found to be in a similar condition although one of those universities outperformed the other universities in terms of the regular usage of the library. The students were at a disadvantage when it came to identifying the sources of information. Furthermore, the students' perceptions and understanding of the information sources were in an unstable state. The results also showed that students had limited ability to obtain and utilize information during assignments, quizzes, and exams, as well as when writing research articles. This had serious consequences on their learning outcomes.

Shahzad and Khan (2021) used a survey to measure the IL skills of research scholars engaged in research-based tasks. The majority of respondents who were engaged with various research-based activities were in favor of IL instructional programs to develop the skills required to conduct the research efficiently. The results showed significant age and class-based differences among the IL competencies of different research scholars. Abdullah et al. (2006) investigated IL among final-year students at six Malaysian universities. The study measured students' IL competency in key areas, namely, the ability to identify, access, retrieve, evaluate, and organize the information needed to achieve certain purposes. Respondents comprised students from three main fields: science and technology, social science and humanities, and business and accountancy. The results showed higher proficiency levels in those who frequently read the material in English, used the internet to download programs/software, searched databases for academic materials, used the library to read academic journals, and discussed academic matters, compared to those who went to a library for other reasons, such as borrowing books, meeting friends, or studying.

Faculty Perspectives on IL Instruction and Students' Skills

Giangrande et al. (2022) investigated teachers' perceptions of students' IL skills using semi-structured interviews with 24 faculty members in Social Sciences. The results showed that knowledge of IL frameworks was not widely held among campus teachers, but after the conversation, most of the interviewees stated their validity. Regarding information skills, teachers tended to say that undergraduates had insufficient abilities, master's degree students had good skills, and postgraduates had more advanced skills. In line with their more conventional role as specialists in bibliographic research, they expressed gratitude for the library's training initiatives.

Perry (2017) provided faculty perspectives on the type of information they used and what they wanted to see when their students conducted library research. Academic librarians needed reliable information on the needs of faculty teaching undergraduates to seek and use information using semi-structured interviews with teaching faculty in the sciences from several Boston-area colleges. The results provided insight into the attitudes of science faculty toward students' research skills and abilities. Kousar and Khalid (2015) identified faculty perceptions regarding the current level of IL skills of engineering students in higher education. Teachers of science and technology, who were teaching engineering at the postgraduate level, were surveyed using a structured questionnaire. The term "information literacy" was new to the Pakistani library. The study helped determine the current IL skills of students at the undergraduate level, their requirements, and the best way to fulfill these requirements. This may help design better IL programs for tertiary-level students, using the ACRL Information Literacy Proficiency Standards for Science and Engineering/ Technology as a basis for assessing these perceptions.

Dubicki (2013) investigated academic faculty perceptions of IL at eight higher educational institutions in New Jersey. The study examined the value and importance of faculty places on IL, the incorporation of IL into curriculum learning goals, and the determination of the degrees of proficiency obtained by students becoming familiar with IL skills. As a multi-institutional study carried out at both two-year and four-year institutions, it contributed to the field's research and investigated perspectives from both full-time and part-time faculty using a survey. The results showed that the familiarity of faculty with IL concepts was high, and they overwhelmingly supported it, and that IL skills were strongly expected of students upon graduation. Instructors incorporated these skills into the learning goals of their

coursework, but according to faculty perceptions, students failed to grasp such skills by the end of their programs. Saunders (2012) explored faculty perspectives on IL and investigated possible cultural differences in their attitudes toward and approaches to IL within their disciplines by surveying and interviewing a nationwide sample of teaching faculty in six disciplines regarding their perspectives on the importance and relevance of IL competencies for their students. The findings provided academic librarians with a broader view of the faculty's understanding of IL and are believed to aid in the development of IL discourse in the disciplines. Cox et al. (2023) investigated the perceptions of faculty towards IL. The results found that faculty valued the importance of IL; however, there was inconsistency in faculty-librarian collaborations. Such discrepancy is attributed to the faculty who might not understand the role of librarians in enhancing the course or curriculum with IL.

Methodology

The study adopted the quantitative approach using the survey method to collect data on students' IL skills in the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Kuwait University.

Participants

The target population was students and faculty members of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies. A nonprobability convenience sampling was selected as a sampling technique. Convenience sampling is an affordable method of data collection, as it saves time, provides a wealth of quantitative information, and facilitates the research process (Gaille, 2020). Although one of its disadvantages is narrow generalizability, it aligns well with the homogeneous members of the target population that makes the generalizability clearer (Jager et al., 2017). Jager et al. (2017, p.7) confirm that "the more homogeneous

a population, the easier (more probable) it is to generate a representative sample, even when using convenience sampling", There were 358 responses received from students whom most of them were females, 275 (76.8%), and only 83 were males (23.2%). In terms of academic degrees, the majority were undergraduate students 313 (87.4%), followed by 45 graduate students (12.6%). Nearly half of the respondents were sophomores 159 (44.4%), whereas freshmen accounted for only 51 (14.2%); see Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Student Respondents

Demographics	***n***	**%**
Gender		
Male	83	23.2
Female	275	76.8
Academic degree		
Undergraduate	313	87.4
Graduate	45	12.6
Academic year		
Freshman	51	14.2
Sophomore	159	44.4
Junior	89	24.9
Senior	59	16.5

Note. N= 358.

Moreover, 78 responses from faculty members were received. Most of the respondents were males, 50 (64.1%), nearly half of them Assistant Professors 47 (60.2%). In terms of academic major, 24 (30.7%) of the faculty members majored in Quranic Interpretation and Prophetic Tradition; see Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Faculty Respondents

Demographics	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	50	64.1
Female	28	35.8
Academic Major		
Quranic Interpretation and Prophetic Tradition	24	30.7
Comparative Jurisprudence and Policy of Sharia	22	28.2
Doctrine and Preaching Islam	9	11.5
Jurisprudence and Principal of Jurisprudence	23	29.4
Academic Rank		
Professor	10	12.8
Associate Professor	21	26.9
Assistant Professor	47	60.2

Note. N= 78.

Measures

This study used online questionnaires via the Survey Monkey tool to collect the data. Online questionnaires are cost-effective and can be conducted over a short period of time (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). The students' questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section included questions on students' demographic information: gender, college degree (undergraduate or graduate), and academic year (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior). The second section included question items evaluating students' IL skills using a five-point Likert scale, which included: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Some questions were adapted from Geary (2021) and Keshalu and Srinivasulu (2016), and additional questions were included

to provide a comprehensive understanding of IL skills. For the questionnaire's items, see Table 3.

The faculty's questionnaire, which included questions on evaluating students' IL skills using a five-point Likert scale, was adopted from Özel et al. (2012), in addition to other questions reflecting their perspectives. For the questionnaire's items, see Table 4. The questions in both questionnaires were modified to reflect the aim and context of the study. Since the language of instruction at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies is Arabic, both questionnaires were translated into Arabic to allow students and faculty members to better understand the questions. The questionnaires were designed in such a way that should be easily comprehended. It was expected that the IL concept would be new to many participants; therefore, short descriptions and examples were provided wherever necessary. The instruments were reviewed by professionals who provided feedback for improvement. The questionnaires were revised accordingly.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was conducted using self-administered online questionnaires in the summer semester of academic year 2021/2022. An official letter was sent to the college's Vice Dean for Students' Affairs to permit the distribution of the questionnaire among students and faculty members. The student questionnaire was sent to several students through class groups via WhatsApp and social media platforms, to reach a large number of participants. To increase the response rate, the student associations at the college, namely, Alsharia and Altagyir associations, were contacted to assist in the distribution of both questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The collected data were downloaded from the Survey Monkey tool and statistically analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Frequencies, percentages, and means were used to represent collected data. Moreover, SPSS software was used to employ the t-test and the one-way ANOVA test in order to identify any significant differences between sets of demographic variables on IL skills.

Ethical Considerations

The research project adheres to the ethical regulations and policies of Kuwait University. The participants were informed about the aim and the context of the study and ensured that their participation was completely anonymous and voluntary. The collected data was handled with confidentiality, and all information was strictly protected.

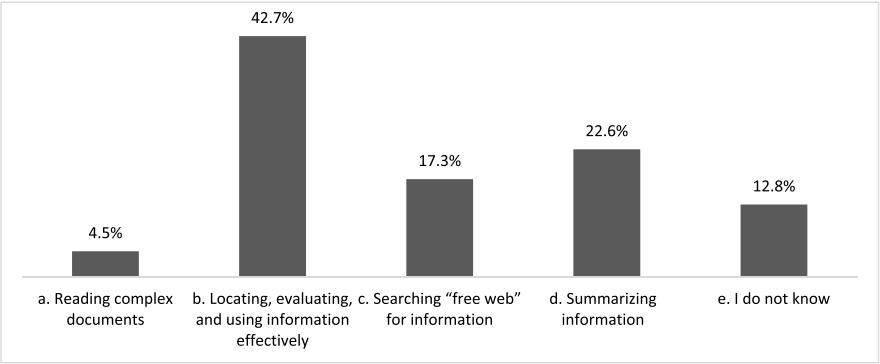
Results

Students' Information Literacy Skills

Students were asked to select the definition of "information literacy" based on their understanding. A total of 153 (42.7%) of the respondents selected the correct answer, which was "locate, evaluate, and use information effectively". However, the majority selected the wrong definitions (read complex documents, search the free web for information, summarize the information you read). In all, 46 (12.8%) reported ignorance of the meaning of IL; see Figure 1.

Figure 1

Respondents' Definitions of Information Literacy

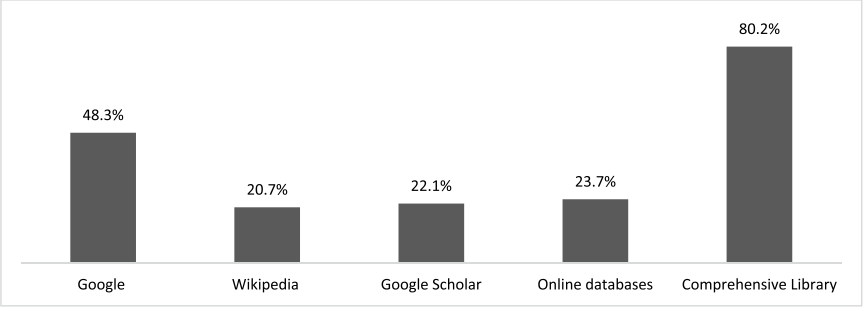


Note. N= 358.

As seen in Figure 2, students were also asked about the sources of information that they used for their study. The Comprehensive Library, which is free software that provides a digital research environment for Islamic scholars with a large collection of Arabic primary and secondary sources that are used by Colleges of Sharia and Islamic Studies around the world, was the most used source by 287 respondents (80.2%), followed by 173 respondents using the Google search engine (48.3%), while Wikipedia was the least used source, reported by 74 respondents (20.7%).

Figure 2

Sources of Information Used



Note. N= 358.

Table 3 shows the means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) scores of the students' overall IL skills, which were considered positive (*M* = 3.71; *SD* = 0.87). The results indicate that as respondents were positive about their IL skills (*M* = 3.9; *SD* = 0.78) and computer skills (*M* = 3.77; *SD* = 0.87), they were less positive about their research skills (*M* = 3.47, *SD* = 0.96).

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Information Literacy Skills

Items	*M*	*SD*
Information skills	3.90	0.78
I can select a variety of sources of information I need (i.e., books, articles, theses, etc.).	3.99	0.78
I can find the information I need.	4.01	0.69
I can use different types of print sources (i.e., books, periodicals, encyclopedias, chronologies, etc.).	3.83	0.84
I can locate the printed and electronic information sources in the library that I need.	3.84	0.79
I can know if the sources of information retrieved are correct and reliable.	3.72	0.91
I can select information most appropriate to the information requested.	3.98	0.69
Computing skills	3.77	0.87
I can use electronic information sources.	4.18	0.61
I can use the electronic catalog.	3.70	0.94
I can identify the various resources in the library using the electronic library catalog.	3.76	0.86
I can use search engines, such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo, to access information sources.	3.96	0.84
I can use different types of libraries, such as Umm Al-Qura University Library.	3.54	1.00
I can limit search strategies by subject, author, and title.	3.79	0.86

Cont. Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Information Literacy Skills

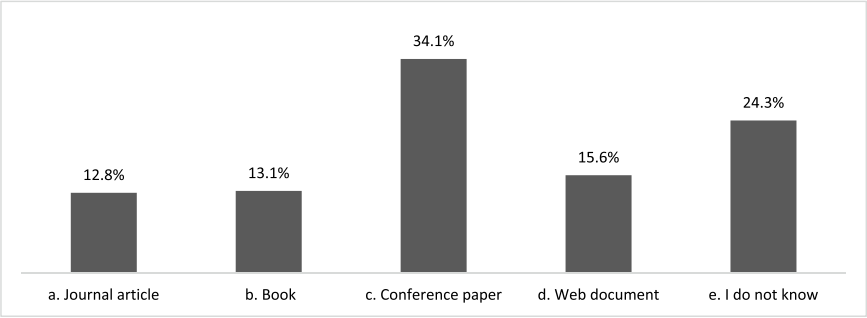
Items	*M*	*SD*
I can use the Boolean operator "AND" as a means of narrowing a search and getting relevant results.	3.68	0.93
I can search in databases and identify key terms.	3.62	0.90
I can define strategies to expand the search and use "OR" to get more results.	3.70	0.89
Searching skills	3.47	0.96
I can initiate search strategies by using keywords and Boolean logic.	3.51	0.97
I am able to identify a citation as indicating a journal article.	3.53	0.93
I can prepare a bibliography using a citation style, such as APA.	3.38	0.98
I can create citations and use quotations within the text.	3.87	0.80
I have not gained the basic skills required to determine the source of information I need to conduct scientific research.	2.96	1.11
I can write a research paper that contains all the criteria of scientific research.	3.54	0.99
Overall skills	3.71	0.87

Note. N= 358.

Students were asked to identify the type of cited reference "a conference paper". Almost half of the respondents 149 (41.6 %) selected the wrong types (journal article, book, web document), while only 122 (34.1%) respondents reported the correct answer and 87 (24.3%) of whom did not know it; see Figure 3.

Figure 3

Reference Citation

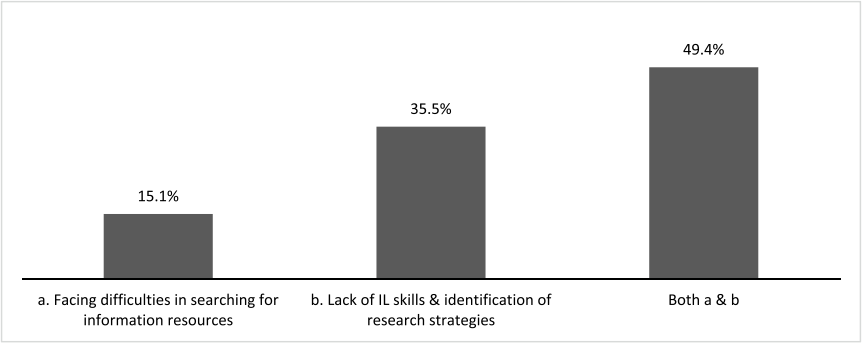


Note. N= 358.

Students were asked about the challenges they faced in courses that required them to write a research paper. Figure 4 shows that 177 (49.4%) of respondents thought that they lacked IL skills, as well as resource-searching skills. However, 127 (35.5%) respondents reported that they lacked the IL skills and identification of research strategies, and 54 (15.1%) respondents faced large difficulties in searching for sources of information.

Figure 4

Challenges Faced in Courses Containing Scientific Research

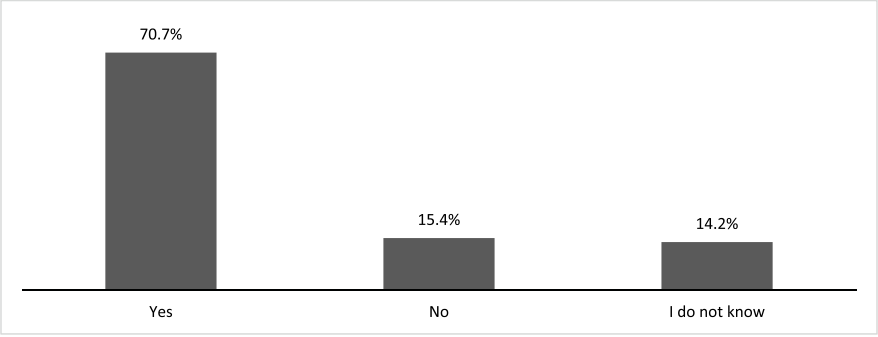


Note. N= 358.

Students were asked if they needed an IL course to be added to the majors offered at the College of Sharia so that they would be able to search and retrieve information sources and use them effectively for study and research, with 252 (70.7%) of respondents reporting its importance; see Figure 5.

Figure 5

Adding an Information Literacy Course in the College



Note. N= 358.

In addition, several tests were employed to identify differences between demographic characteristics and IL skills. The t-test was applied to the variables of gender and academic degree, while the one-way ANOVA test was used for the variable of academic year. However, no significant differences were found.

Faculty Perspectives

Table 4 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the faculty perspectives on students' IL skills. Although the overall results show that the faculty respondents were neutral about students' IL skills, many results indicate that they disagreed with the majority of statements. For example, "Students are able to evaluate the credibility and reliability of information sources" (M = 2.26; SD = 0.96);

"Students can prepare a bibliography using a specific style such as APA" (*M* = 2.41; *SD* = 1.02); "Students are able to accurately identify information" (*M* = 2.42; *SD* = 0.89); "Students are able to locate the sources of information required in assignments and scientific research" (*M* = 2.46; *SD* = 1.03); "Students can use the electronic catalog to locate the resources in the electronic library at Kuwait University" (*M* = 2.78; *SD* = 1.04). Meanwhile, the faculty thought that students could use search engines, such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo, to locate the required information (*M* = 4.15; *SD* = 0.87); they asked for help in obtaining the required sources of information (*M* = 3.96; *SD* = 1.02), realized the need to obtain information from multiple sources (*M* = 3.40; *SD* = 1.10), and selected different websites to fulfill information needs (*M* = 3.29; *SD* = 1.03). In addition, the faculty respondents were neutral about students' ability to find what they needed in the electronic library at Kuwait University (*M* = 3.03; *SD* = 0.99) and use of keyword searche in the Kuwait University electronic catalog to locate books and their locations on the library shelves (*M* = 3.05; *SD* = 0.91).

Table 4

Faculty Responses on Students' IL Skills

Items	*M*	*SD*
Students are able to locate the sources of information required in assignments and scientific research.	2.46	1.03
Students are able to accurately identify information.	2.42	0.89
Students realize that there is a need for information that must be obtained from multiple sources.	3.40	1.10
Students can find the required information from several sources, such as books, journals, and references.	2.90	1.08
Students can use search engines, such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo, to locate the required information.	4.15	0.87

Cont. Table 4

Faculty Responses on Students' IL Skills

Items	*M*	*SD*
Students can select different websites to fulfill information needs.	3.29	1.03
Students can find what they need in the electronic library at Kuwait University.	3.03	0.99
Students can use the databases on the university library website to obtain information sources.	2.85	1.11
Students can use the electronic catalog to locate the resources in the electronic library at Kuwait University.	2.78	1.04
Students can use the advanced search option to limit their search to get specific and relevant results.	2.91	1.01
Students can use a keyword search in the Kuwait University electronic catalog to locate books and their locations on the library shelves.	3.05	0.91
Students can create citations and use quotations within the text.	2.81	1.01
Students can prepare a bibliography using a specific style, such as APA.	2.41	1.02
Students are able to evaluate the credibility and reliability of information sources.	2.26	0.96
Students ask for help in obtaining the required sources of information.	3.96	1.02
Students have the information literacy skills to write academic research.	1.94	0.81
Students need information literacy skills to enable them to access and use information sources to improve their academic performance.	4.56	0.62

Note. N= 78.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate students' IL skills at Kuwait University. The results indicate that the students were positive about their overall skills. They claimed that they had good search, computer, and information skills. However, when delving into the questions, it became clear that students neither knew the meaning of IL, nor possessed the necessary skills. For example, most students did not

correctly answer the question of how to define IL, indicating that the term was new to them. This result is similar to those of Keshalu and Srinivasulu (2016) and Kousar and Khalid (2015). Also, other results showed that students did not have the skills, as they thought they did, to find, evaluate, organize, use, and communicate information in its various forms. This result was confirmed by the results of the faculty, who highlighted the lack of students' IL skills, as they were aware of the students' capabilities through interacting with them. This result is unsurprising as IL is inadequately integrated in the curriculum, and thus, it tends to negatively affect students' skills. This is in line with the findings of Ilogho and Nkiko (2014) and Kousar and Mahmood (2013), who found that students who were not exposed to IL courses lacked IL skills. These results respond to the study's first question and show that students' IL skills were relatively low.

Interestingly, the results indicated that the majority of students used the Comprehensive Library as a source of information, followed by the Google search engine, suggesting students' lack of awareness of the diversity of reliable academic sources offered by the online academic library, and they focused on limited sources. Insufficient information and training on reliable sources offered by the academic library were among the most important obstacles to students' academic progress. This result was confirmed by the results of Ekong & Ekong (2018), Flywel & Jorosi (2018), and Toyo (2017).

The results also indicate that a large number of students claimed that they could prepare a bibliography using APA style, cite references, and use in-text quotations. However, when asked to identify a citation of a conference paper, the majority of the respondents selected the incorrect answer. This result was also confirmed by the results of faculty respondents who disagreed with the fact that students were

capable of preparing a bibliography using the APA style, citing references, and using in-text quotations. This result is similar to that reported by Kimani and Onyancha (2015).

Moreover, the results revealed the challenges faced by a large number of students in searching for sources of information and developing search strategies. This confirms the lack of IL skills offered in the college curricula and the lack of training on using the Kuwait University e-library and that students depended on the Comprehensive Library. This result is consistent with that of Shorsher and Bronstein (2018).

It was expected that there would be associations between students' IL skills and their demographics. However, the statistical results did not show any significant relationships, indicating gender equality in education, and both males and females were affected by the lack of IL instruction. Unfortunately, contrary to expectations, graduate programs were also unsuccessful in enhancing the IL skills of graduate students. In response to the second question, the results demonstrated faculty perspectives that the students' lack of information skills has negatively affected their academic achievement. This negatively affected academic research, which leads students to avoid courses that contain research. Academic research is one of the most important aspects in the academic field. The diversity of reliable sources and references from which the researcher collects information for their study is a major factor that enriches scientific study and increases its value. Students' knowledge on how to access various reliable academic sources to obtain information helps them reach sound scientific conclusions and solutions in a well-ordered manner. Therefore, according to the results, both faculty and students agreed to add an IL course at the College of Sharia so that students could

identify, search, and retrieve information sources and use them effectively for study and scientific research. This would improve their research and writing skills, especially for graduate students who carry out extensive research activities to complete their theses, and thereby lead to an improvement in their academic performance. This result is similar to those of Hussain et al. (2022), Partap (2021), and Shao & Purpur (2016).

Conclusion

This study investigated the IL skills of students at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, Kuwait University. A quantitative method was used to collect data from students as well as faculty members to validate the results. The empirical results demonstrate that students lack the IL skills that would enable them to identify, access, retrieve, evaluate, and organize needed information, thereby negatively impacting their academic achievement. These findings confirm the significance of IL in education in order to enhance the students' learning experience and ensure their academic success. Specifically, in collaboration with the Department of Information Studies at the College of Social Sciences, an IL course must be included as a prerequisite for newly admitted students at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies to equip them with the relevant skills.

The practical implications of this study are necessary to achieve information-literate individuals who would contribute to the information community. Faculty members are responsible for improving students' IL skills by incorporating them into the curriculum and providing the students with the opportunity to apply those skills in academic activities and assignments. Despite the challenges that faculty and librarians face in fostering students' IL skills, investment should be made into necessary joint efforts to design effective instructional programs

and take motivational action to promptly raise students' level of performance. In fact, the responsibility lies not only on faculty members and librarians, but also on teaching assistants, library administrators, and other community members, to work together to create strategies that get students involved, so that they can benefit from the extensive amounts of information available in and outside libraries and through various platforms to advance different societal aspects.

Based on the findings of the study, the following strategies are suggested to improve the IL skills of the students at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies:

- Joint efforts between librarians and faculty members to spread awareness of IL skills among both faculty and students are expected to foster the importance of such lifelong skills in students' academic performance. This could be done by designing awareness campaigns, advertisements in the college's newsletters, and exhibitions.
- A well-designed program comprising a series of seminars, workshops, and training courses should be conducted for students to help them develop IL skills.
- Faculty members and well-trained teaching assistants are expected to provide students with assistance in their assignments and scientific research and continuously monitor their progress to implicitly equip them with IL skills.
- Most importantly, an IL course is anticipated to be added to major curricula to ensure that students acquire these skills. This would help students benefit from the skills and become information-literate individuals who are able to find, evaluate, organize, use, and communicate information in various forms.

Similar to other studies, this study has some limitations. Data collection consumed a lot of time and effort since many students at the college were unfamiliar with surveys that they did not know how to respond to questions. Courses at the college are based on the interpretation and analysis of Sharia and Islamic Sciences; therefore, many students required explanations on how to answer the questions.

Future studies should focus on the IL skills of students from other colleges, in order to identify the relationship between their skills and academic performance. Moreover, the academic faculty's IL skills should be explored to ensure that they are capable of enhancing students' skills to improve their academic achievement.

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