RESEARCH ARTICLE

Innovative approaches for enhancing information literacy among aesthetic studies undergraduates: a study at Swamy Vipulanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Information literacy is identified as an important skill in the contemporary higher education environment. It is the necessary skill required to access, locate, evaluate, present and process information for learning. In this context, this study explores innovative approaches to enhancing information literacy (IL) among aesthetic studies undergraduates at Swamy Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies in Sri Lanka. The study used a mixed method design integrating social constructivist theory, guided inquiry design, and the Big6 model. Quantitative data was collected through surveys, pre-tests, and post-tests, while qualitative data was gathered from interviews and focus groups discussions. Through the stratified random sampling method all 312 final year students of the Institute were selected as sample and 300 (96.15%) were responded. According to the findings guided inquiry-based pedagogical practices significantly improved IL skills, particularly in searching and gathering online information, evaluating online information, and source-based writing. Curriculum integration and faculty support were also crucial. The study suggested several recommendations to improve the information literacy skill among the aesthetic studies undergraduates and higher education sector.

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INTRODUCTION

Information literacy (IL) is a critical skill for university students, enabling them to effectively locate, evaluate, and use information. In the digital age, the ability to navigate a vast amount of information is essential for academic success and lifelong learning (Julien, 2018). But it is a challenge for undergraduates, given the overload of information. Information overload is a frequent complaint within these environments. Because of the complexity of these environments, undergraduates face a diverse and abundant array of information choices in their academic studies (Mashroofa, 2009).

Moreover, Brindha (2016) sated in the present digital age, people can collect information from various platforms, the internet, libraries, community resources, etc. However, a strong question arises here about the authenticity of this type of information, resulting in challenges in evaluating and using information. Therefore, the critical importance of information literacy for effective information use is frequently reiterated. The lack of effective IL skills among university students in Sri Lanka poses significant challenges. Students often struggle with identifying credible sources, evaluating information, and applying it effectively in their academic work (Moselen & Wang, 2014). This gap in IL skills can hinder academic performance and limit students' ability to engage in critical thinking and research. Addressing this problem is crucial for improving educational outcomes and preparing students for the demands of the information-rich world (Hodge, 2015).

The scope of this study is specifically on the Swami Vipulanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, focusing on their IL skills and the effectiveness of innovative pedagogical practices. The study is grounded in social constructivist theory, emphasizing the role of guided inquiry and collaborative learning in developing IL skills (Kuhlthau, 2012).

The Swamy Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies was merged as a higher education institute with the Eastern University officially in 14th March 2005. The Institute has three Departments such as the Department of Carnatic Music, the Department of Dance, Drama & Theatre, and Visual & Technological Arts. The Institute offered the following Bachelor's Degrees in Fine Arts; Bachelor of Fine Arts in Carnatic Music, Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance, Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama & Theatre, and Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual & Technological Arts.

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Objectives

The objective of this study is to explore and evaluate innovative approaches to enhancing information literacy among aesthetic studies undergraduates.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the current state of information literacy among aesthetic studies undergraduates in Swamy Vipulandanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.
2. To develop and test innovative pedagogical practices for improving information literacy.
3. To assess the effectiveness of these practices in enhancing students' information literacy skills.

Problem statement

Due to the Information explosion, many higher education students face challenges in accessing and using information. This situation has been impacting the undergraduates' learning activities. For enhancing this information literacy, skills play a vital role in higher education. “Development of information literacy skills of undergraduates enables them to pursue their studies more effectively” (Jayatissa, 2009, p.5). The findings of the above study indicate the importance of developing information literacy skills among undergraduates. Similarly, Prashanthan (2020) study conducted at the Swamy Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies also revealed that undergraduates possessed limited information literacy skills and highlighted the need for further improvement. These findings demonstrate the need for continued research on the importance of Information literacy skills and identifying effective strategies to promote information literacy skills among the undergraduates of Swamy Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies.

Significance

This research is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the existing research on information literacy focusing on Swamy Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies undergraduates has not been conducted on a specific number. The study gains its significance from its capacity to ascertain the perceptions and cognitive levels pertaining to information literacy among students. Furthermore, the findings of this study will facilitate the Swamy Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies to integrate or incorporate of information literacy skills into its curriculum development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Information literacy (IL) is a critical competency for university students, enabling them to effectively locate, evaluate, and use information. Reviews the existing literature on innovative approaches to enhancing IL among university students, with a focus on comparative studies and best practices from various countries. The review is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the variables, theories, past research findings, and research gaps. According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2016), IL is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.Innovative Pedagogical Practices: These refer to new and creative teaching methods designed to enhance learning outcomes. Examples include inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, and the use of digital tools and resources (Kuhlthau, 2012).

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in social constructivism, which posits that learning is a social process where individuals construct knowledge through interactions with others (Vygotski & Cole, 1978). Key theories relevant to this study include:

Social Constructivism: Vygotsky’s theory emphasizes the importance of social interactions and the role of more knowledgeable others (MKO) in the learning process. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is central to this theory, highlighting the potential for learners to achieve higher levels of understanding with appropriate guidance (Vygotski & Cole, 1978).

Guided Inquiry Design (GID): It was developed by Kuhlthau (2012). Guided Inquiry Design is a framework that supports inquiry-based learning through structured guidance and intervention at multiple phases of the learning process. This approach is designed to foster deep learning and improved understanding.

Big6 Model: This is an inquiry-based pedagogical approach to information problem-solving, comprising six major stages and two sub-stages. It emphasizes critical thinking and the

systematic process of information seeking and use (Eisenberg & Berkowitz, 1999).

Numerous studies have explored the effectiveness of various pedagogical practices in enhancing IL among university students. Key findings from past research include that studies have shown that inquiry-based learning can significantly improve IL skills among students. For example, Hossain and Sormunen (2023) found that a guided inquiry-based pedagogical practice embedded into regular courses improved IL skills among LIS students in Bangladesh.

Integrating IL into the curriculum at different levels (university, faculty, program, course, class) has been advocated by many researchers (Salisbury & Sheridan, 2011; Stubbings & Franklin, 2006). Both top-down and bottom-up approaches have been used successfully to embed IL instructions into curricula (Hossain & Sormunen, 2023). Learner-centered pedagogical methods, such as problem-based learning (PBL), inquiry-based learning (IBL), and project-based learning, have been proven more effective than traditional lecture-based methods in improving IL competences (Dolnicar, 2017; Walton & Hepworth, 2011). Multiple assessment methods, including knowledge tests and performance-based assessments, have been used to measure the effectiveness of IL interventions. Studies have found that contextualizing IL needs with course content, learning activities, assignments, and assessments is critical for successful IL integration (Freeman & Lynd-Balta, 2010; Wang, 2011). Research on innovative practice of information literacy education in universities under the background of digitalization. The study proposes innovative approaches to enhance college library information literacy education including establishing an assessment mechanism for college students. (Guijuna, Pang, 2025).

While many researchers have advocated for curriculum-embedded IL instructions in various disciplines, it is not common in LIS schools. More research is needed to explore the effectiveness of IL teaching interventions in LIS education (Hossain & Sormunen, 2023). Relationship between IL Knowledge and Skills: The relationship between IL knowledge and skills is complex and not well understood. More research is needed to explore how IL knowledge and skills are related and how they can be effectively developed through pedagogical interventions (Hossain & Sormunen, 2023).

This literature review has highlighted the importance of IL for university students and the various innovative pedagogical practices that can enhance IL skills. The review has also identified key theories, past research findings, and research gaps

METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in social constructivism, which posits that learning is a social process where individuals construct knowledge through interactions with others (Vygotski & Cole, 1978). The framework integrates guided inquiry design (GID) and the Big6 model to enhance IL among students.

The population for this study includes Institute students enrolled in undergraduate programs in the Swamy Vipulandanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. A stratified random sampling method will be used to select participants from various disciplines across the Institute. The sample will include all final year students from different departments and programs to ensure diversity and representativeness. The target sample size was 312 students (All final year Students of undergraduates program in the 2025 or 2019/2020 academic year). However, 300 (96.15%) students responded. The data collection methods for this study were applied to obtain appropriate information from quantitative and

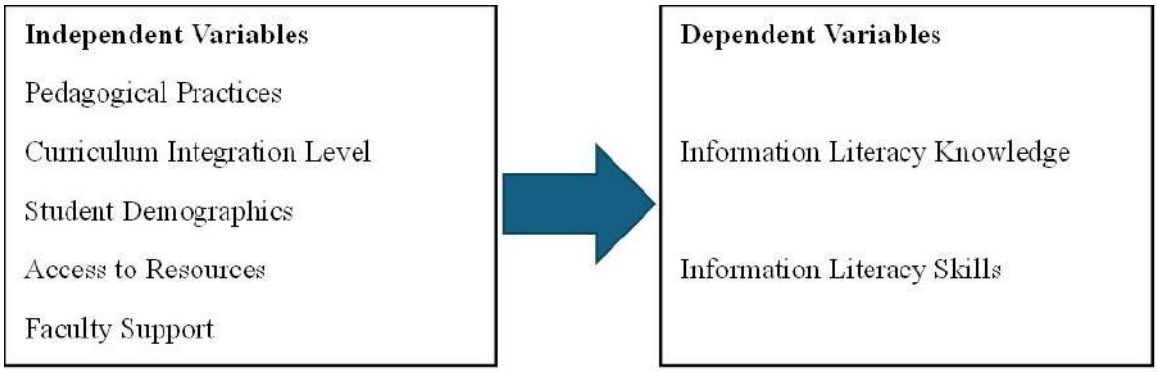

Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing factors influencing the information literacy knowledge and information literacy skills

qualitative methods. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data on students' information literacy skills, knowledge, and attitudes. The surveys include both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Information literacy knowledge and skills were assessed using pre-tests and post-tests based on the ACRL framework (ACRL, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and faculty members to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions of information literacy. Focus group discussions were held to explore students' views on the effectiveness of different pedagogical practices. The analysis includes descriptive statistics, inferential statistics for quantitative data, and thematic analysis of qualitative data. The data were collected using surveys, pre-tests, post-tests, and focus groups. T-tests were used to compare the means of information literacy knowledge and skills between the intervention group and the control group. The Interview and focus group data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns. The analysis was conducted using SPSS software, and the results were presented in tables and figures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Knowledge on Information Literacy

The pre-test results for information literacy knowledge among undergraduates in Swamy Vipulandanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka is summarized in Table 1. The variables measured include searching and gathering online information, evaluating online information, understanding the value of information, and overall information literacy knowledge.

The mean score for searching and gathering online information is 2.51, with a median of 2.50 and a mode of 2.00. The standard deviation is 0.91, indicating moderate variability in students' ability to search and gather online information. Evaluating online information has a higher mean score of 3.03, with a median and mode of 3.00, and a standard deviation of 1.29, suggesting greater variability in students' evaluation skills. Understanding the value of information has a mean score of 2.00, with a median and mode of 2.00, and a standard deviation of 1.02, indicating moderate variability. The overall information literacy knowledge has a mean score of 2.51, with a median of 2.50, a mode of 2.00, and a standard deviation of 0.91.

Information Literacy Skills

The pre-test results for information literacy skills among undergraduates in Swamy Vipulandanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, are summarized in Table 2. The variables measured include searching and gathering online information, evaluating online information, source-based writing, understanding the value of information, and overall information literacy skills.

The mean score for searching and gathering online information is 1.35, with a median of 1.00 and a mode of 1.00. The standard deviation is 0.76, indicating moderate variability in students' ability to search and gather online information. Evaluating online information has a mean score of 1.29, with a median and mode of 1.00, and a standard deviation of 0.65, suggesting moderate variability in students' evaluation skills. Source-based writing has a mean score of 0.93, with a median and mode of 1.00, and a standard deviation of 0.42, indicating lower variability. Understanding the value of information has a mean score of 0.57, with a median of 0.50, a mode of 0.00, and a standard deviation of 0.60, indicating moderate variability. The overall information literacy skills have a mean score of 1.04, with a median of 1.00, a mode of 1.00, and a standard deviation of 0.39.

The descriptive statistics provide valuable insights into the current state of information literacy knowledge and skills among undergraduate students in Swamy Vipulandanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. The mean scores indicate that students generally have moderate levels of information literacy knowledge and skills, with some variability across different domains.

The mean score for evaluating online information (1.29) suggests that students may be more proficient in assessing the credibility and relevance of information compared to other domains. However, the variability in scores indicates that there is room for improvement in students' evaluation skills.

The lower mean scores for source-based writing and understanding the value of information suggest that these areas may require more targeted interventions to enhance students' abilities. The variability in scores indicates that students have differing levels of proficiency in these domains, highlighting the need for personalized and differentiated instruction.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Information Literacy Knowledge (Pre-test)

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
Searching and Gathering Online Information	300	2.51	2.50	2.00	0.91
Evaluating Online Information	300	3.03	3.00	3.00	1.29
Understanding the Value of Information	300	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.02
Overall Information Literacy Knowledge	300	2.51	2.50	2.00	0.91

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Information Literacy Skills (Pre-test)

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
Searching and Gathering Online Information	300	1.35	1.00	1.00	0.76
Evaluating Online Information	300	1.29	1.00	1.00	0.65
Source – Based Writing	300	0.93	1.00	1.00	0.42
Understanding the Value of Information	300	0.57	0.50	0.00	0.60
Overall Information Literacy Skills	300	1.04	1.00	1.00	0.39

Overall, the descriptive statistics underscore the importance of implementing innovative pedagogical practices to enhance information literacy among undergraduates. The findings suggest that guided inquiry-based learning and other learner-centered approaches can be effective in improving students' information literacy skills.

The T-test results for information literacy knowledge (post-test) (Table 3) indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the intervention group and the control group in the domains of searching and gathering online information ($t = 10.47$, $p = 0.002$) and evaluating online information ($t = 4.33$, $p = 0.041$). However, there is no significant difference in understanding the value of information ($t = 0.017$, $p = 0.897$) and overall information literacy knowledge ($t = 0.617$, $p = 0.435$).

The T-test results for information literacy skills (post-test) (Table 4) show that there is a statistically significant difference between the intervention group and the control group in all domains: searching and gathering online information ($t = 15.53$, $p < 0.001$), evaluating online information ($t = 20.41$, $p < 0.001$), source-based writing ($t = 22.44$, $p < 0.001$), understanding the value of information ($t = 21.31$, $p < 0.001$), and overall information literacy skills ($t = 43.64$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate that the intervention group performed significantly better than the control group in all aspects of information literacy skills.

The ANOVA results for information literacy knowledge (post-test) (Table 5) indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the groups in the domains of searching and gathering online information ($F = 10.47$, $p = 0.002$) and evaluating online information ($F = 4.33$, $p = 0.041$). However, there is no significant difference in understanding the value of information ($F = 0.017$, $p = 0.897$) and overall information literacy knowledge ($F = 0.617$, $p = 0.435$).

The ANOVA results for information literacy skills (post-test) (Table 6) show that there is a statistically significant difference between the groups in all domains: searching and gathering online information ($F = 15.53$, $p < 0.001$), evaluating online information ($F = 20.41$, $p < 0.001$), source-based writing ($F = 22.44$, $p < 0.001$), understanding the value of information ($F = 21.31$, $p < 0.001$), and overall information literacy skills ($F = 43.64$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate that the level of curriculum integration has a significant impact on students' information literacy skills.

Table 3: Independent Sample T-test for Information Literacy Knowledge

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t- Value	p - Value
Searching and Gathering Online Information	Intervention	150	3.86	0.91	10.47	0.002
Evaluating Online Information	Intervention	150	3.40	1.03	4.33	0.041
Understanding the Value of Information	Intervention	150	3.61	1.20	0.017	0.897
Overall Information Literacy Knowledge	Intervention	150	3.62	0.80	0.617	0.435

Table 4: Independent Sample T-test for Information Literacy Skills

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t- Value	p - Value
Searching and Gathering Online Information	Intervention	150	3.05	0.79	15.53	<0.001
Evaluating Online Information	Intervention	150	2.61	0.82	20.41	<0.001
Source – Based Writing	Intervention	150	1.95	0.87	22.44	<0.001
Understanding the Value of Information	Intervention	150	1.77	0.86	21.31	<0.001
Overall Information Literacy Skills	Intervention	150	2.35	0.64	43.64	<0.001

Table 5: ANOVA for Information Literacy Knowledge

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F Value	p - Value
Searching and Gathering Online Information	Between Groups	10.47	2	5.24	10.47	0.002
Evaluating Online Information	Between Groups	4.33	2	2.17	4.33	0.041
Understanding the Value of Information	Between Groups	0.017	2	0.008	0.017	0.897
Overall Information Literacy Knowledge	Between Groups	0.617	2	0.308	0.617	0.435

Pearson's correlation was used to explore the relationships between information literacy knowledge and skills. Pearson's correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables.

Pearson's correlation results (Table 7) indicate that there is a significant positive correlation between overall information literacy knowledge and overall information literacy skills ($r = 0.361$, $p < 0.01$). There are also significant positive correlations between overall information literacy knowledge and skills in evaluating online information ($r = 0.290$, $p < 0.05$), source-based writing ($r = 0.366$, $p < 0.01$), and understanding the value of information ($r = 0.325$, $p < 0.01$). However, the correlation between overall information literacy knowledge and skills in searching and gathering online information is not significant ($r = 0.167$, $p > 0.05$).

The correlations between knowledge of searching and gathering online information and overall information literacy skills ($r = 0.371$, $p < 0.01$), source-based writing ($r = 0.384$, $p < 0.01$), and understanding the value of information ($r = 0.380$, $p < 0.01$) are significant. However, the correlation with skills in evaluating online information is not significant ($r = 0.215$, $p > 0.05$).

Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data collected from interviews and focus groups. The analysis identified common themes (Table 8) and patterns related to students' experiences and perceptions of information literacy.

Table 6: ANOVA for Information Literacy Skills

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F Value	p - Value
Searching and Gathering Online Information	Between Groups	15.53	2	7.77	15.53	<0.001
Evaluating Online Information	Between Groups	20.41	2	10.21	20.41	<0.001
Source – Based Writing	Between Groups	22.44	2	11.22	22.44	<0.001
Understanding the Value of Information	Between Groups	21.31	2	10.66	21.31	<0.001
Overall Information Literacy Skills	Between Groups	43.64	2	21.82	43.64	<0.001

Table 7: Pearson's Correlation between Information Literacy Knowledge and Skills (Post-test)

Variable	Overall IL Skills	Skills in Searching and Gathering	Skills in Evaluating Online Information	Skills in Source – Based Writing	Skills in Understanding Value of Information
Overall IL Knowledge	0.361**	0.167	0.290*	0.366**	0.325**
Knowledge of Searching and Gathering	0.371**	0.230	0.215	0.384**	0.380**
Knowledge of Evaluating Online Information	0.093	-0.052	0.139	0.165	0.019
Knowledge of Understanding Value of Information	0.285*	1.63	0.260*	0.206	0.271*

Table 8: Themes of Interviews and Focus Groups

Theme	Description
Challenges in Information Literacy	Students reported difficulties in identifying credible sources, evaluating information, and applying it effectively in their academic work.
Effectiveness of Pedagogical Practices	Students found inquiry-based learning more engaging and effective in improving their information literacy skills compared to traditional lecture-based methods.
Curriculum Integration	Students and faculty emphasized the importance of integrating information literacy into the curriculum at different levels to enhance learning outcomes.
Faculty Support	The level of support and involvement from faculty members was identified as a critical factor in promoting and integrating information literacy into the curriculum.
Access to Resources	Limited access to technological and educational resources was reported as a barrier to developing information literacy skills.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore innovative approaches to enhancing information literacy (IL) among undergraduate students in Swamy Vipulandanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Through a comparative study, the research addressed the problem of low levels of IL skills among undergraduate students and sought to achieve several objectives, including identifying the current state of IL, comparing IL practices in Swamy Vipulandanda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

The findings from the data analysis indicate that the problem of low IL skills among undergraduate students has been effectively addressed through the implementation of guided inquiry-based pedagogical practices. The study demonstrated that these innovative practices significantly improved students' IL skills, particularly in areas such as searching and gathering online information, evaluating online information, and source-based writing. The positive correlation between IL knowledge and skills further supports the effectiveness of these practices.

The pre-test results revealed that students had low levels of IL skills, confirming the need for intervention. The guided inquiry-based pedagogical practices were developed and tested, showing significant improvements in students' IL skills. The post-test results and qualitative data from interviews and focus groups confirmed the effectiveness of the innovative pedagogical practices in enhancing IL skills.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for further enhancement of IL among aesthetic undergraduate students. These recommendations are categorized into short-term and long-term strategies.

Short-Term Recommendations

Institutions should adopt guided inquiry-based pedagogical practices in their curricula to improve IL skills. This approach is effective in enhancing students' ability to search, evaluate, and use information. Regular workshops and training sessions on IL should be organized for students and academic department members. These workshops can provide hands-on experience and practical skills in information literacy. IL components should be embedded into existing courses across various disciplines. This integration can be achieved through collaboration between the staff of Academic departments and librarians. The institute should ensure that students have access to the technological and educational resources necessary for developing IL skills. This includes providing access to online databases, digital libraries, and research tools.

Long-Term Recommendations

The institute should develop comprehensive IL programs that are integrated into the curriculum at different levels (institute, department, programme, course). These programmes should be designed to systematically enhance IL skills over the course of students' academic careers. Academic members should be

actively involved in promoting and integrating IL into the curriculum. (Promote Academic Members' Involvement) This can be achieved through professional development programs and incentives for faculty who contribute to IL education. Collaborate with international institutions to share best practices and develop joint IL programs. This collaboration can enhance the quality of IL skills and provide students with global perspectives.

Future Research Directions

While this study has provided valuable insights into enhancing IL among aesthetic studies in Sri Lanka, several limitations should be acknowledged, and future research directions should be considered.

The study was conducted with a sample size of 300 final-year students from various disciplines in Swamy Vipulanada Institute. While this sample size is adequate, future research could benefit from larger and more diverse samples to ensure generalizability. The study focused on short-term interventions and their immediate effects on IL skills. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term impact of these pedagogical practices. While qualitative data from interviews and focus groups provided valuable insights, future research could include more extensive qualitative data collection to capture a broader range of experiences and perceptions.

Research should investigate Institute's perspectives on IL education and their role in promoting and integrating IL into the curriculum. Understanding faculty attitudes and experiences can inform strategies for enhancing faculty involvement. Moreover, future studies should examine the impact of technological resources on IL development, considering factors such as access to digital libraries, online databases, and research tools. This can include assessing the effectiveness of different types of resources in enhancing IL skills.

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