

Information literacy and ICT skills training for an informed nation: How RAU library & information centre responds to the Multimodal learning

Background

The University library is involved in the teaching of the Information skills course for the foundation program students under the auspices of the UNIPREP. This course is compulsory for all the foundation program students, it contribute 25% of the student final mark for UNIPREP course.

Over the years, we have as the profession wanted to have information literacy integrated into academic programmes, when this opportunity was presented to the library that we should offer this course we grabbed it with both hands, we were then allocated 500 minutes per class over a period of three weeks for the library to present the course. We had to have at times at least 6 facilitators and 12 student assistants at the same time, with classes of about of +- 80 students. This meant that subject librarian have to put in this additional workload to their normal workload not to mention the planning for the lesson.

This resulted in people being overworked and petty squabbles developed were some felt that others were doing more others less, because not all librarians have expertise to facilitate others were stretched to the limit and thus were really not looking forward to the UNIPREP classes. Most student who are in the foundation programmes are there because their M-score is less than the required and some of them have matriculation exemption and therefore resent being in the class in the 1st place. Some have a negative attitude towards the UNIPREP and thus if their interest is not aroused right from the beginning, they become disruptive and pose a problem for the facilitators and as I have indicated that some librarians have no expertise in the field of facilitating.

We were confronted with the following challenges in proving the course for 2004:

- Information service is a contact service which require that subject librarians are available to assist clients, this course meant that subject librarian will in most the time be not available to service clients.
- The workload increases drastically for the subject librarians.
- Some students have prior knowledge and therefore get bored easily and become disruptive.
- The number of student assistants (Information Science Honours Students) that we need is high.
- Too much information in short space of time.
- Reduction of periods allocated to UNIPREP by faculties

In response to challenges raised above, we looked at the options available to the library. One of the main reasons for the UNIPREP programme is to prepare students for the university and since the university was going multimodal, we are left we had to adapt. The circumstances presented us with an opportunity to run this course as a pilot project for our bigger goal of having an academic integrated

IL course. RAU uses WebCT (later to be referred as Edulink) as a tool for online teaching. In the past, we mainly used Edulink for group activities, self-testing and summative assessment but now we had to use it as a mode of delivery of learning. The benefits that comes with the use of Edulink are boundless, not only that it present a learner with an opportunity to learn at his or her pace but it also allows the facilitator to interact with the learner at ease.

2003	2004
12 Facilitators	2 Facilitator (1 is a back up facilitator)
12 Student Assistant	4 Student Assistant
39 periods per week @ 50 Minutes for three weeks	9 periods per week @ 50 Minutes for four weeks

The use of Edulink also leads or allows the learning of other critical cross-fields such as ICT skills, group or teamwork, problem solving, etc. Each person can learn at his or her pace without affecting other students. Online tools presents to the librarians an opportunity to present relevant information literacy because you can select the group that is supposed to receive whatever you put on the tool. You can chop and change the groups as you wish, because they are online participants there is no strong attachment to one another but you can fast forward those you feel need to be given more challenging projects.

Edulink made sure that one customize the page to suite the student that is meant for, (Slide 2) you can change colour, graphics, wording to suite whatever group you. For others you can hide, you can set it to release certain information for a certain group. It is a very flexible tool to use. The course was divided into five units, only unit 1: Printed Media is visible for all students and unit 2 only become visible when the student has scored 60% on unit 1. The following unit only becomes available only when the student has found competent on the preceding unit. This present a student with an opportunity to do self-assessment right from the beginning, if there are gaps the students can go back to the course content to learn more on the subject. (Slides 3-4)

The course can be designed to be as informative as possible to eliminate confusion and to assist those students who are hard workers, as they can do the course on their own without much help from contact session with the facilitator. You can from the begging introduce yourself, put in information about the method of learning, provide background to the course and any other information that would assist the learning process. (Slide 5). The tool allows you put notes for students, hyperlinks to useful sites and databases. It is able to handle almost all types of programmes such as word, PP, EXCEL, etc. (Slides 9&7).

Although Edulink provide one with the group discussions tool, I did not use this tool, as it requires that one should be connected to internet even after hours. When students are able to sit on the computer labs or home and discuss, as the

facilitator you should from time to time make intervention and steer the discussion in the right direction. It also presenter student with an opportunity to discuss among themselves, as the facilitator you can discuss the student either in private or in public. The tool allows you to randomly generate groups or by a certain specification. (Slides 8-9)

The next obvious challenge after you have presented content is to assess the level of competence of the students. Edulink present the facilitator with a number of way that you can assess student and for students to assess themselves. Since this is about acquiring a skills the emphasis is not on the now but a student can take the assessment as many times as possible with feedback and assistant from the facilitator. Edulink can handle anything from question and answer, short question, matching, multiple choices to discussion.

You must create question database where the system will retrieve questions for a specific assessment. It is important that you create a very big database so that students sitting next to each other do not receive the same questions. For example if you are going to give the a multiple choice question out of ten question, you must create a database of about 50 or so question, what it means that the system will select 10 question from 50 and give it to one student. For ease of use you must create, categories were you would select question for a specific assessment. (Slides 10-14)

Another excellent feature of the tool is the management of the course, you can easily do anything from tracking students in terms how much time have they spend on the course, how many attempts on the assessment. It also provides with the search facility if you want to limit to a specific group, e.g. those who have not done assessment 1. (Slides 15-20). You can also track them to see when was the last time they locked into the course and how many times have they locked in and for how long. This assessment tools can do all kinds of statistics, you can also look at detailed report where you observe which question where the student did not do well.

Another important use of this tool especially for a skill oriented course such IL, is the survey option. It provides the facilitators with the opportunity to get feedback from the student about the course. You can as the facilitator the tool to assess yourself and the course by looking at the assessment details. It provides one with statistics of the whole class, of each student and of each question. If there is a specific question where a number of students get it incorrect, you can go back and look at the question or the notes. (Slides 21-25)

The good thing about multimodal learning is that students have an opportunity of learning on their own while they also know that there is a facilitator to assist, because in their learning they also have to use ICT tools, their competence is improved drastically.