

## Low Levels of Teacher Information Literacy Awareness and Collaboration Between Librarians and Teachers in Information Literacy Instruction

McKeever, C., Bates, J., & Reilly, J. (2017). School library staff perspectives on teacher information literacy and collaboration. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 11(2), 51-68. <https://doi.org/10.11645/11.2.2187>

Ruby Warren

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*Evidence Summary*

**Low Levels of Teacher Information Literacy Awareness and Collaboration Between Librarians and Teachers in Information Literacy Instruction**

**A Review of:**

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**Reviewed by:**

Ruby Warren  
User Experience Librarian  
University of Manitoba Libraries  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
Email: [ruby.warren@umanitoba.ca](mailto:ruby.warren@umanitoba.ca)

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**Abstract**

**Objective** – Researchers sought to determine school library staff perspectives on the information literacy knowledge held by secondary school teachers, and teacher relationships with the library.

**Design** – Interviews analyzed with thematic and axial coding.

**Setting** – Secondary schools in Northern Ireland.

**Subjects** – 21 schools across Northern Ireland were selected as a sample, including urban,

rural, integrated, grammar, and secondary schools. 16 schools ultimately participated.

**Methods** – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with one library staff member at each selected secondary school. Interview audio and notes were transcribed and coded thematically both manually by the researchers and using NVivo. Categories were identified by open coding, then relationships identified via axial coding.

**Main Results** – The majority (10 of 16) of library staff members interviewed expressed that they had not been asked about information literacy by teachers, and only one

library staff member described a truly collaborative instructional relationship with teaching staff. The majority of staff expressed either that teachers were familiar with concepts related to information literacy but did not know the name for them, or, that they thought information literacy was entirely unfamiliar to teachers at their school. Staff frequently cited competing priorities (for example, standardized testing) and limited class time as potential causes for teachers not focusing on information literacy concepts.

**Conclusion** – Both cultural and policy changes need to be made in schools to prioritize information literacy as a core competency for both students and teachers. The researchers call for greater intra-school collaboration as a means to achieve this cultural change.

### Commentary

This is the first study to evaluate the knowledge of information literacy among teachers in Northern Ireland. It is interesting because rather than asking teachers to assess themselves, the researchers instead asked school library staff to assess teacher familiarity with information literacy. This perspective is particularly valuable because library staff are more likely to be familiar with the concept of information literacy, as well as more familiar with information literacy as a term. As such, school library staff are thus able to more accurately report on the ways teachers pursue engagement with the library to support information literacy instruction. Context provided by the authors indicates that professional librarian positions in schools are extremely uncommon in Northern Ireland – no national information strategy framework exists, and therefore this study provides welcome insight by focusing on information literacy education where there is often no librarian available to support it. The findings of this study align with recent interviews of teaching staff in Alberta, Canada (another location with few school librarians), where teaching staff self-reported that they are unfamiliar with the term information literacy, and that a variety of competing priorities or time constraints affect how they approach

imparting information literacy concepts (Smith, 2013). A lack of library collaboration, lack of familiarity with information literacy, and lack of time seem to be concerns with secondary school information literacy education that are consistent across recent related literature (Lee, Reed, & Laverty, 2012; Stockham & Collins, 2012; Togia, Korobili, Malliari, & Nitos, 2015).

This study scores 88% validity when evaluated against the criteria for qualitative research in Glynn's (2006) EBL Critical Appraisal Checklist. The initial sample, chosen for inclusivity of different types of secondary schools in Northern Ireland, achieved acceptable breadth to represent different types of secondary educational institutions and experiences, and school exclusion criteria (e.g., not having a staffed library) were clearly defined. Although multiple institutions declined to participate, the final sample of 16 schools appears to have achieved saturation – the point at which no new ideas are being introduced by participants – and is therefore adequate for insight.

The authors' coding process is explained in detail, and the semi-structured interview outline is provided in the appendix for easy study replication. Greater clarity could have been offered on whether the authors collaboratively coded transcripts, and an inter-coder reliability calculation would have further boosted the study's face validity. Identified themes and sub-themes are well presented in the article and appear to clearly follow from interview excerpts, and future research opportunities are highlighted.

This research may be useful for advocates and policy makers looking to encourage librarian presence in secondary schools, and for those attempting to improve information literacy curriculum or collaborative education practices in their schools. Study results clearly indicate a need for collaborative information literacy support for teaching staff, many of whom lack familiarity with the subject.

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