

Information Literacy Competencies of Buddhist Monk Undergraduates at the University Of Kelaniya: An Assessment Using the Big6 Information Literacy Model

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Abstract

Information literacy is a fundamental competency in higher education, enabling students to identify information needs, locate appropriate resources, evaluate information critically, and use information ethically for academic and lifelong learning purposes. Although universities increasingly emphasize information literacy development, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the information literacy competencies of Buddhist monk undergraduates in Sri Lanka. This study aimed to assess the information literacy competencies of Buddhist monk undergraduates at the University of Kelaniya using the Big6 Information Literacy Model and to identify the strongest and weakest dimensions of their information literacy skills. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed. Data were collected from 35 Buddhist monk undergraduates residing in the university hostel using a structured questionnaire consisting of demographic questions and eighteen five-point Likert scale statements representing the six dimensions of the Big6 Model; Task Definition, Information Seeking Strategies, Location and Access, Use of Information, Synthesis, and Evaluation. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. The findings revealed that Task Definition was the strongest competency dimension, with 82.4% of respondents demonstrating a high competency level. In contrast, Information Seeking Strategies emerged as the weakest dimension, with 47.1% of respondents demonstrating a low competency level. Moderate competency levels were observed in Location and Access, Use of Information, Synthesis, and Evaluation. The findings indicate that Buddhist monk undergraduates possess satisfactory foundational information literacy skills but require further support in advanced information searching, source selection, digital retrieval, synthesis, and critical evaluation.

Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technologies has transformed the ways in which information is produced, accessed, evaluated,

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and used. The contemporary academic environment provides students with a vast range of information resources, including electronic databases, digital libraries, and online scholarly materials. However, the availability of information alone does not guarantee effective academic learning. Students require information literacy competencies to recognize information needs, develop effective search strategies, evaluate information credibility, organize information, and apply knowledge ethically.

Information literacy has become an essential requirement in higher education because students engage in academic activities such as assignments, presentations, examinations, and research projects that require effective information management. University libraries play an important role in developing these competencies by providing access to information resources and offering instructional support. However, differences in students' educational backgrounds, academic experiences may influence their level of information literacy.

Buddhist monk undergraduates represent a distinctive student group within the University of Kelaniya, where many students engage with both traditional knowledge systems and contemporary academic disciplines. Their academic activities require effective engagement with diverse information sources, including scholarly literature, digital resources, and library collections. Despite their unique educational context, limited research has examined the information literacy competencies of Buddhist monk undergraduates in Sri Lanka.

The Big6 Model provides a systematic framework for understanding information problem-solving through six stages; Task Definition, Information Seeking Strategies, Location and Access, Use of Information, Synthesis, and Evaluation. The model is appropriate for this study because it examines information literacy as a complete process rather than focusing only on information searching skills.

Therefore, this study investigates the information literacy competencies of Buddhist monk undergraduates at the University of Kelaniya using the Big6 Information Literacy Model.



Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the information literacy competencies of Buddhist monk undergraduates using the Big6 Information Literacy Model.
2. To identify the strongest and weakest dimensions of information literacy among Buddhist monk undergraduates.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to assess the information literacy competencies of Buddhist monk undergraduates at the University of Kelaniya. The Big6 Information Literacy Model was adopted as the conceptual framework because it provides a comprehensive approach to examining students' abilities throughout the information research process, from identifying information needs to evaluating and using information effectively.

The study population comprised Buddhist monk undergraduates residing in the University of Kelaniya hostel. Due to the relatively small population, a census sampling approach was employed, and all eligible students were invited to participate. A total of 35 undergraduate Buddhist monks completed the survey.

Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained before questionnaire completion. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions and eighteen statements based on the six dimensions of the Big6 Model.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to determine competency levels across the six dimensions of the Big6 Information Literacy Model. The results were used to compare competency levels across the six dimensions and identify the strongest and weakest areas of information literacy among the respondents. Given the sample size ($n = 35$), inferential statistical analyses were not conducted, and the findings should be interpreted as descriptive rather than generalizable.

Big6 Dimension	Information Literacy Competency Assessed	Number of Items
Task Definition	Identifying information needs and defining research tasks	3
Information Seeking Strategies	Selecting appropriate information sources and search methods	3
Location and Access	Locating and retrieving information effectively	3
Use of Information Reading, extracting, and using relevant information	Reading, extracting, and using relevant information	3
Synthesis	Organizing and integrating information from multiple sources	3
Evaluation	Assessing the quality of information and the research process	3

Results

The analysis revealed variations in information literacy competency across the six dimensions of the Big6 Information Literacy Model. Among the six dimensions, Task Definition recorded the highest level of competency, with

82.4% of respondents demonstrating a high competency level and 17.6% showing a moderate level. No respondents were classified as having low competency in this dimension.

In contrast, Information Seeking Strategies emerged as the weakest competency area. Nearly half of the respondents (47.1%) demonstrated a low level of competency, while 29.4% showed a moderate level and only 23.5% demonstrated a high level.

The remaining four dimensions showed predominantly moderate to high competency levels. For Location and Access, 41.2% of respondents demonstrated high competency, 47.1% moderate competency, and 11.8% low competency. Use of Information showed relatively stronger performance, with 58.8% of respondents classified as highly competent, 35.3% as moderately competent, and 5.9% as having low competency. In the Synthesis dimension, 47.1% demonstrated high competency, 41.2% moderate competency, and 11.8% low competency. Similarly, Evaluation recorded 52.9% high competency, 35.3% moderate competency, and 11.8% low competency.

Overall, the findings indicate that respondents exhibited stronger competencies in defining information needs than in selecting appropriate information sources and search strategies. The competency levels across the six Big6 dimensions are summarized in Table 1.

Information Literacy Competency Levels Across Big6 Dimensions

Big6 Dimension	High	Moderate	Weak	Interpretation
Task Definition	82.4%	17.6%	0.0%	Strongest Level
Information Seeking Strategies	23.5%	29.4%	47.1%	Weakest Level
Location and Access	41.2%	47.1%	11.8%	Moderate Level
Use of Information	58.8%	35.3%	5.9%	Moderate Level
Synthesis	47.1%	41.2%	11.8%	Moderate Level
Evaluation	52.9%	35.3%	11.8%	Moderate Level

Conclusion

The findings indicate that Buddhist monk undergraduates at the University of Kelaniya possess satisfactory overall information literacy competencies, although their abilities vary across the six dimensions of the Big6 Information

Literacy Model. Task Definition emerged as the strongest dimension, with 82.4% of respondents demonstrating a high level of competency, indicating that most participants are capable of identifying their information needs and clearly defining research tasks. In contrast, Information Seeking Strategies was identified as the weakest dimension, with 47.1% of respondents demonstrating a low level of competency, suggesting difficulties in selecting appropriate information sources, developing effective search strategies, and identifying the most suitable resources for academic work. The remaining dimensions; Location and Access, Use of Information, Synthesis, and Evaluation which are showed predominantly moderate competency levels, indicating the need for further development of advanced information literacy skills.

The Big6 Information Literacy Model was selected for this study because it provides a comprehensive and systematic framework for assessing the complete information problem solving process. Unlike models that emphasize only information searching, the Big6 evaluates six sequential competencies from defining information needs to evaluating the final outcome making it well suited for measuring the overall information literacy abilities of university students.

Buddhist monk undergraduates at the University of Kelaniya were selected as the study population because they represent a unique group of learners who combine traditional Buddhist education with modern university studies. Their academic activities require the effective use of both religious and scholarly information resources, yet empirical studies on their information literacy competencies remain limited in Sri Lanka. Assessing their competencies helps identify specific training needs and provides evidence for designing targeted information literacy programmes through the university library and academic departments. Due to the small sample size, the findings should be interpreted as descriptive and cannot be generalized to all Buddhist monk undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Future studies involving larger samples from multiple universities are recommended to validate and extend these findings.

Keywords - Information literacy, Big6 Information Literacy Model, Buddhist monk undergraduates, higher education, university libraries

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