Improving Information Skills of the Postgraduate Students of NILIS University of Colombo: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The paper provides a brief introduction to the establishment of the National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS) of Sri Lanka, its main functions and education and training programmes currently offered. It also discusses the changing pedagogical paradigms within the Sri Lankan education system and relevance of information literacy (IL). The paper also describes an international workshop organised by NILIS under the auspices of IFLA/ALP in 2004 which gave birth to Empowering 8™ a new IL model. The author discusses the necessity of developing such a model within the South Asian region, and also discusses a case study which integrates information skills into the Postgraduate Diploma in Teacher Librarianship conducted by NILIS.

Keywords: Information skills, information literacy models, empowering 8™.

1. NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCES

1.1 Background

In 1996, Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka started the Second Phase of the General Education Project (GEP2) with the World Bank assistance, which implemented many education policy reforms. Under this project, 4000 school libraries were developed to promote resource-based teaching and learning in the Sri Lankan education system. Since there was a severe shortage of trained school library professionals, it was decided to train 4000 teachers as teacher librarians at the beginning and the project was searching for an organisation to undertake this responsibility. During this period a proposal to establish an institute of Library & Information Science was submitted to the World Bank by the Sri Lankan University Grants Commission.

The World Bank agreed to fund the establishment of this institute on the condition that it trains these teacher librarians. Accordingly, the National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS) was established in 1999 affiliated to University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

1.2 Functions

The institute has been given authority by the Ordinance to perform the following significant functions:

✄ To admit students

✄ To provide instruction, training and research in various branches of LIS

✄ To determine the postgraduate degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions to be awarded in LIS

✄ To conduct examinations and award postgraduate degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions in LIS

✄ To cooperate by way of exchange of teachers,

students and scholars with universities or institutions in Sri Lanka or abroad, having similar objectives to those of NILIS

✠ To institute and award fellowships, scholarships, exhibitions, bursaries, medals and other prizes.

1.3 Education and Training Programmes

NILIS started its first education programme in October 2002 and currently runs two types of programmes. Short-term programmes (workshops, seminars, lectures and certificate courses) for which certificates of participation are awarded by NILIS, and Diplomas and Postgraduate programmes for which the University of Colombo awards the certificate. Following courses are conducted regularly:

✠ Certificate in School Librarianship—A six months course for school library staff who have had no training in librarianship before

✠ Certificate in Teacher Librarianship—A six months course for school teachers who have had no training in librarianship before

✠ ICT for school/teacher librarians—A four months course for school/teacher librarians

✠ Certificate in Public Librarianship—A six months course for public library staff

✠ Diploma in Teacher Librarianship—A 300 hr diploma course for trained teachers

✠ Diploma in Library and Information Management— A three-year part time course for young school leavers

✠ Postgraduate Diploma in Teacher Librarianship— A two-year part time course for teachers with a Bachelors degree from a recognised higher education institute

✠ Postgraduate Diploma in LIS—A two-year part time course for those with a Bachelors degree from a recognised university. This is an entry point for the new entrants to the profession

✠ Masters in Teacher Librarianship—A two-year part time course for teachers with a Bachelors degree and a PG Diploma in Education or any other discipline from a recognised higher education institute

✠ Masters in Library & Information Science—A two year full time course for practicing Librarians and Information Professionals.

Most of these courses are offered in Sinhala as well as in English depending on the student demands.

2. NECESSITY OF TRAINING IN IL FOR NILIS

2.1 Changing Pedagogical Paradigms

The World Bank project in Sri Lanka has supported the infrastructure development of 4000 school libraries (about 50 per cent of the schools in the country). This initiative was taken to support the resources-based student centred learning emphasised in the new education policy reforms of Sri Lanka. Even if the physical structures are developed, human resources are not yet adequately developed in all these libraries and still the library is perceived by many as a storehouse of books. While the general education policy reforms are being implemented at school level, University Policy Reforms were also introduced in 1996 and a Presidential Task Force was appointed to make recommendations for the implementation of the policy reforms. Following these recommendations made by the Presidential Task Force on University Reforms, the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka promoted a series of reforms in the university system covering curriculum reform, staff development, career guidance services, quality assurance and accreditation and formulation of corporate plans and a new universities Act. A strong emphasis was laid on improving the quality and relevance of university education because many surveys have concluded that the quality of university education has to be improved and made relevant to the world of work. It is the responsibility of NILIS to promote resource-based student centred learning and to promote competencies in learning to learn among its student. Accordingly NILIS incorporated information literacy in all its teacher librarianship programmes.

2.2 Information Literacy

IL is defined as an individual's ability to recognise need for information, identify and locate appropriate information sources, know how to gain access to the information contained in those sources, evaluate the quality of information obtained, organise the information, and use the information effectively.[1]

An information literate person is one who:

✠ Recognises that accurate and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision making

✠ Recognises the need for information

✠ Formulates questions based on information needs

- ✂ Identifies potential sources of information

- ✂ Develops successful search strategies

- ✂ Accesses sources of information including computer-based and other technologies

- ✂ Evaluates information

- ✂ Organises information for practical application

- ✂ Integrates new information into an existing body of knowledge

- ✂ Uses information in critical thinking and problem solving.[1]

In an information literate environment, students engage in active, self-directed learning activities, and teachers facilitate students' engagement through a more adventurous style of instructional delivery. Initially there was a lack of competent lecturers to teach this subject but under GEP2 support was extended to NILIS by Dr Penny Moore of New Zealand, who is an authority on IL. Dr Moore was invited in 2003 to conduct a two-week workshop at NILIS. With this initial training NILIS started training teacher librarians in IL. However, it was felt that Sri Lanka needs more exposure to IL. A proposal was submitted to IFLA/ALP in early 2004 to seek funds to conduct a one-week workshop on *Information Skills for Learning*. NILIS is the national body responsible for library and information education in Sri Lanka and also the national institute responsible for the education and training of teacher librarians for the 4000 school libraries developed under the World Bank project (and also for other school libraries). Therefore, it was felt that it is the best institution to undertake this kind of a workshop and initiate the changing process of 'school libraries' into 'School Learning Resource Centers'. In keeping with the IFLA/ALP objectives the workshop was meant to be regional. The proposal was accepted by IFLA/ALP and funding was provided to conduct the workshop. In addition to about 40 Sri Lankans there were 11 delegates from 10 South and Southeast Asian countries. Workshop was facilitated by expert resource persons from Australia, Canada, Malaysia and UK.

Its main objectives were to:

- ✂ Re-orient classroom situations from 'chalk and talk' to project-directed learning away from classrooms and into learning information centres

- ✂ To re-position the 'library' as the central core providing students learning experiences and for teachers as the central resource to guide the learners

- ✂ To re-orient school libraries from libraries to Learning Resource Centres in order to improve the quality of school education

- ✂ To re-focus school librarianship skills away from materials-based collections management to active information provision exploiting IT

- ✂ To make known IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto and IFLA /UNESCO School Library Guidelines

- ✂ To define information literacy skills, i.e., what is IL? What does IL look like? What makes it work? What skills do children require to become information literate?

- ✂ To develop strategies in educational institutions for incorporating IL skills teaching as an integral part of curricula

- ✂ To develop a realistic model to introduce information skills at national level.

When a plethora of IL models are already available, one may question why the wheel was being re-invented. Re-inventing the wheel or developing another model was essential because of the composite culture and local conditions in these countries. If an existing model used in a developed country is imposed, it would have been difficult for the stakeholders to understand the philosophical roots behind the model. Therefore, the workshop participants, throughout five days worked from identifying the need of information literacy through comparison of different models to building a new model to suit the local needs of the region. A detailed account of this workshop and the development of the model can be found in Wijetunge and Alahakoon 2005[2].

2.3 Empowering 8™ IL Model

Empowering 8™ is the IL model developed at this international workshop. It is now registered as an intellectual property of NILIS and being promoted in LIS programmes offered by NILIS and in a variety of other educational contexts of Sri Lanka. Though it is registered as a property of NILIS it does not restrict anyone from using Empowering 8™ for non profit making educational purposes. NILIS, however expects that such users will share the applications to enrich its knowledge. Empowering 8™ can be defined as a model which can be used to solve any information problem effectively using eight stages with several sub-stages under each component. It's not necessary to complete these stages in a linear order, but one can enter the cycle from any point
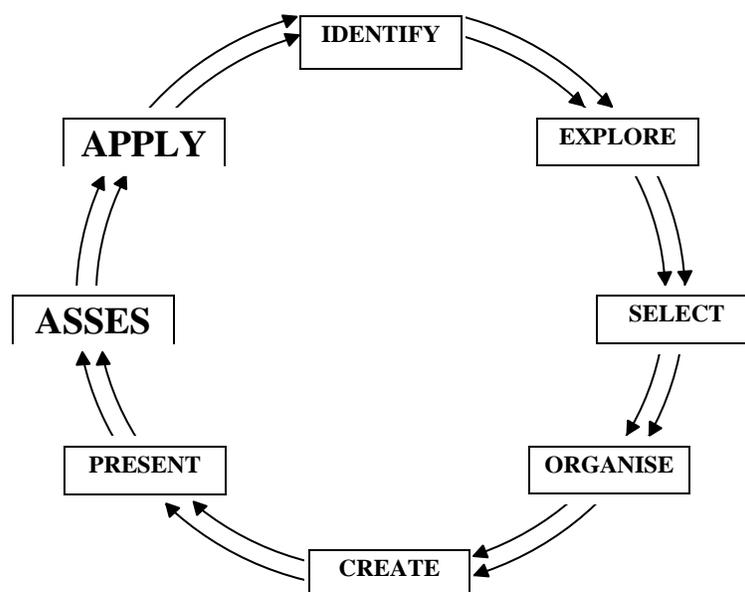
Figure 1. Eight components of Empowering 8™

and proceed in a cyclical manner. However, one is taken through all stages in a successful information problem solving situation. Two arrowed lines denote the teacher and the teacher librarian getting involved in the process (Fig.1). Empowering 8™ has a set of 108 corresponding skills ranging from defining the need for information to application of new concepts learned to other situation. This list of skills is still being reviewed depending upon the experience gained. Developing competencies in these skills will take place according to the nature and complexity of the problem being solved using Empowering 8™.

Empowering 8™ process and the skills are applicable to all subject areas across the full range of levels from kindergarten to postgraduate. It is not limited only to the educational context but can be applied in a variety of problem solving situations in the personal and work environments as well. Empowering 8™ is best understood and practiced when integrated with the curriculum activities therefore the training programme, which is described in this paper, integrates the eight components of Empowering 8™ and related skills with an assignment topic relevant to the postgraduate programme.

3. DEVELOPING INFORMATION SKILLS: THE CASE STUDY

One of the postgraduate courses conducted by NILIS was chosen to introduce the information skills development programme as a pilot project, the details of which are given below:

3.1 Postgraduate Diploma in Teacher Librarianship

Postgraduate Diploma in Teacher Librarianship (PGTL) is designed for teacher librarians who have been recruited with only a Bachelor's degree in any discipline so that once completed, those with exposures to different academic disciplines at undergraduate level will receive a common knowledge of teacher librarianship.

The objectives of the programme are:

� To give professional education and training in basic professional skills, which will enable students to confidently enter into work assigned to newly qualified teacher librarians

� To provide a broad understanding of the principles of teacher librarianship, the organisation and management of school libraries and information centres, and ways of handling, storing, and retrieving information in all media, and

� To introduce students to the theory and practice of research as it is applied in the field of teacher librarianship at the postgraduate level.

All PGTL students study a core of seven subjects which cover a total of 360 classroom contact hours. In addition to the core subjects, they have to complete a work attachment equal to 40 hours in a recognised library and to prepare a project report not less than 6000 words based on an independent study. The

subject structure is indicated below:

- Introduction to teacher librarianship
- Collection, management and organisation of information
- Management for teacher librarians
- Information sources and services
- Information literacy
- Information and communications technology (ICT) for teacher librarians
- Research methods
- Work attachment
- Project report.

PGTL commenced in 2003 and there were two full-time intakes in 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 academic years. These students were school teachers with several years of experience and in service training in teaching and learning. Few of them were Bachelor of Education Degree holders. But the current intake is different from the previous intakes. In the later part of 2005 Ministry of Education, recruited a little more than 2000 newly qualified graduates as teacher librarians with the objective of filling the existing teacher librarian vacancies in the government schools. Although priority was given to library science graduates and graduates with a library science component in their degree, there were not many applicants with these qualifications. Therefore, graduates in other disciplines who were willing to join as teacher librarians were also recruited. Twenty two such new graduates comprises the current PGTL group. Since they are just recruited they are not entitled for full-time study leave, hence PGTL had to be conducted in part-time mode in 2005-2007. The group of students is heterogeneous in their academic backgrounds. They represent many established older universities as well as recently established regional universities. Some of them have studied as internal students in formal university environments while others have been external students who studied independently away from traditional university set-up. Subjects they have studied for Bachelor,s vary from Library Science, Sinhala, and Philosophy, Economics, Business Management, and Mass Communication. Due to the variations in their prior learning environments, it was felt that they need an orientation programme to familiarise themselves to the academic environment of NILIS, especially those who have studied as external students needed guidance in using the library resources and computers, academic style of writing and in many other academic aspects. It was also felt that without such an orientation programme it will be difficult for the students to perform well in their formal internal academic environment at NILIS which is highly student centered.

3.2 Implementation

The orientation programme is based on an assignment topic chosen by the module lecturer. Using the eight components of the Empowering 8™ model, learners are taken through the process of defining the topic to creating and assessing the results. To guide the students a variety of check lists, activity sheets and guidelines are provided. Duration of the module is forty classroom contact hours spread across nine days with a similar number of self-study hours. Following section will explain how the students were taken through each component of the model. Expected learning outcomes, rationale and the specific learning activities planned for each component are described. Though many activity sheets are used during the process only two most significant ones are indicated here due to space limitations.The time frame allocated to each component is indicated in Table 1.

3.3 Course Outline

3.3.1 Empowering 8™: Identify

Learning Outcome

- Define the assignment topic
- Determine and understand the audience to which it will be presented
- Identify the keywords
- Plan a search strategy
- Choose the relevant format for the finished product.

Rationale

It is strongly believed that any information skills programme has to be integrated into the actual learning environment to be effective. Course co-ordinator identified a general topic suitable for the first module of PGTL before the commencement of the actual orientation programme and the students are expected to refine it by following the recommended activities. The topic chosen in this instance is "the role of the teacher librarian within the school community". As newly recruited teacher librarians the students need to learn this topic. It was decided that rather

Table 1. Time frame allocated to each component

Day	Topic	Activity	Duration	Time
Day 1	Identify/ Explore	▪ Identify the topic & introduction to marking scheme ▪ Introduction to NILIS Library ▪ Introduction to cat/class system	2 hr 1 hr 2 hr	09.00-11.00 11.30-12.30 01.00-03.00
Day 2	Explore	▪ Visit to National Library	5 hr	09.00-03.00
Day 3	Select	▪ Part of a book/Jl. Extracting Inf: from Dictionaries /Encyclopedias ▪ Introduction to Internet searching, online information sources (EBSCO, etc.) ▪ Using CD/ROMs(IFLA, IASL and Other ▪ Using ERIC	1 hr 2 hr 1 hr 1 hr	09.00-10.00 10.30-12.30 01.00-02.00 02.00-03.00
Day 4	Select Organise	▪ Evaluation of information print/non-print media ▪ Reflect on own information sources for assignment ▪ Note taking skills. ▪ Plagiarism	1 hr 1 hr 2 hr 1 hr	09.00-10.00 10.00-11.00 01.30-01.30 01.30-02.30
Day 5	Create	▪ Introduction to Harvard system & NILIS format ▪ Lecture on 3P model including evaluation criteria for presentation define a format for evolution ▪ Students plan the presentation for the following class	2 hr 2 hr 1 hr	09.00-11.00 11.30-01.30 01.30-02.30
Day 6	Present	▪ Student make 5 minute presentations using OHP ▪ Lecturer/peer evaluation & suggestions using predefined format ▪ Student reflections	2 hr 2 hr 1 hr	09.00-11.00 11.30-01.30 01.30-02.30
Day 7	Present	▪ Students reflections on their own assignment. ▪ "Word" & keyboard skills	1 hr 4 hr	09.00-11.00 10.30-02.30
		Two- Three week gap to prepare the assignment		
Day 8	Assesses	▪ Finalise according to feedback & submit (self study)	4 hr	09.00-01.30
Day 9	Assesses & Apply	▪ Reflections by Lecturer & Students after final assessment is given	1 hr	09.00-10.00

than lecturing on the role of the teacher librarian, we will allow students to engage actively in finding the answer. Since it is the very first assignment of the course it was the ideal topic to integrate and introduce information skills. Because the finished product will be assessed for the final marks, students do have necessary motivation to complete the module successfully.

Activities

✄ Discussion between the lecturer and the students on the topic and identifying the specific keywords in the topic using brain storming and mind mapping strategies

✄ Finalising the topic using the given checklist. *(Appendix 1)*

3.3.2 Empowering 8™: Explore

Learning Outcome

✄ Locate resources appropriate to the chosen topic

✄ Find information appropriate to the chosen topic

✄ Do interviews, field trips or other outside research.

Rationale

Many students did not have previous experience in using a library effectively. Therefore at this stage, effective use of a library for their learning activities is introduced. Initially students were introduced to the NILIS library and thereafter they were taken on a study tour to the National Library which they will have to use frequently during their period of study.

Activities

✄ Introduction to the NILIS library by the librarian and the lecturer with a special emphasis on the catalogue and classification system

✄ Students visit the library and locate five books in the catalogue using the template given in an Activity Sheet

✄ Students visit the library and locate five books in the library using a list prepared by the Lecturer and Librarian and enter their class numbers in the given table using an Activity Sheet

- Visit the National Library and use the matrix provided *(Appendix 2)* to collect information about the library. A staff member from National Library was guiding the students together with a lecturer from NILIS

- Once the visit is completed, students discussed their experiences as a plenary session using the collected information.

3.3.3 Empowering 8™: Select

Learning Outcome

- Choose relevant information to suit the purpose

- Determine which sources are too easy, too hard, or just right.

Rationale

At this stage students were introduced to different types of information resources available in the library, identification of key sections of the information sources, and evaluation of information sources.

Activities

- Students in groups identified parts of a book and a journal using the fact sheet given

- Students located different types of information sources (books, journals, reports, videos, CD/ROMs, etc.) which contain information relevant to their assignment from the library using an activity sheet

- Introduction to using a printed general encyclopedia

- Introduction to Internet search engines by the lecturer

- Introduction to online reference sources

- Introduction to extracting information from CD/ROMs

- Introduction to ERIC and other online educational resources

- Introductory lecture on evaluating information

- Listing the criteria to evaluate information sources, which students will be using for their own assignment

- Reflect on relevant information sources for the assignment.

Only an introduction was provided with supporting learning material during the assigned time. Students were expected to allocate more independent time for a better familiarisation with the material, especially the online resources. They were guided by a variety of activity sheets and handouts provided.

3.3.4 Empowering 8™: Organise

Learning Outcome

- Sequence the information in a logical order

- Record relevant information through note making or making a visual organiser such as a chart, graph, or outline, etc

- Collect appropriate citations.

Rationale

Many students have a problem of organising their notes in a logical manner, therefore, they sometimes tend to load the assignment with a mass of irrelevant information. They also have little or no previous experience in note taking and using visual organisers or preparing a list of references or a bibliography. Organise stage will expose them to these aspects.

Activities

- Lecture on the use of the recommended sources to practice note taking skills

- Using the newly acquired knowledge and learn to take notes for the assignment on their own

- Prepare a list of references for the assignment topic according to the Harvard system. It requires that they include different formats of information sources including electronic formats.

3.3.5 Empowering 8™: Create

Learning Outcome

- Prepare information to suit the presentation format

- Use information created by others in an ethical and meaningful way.

Rationale

Students will be introduced to different formats of presentations and they are expected to concentrate specifically on academic essay writing and presentations using overhead projectors (OHP). At this stage students will also be introduced to the concept of plagiarism and how to avoid it.

Activities

- Presentation by lecturer on different presentation formats, plagiarism and how to avoid it

 Learners plan their own presentation.

3.5.6 Empowering 8™: Present

Learning Outcome

 Practice for presentation activity

 Revise and edit own work according to feedback

 Provide feedback to other's work.

Rationale

Many students are too nervous to make presentation in the class but this is an essential requirement of teacher librarians. Students were exposed to making presentations and giving/receiving feedback.

Activities

 Presentation by lecturer on 3P model and evaluation criteria

 Preparing a checklist for the evaluation of presentation by peers

 Review and adopt a commonly agreed upon evaluation form for individual presentations

 Make a five minute oral presentation on the chosen topic

 Each student to provide feedback for at least five other students using the evaluation sheets.

3.5.7 Empowering 8™: Assess

Learning Outcome

 Accept feedback from other students and the lecturer

 Consider what could be done better next time.

Rationale

Students were given two-three week to write and submit their assignment incorporating and improving their draft work based upon the feedback.

Activities

 Revising the assignment according to feedback received and finalising the assignment including the list of references (self study)

 Submit the assignment for formal assessment.

3.5.8 Empowering 8™: Apply

Learning Outcome

 Review the feedback and assessment provided

 Use the feedback and assessment for the next learning activity/task

 Endeavour to use the knowledge gained in a variety of new situations.

Rationale

This stage commenced with the evaluation of the assignment by the lecturer. Depending on the marks and experience gained, students were guided to engage in reflective thinking for future applications.

Activities

 Preparing reflective notes for future use and add the presentation to an individual portfolio.

3.4 Assessment

Since the aim of the module is to provide the students with a sound training in using information sources (both traditional and contemporary) so that they become information literate, evaluation of the assignment placed more weight on the process followed rather than the subject contents.

Lecturer advised the students at the beginning to maintain a folder to keep different activity sheets, mind maps, notes and other documentation for final evaluation. Elements of assessment used in the project are given in the *Appendix 3*.

4. CONCLUSION

We realised that the performance of the PGTL group subjected to this project is far better than the two previous cohorts. Students' feedback indicated that they appreciated the orientation programme very much since it introduced them to a wide variety of new skills which will support them in becoming independent lifelong learners. We have decided that we will extend this programme to all our postgraduate programmes from 2006.

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About the Author

Pradeepa Wijetunge is presently Director, NILIS, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. She has a B.A. Special (Honours) degree in Philosophy from the University of Peradeniya, and the diploma in LIS from the University of Colombo and a Master of Librarianship (Library Automation) from the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, UK. She is a Fellow of the Sri Lanka Library Association and an Associate of Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). She is also a member of the University Librarians Association of Sri Lanka.

She has contributed over 50 publications in the field of LIS and has 20 years of professional experience. She has organised and attended many professional workshops. In November 2004, she organised the IFLA-NILIS Regional Workshop on Information Skills for Learning in which professionals from South and Southeast Asia participated along with resource persons from Australia, Canada, and Malaysia. She has developed curricula for the courses being offered by NILIS and is actively involved in the teaching and consultancy work.

Mrs Wijetunge received a special **Leadership Development Award** in 2005 from the International Association of School Librarianship for promoting school librarianship nationally and internationally.

Appendix 1

Activity Sheet 1.2

Identify the scope of your assignment topic using the following checklist

Item	Your Comment
Who is my audience: lecturer, whole class, small group, any other?	
What am I expected to do? Outline analyse, describe, investigate ….	
What is the scope of the assignment: broad overviews or specific aspect?	
What is the required word length?	
What presentation formats are appropriate?	
What special instructions are given by the lecturer on the format or presentation?	
How extensive should be the assignment? i.e. how many reference sources should be consulted?	
Do I need to use other formats of information? i.e. videos, maps, charts, audio cassettes etc.	
How will I be assessed? Do I know the evaluation scheme?	
How many stages are there and how much is each stage worth?	
Are there any due dates? Do I know them?	
Am I using a folder to hold all relevant materials	

Check list is adopted from First Things First , Thames Valley District School Board, and On your own: A practical guide to research, writing and information literacy. Thames Valley District School Board, London, Ontario. 2002 . p. 7.

Activity Sheet 2.4

Matrix to be completed on library visits

Aspect	Comment
Name of Library	
Address	
Vision	
Mission	
Target user group	
Different sections of the library	
Types of collections (based on access) e.g. Lending, reference etc.	
Types of collections (based on formats), e.g., Books, Newspapers, AV Material, etc.	
Method of obtaining membership	
Method of obtaining information (Interlibrary loans, visits etc.)	
Cataloguing system	
Classification system	
Access to library material (Closed or open)	
Services offered by the library in general (publications, seminars etc.)	
Name and contact information for future use	
Any other useful information	

Elements of assessment

Component	Maximum mark	Items to be produced by the students
Identify	05	Completed fact sheet on identifying the topic.
Explore	05 05	List of libraries and places used to locate information List of different types of resources used
Select	15	Criteria used to select the particular sources of information
Organising	10	Notes taken and visual organisers used
Create	10	Use of references ethically avoiding plagiarism and citing according to Harvard Style.
Present	10 10	Accuracy and appropriateness of the feedback forms designed to be completed by peers Five minute presentation on the process of writing the assignment
Assess	10	Whether revisions are adopted in the final assignment
Subject content of the essay	20	Factual accuracy Logical organisation of facts Availability of all parts of an essay Submission on deadline Any other criteria
Total	100	