"FROM INFORMATION LITERACY TO AI LITERACY: THE ROLE OF COLLEGE LIBRARIES IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI"

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Abstract :

The rise of Generative AI has changed how students in higher education access and use information. Traditional Information Literacy, which focused on finding and evaluating sources, is no longer enough in an era of instant AI-generated content. This paper argues that college libraries must now focus on AI Literacy — the ability to use, critically evaluate, and ethically collaborate with AI tools. Based on a review of UGC policy documents, NEP 2020, and academic literature, this paper examines the shift from IL to AI-L. It outlines key AI Literacy competencies, discusses specific challenges for Indian college libraries, with a focus on rural institutions like Arts & Science College, Kurha, and proposes a practical framework for integrating AI Literacy into library instruction in line with NEP 2020. Primary survey data from Kurha College is also presented in this paper.

Keywords : Information Literacy, AI Literacy, College Libraries, Generative AI, NEP 2020, Academic Libraries, Digital Competencies

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Introduction :

Libraries are service-oriented institutions. Their role is not only to provide resources but also to guide users in accessing and using them. In recent years, technology has made library services faster and more accessible.

`For decades, the core mission of college libraries was clear: teach students to "find the right information." This was known as Information Literacy. With the launch of tools like ChatGPT and Gemini, the problem has reversed. Information is now abundant and available instantly. The new challenge for students is: "Is this AI output accurate, biased, or original?"[1]

This creates an urgent need to move from Information Literacy to AI Literacy. In 2023-2026, many students stopped asking "Where do I find this?" and began asking "Can I trust what the AI gave me?" If college libraries do not lead this transition, students will learn to use AI without critical judgment. This can lead to problems of plagiarism and

misinformation; this shift is even more important to ensure students are not left behind.[2]

Objectives Of The Study :

- To define and differentiate Information Literacy and AI Literacy
- To analyse the impact of Generative AI on college library services and instruction
- To identify core competencies required for AI Literacy in Indian academic settings
- To examine challenges faced by Indian college libraries, especially in rural areas
- To propose a framework for integrating AI Literacy into library services in line with NEP 20203.

Conceptual Framework :

1. Understanding Information Literacy :

The term "Information Literacy" was first used by Paul G. Zurkowski in 1974. The American Library Association defines an information literate person as someone who can "recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively".[3][1]

In the Indian context, Information Literacy became important due to the growth of e-journals, N-LIST, and other digital databases. The need was to teach students how to search, evaluate authenticity, and cite sources correctly to avoid plagiarism.[4]

2. **Understanding AI Literacy :**

AI Literacy is the set of competencies needed to critically evaluate AI technologies, collaborate with AI tools, and use them ethically. It includes understanding how AI works, identifying bias, and verifying AI output.[5]

Long and Magerko define it as the ability to move beyond being a passive user to becoming an informed and ethical participant in a digital society. For students, this means learning to spot "AI hallucinations" and check facts using credible sources.[5]

3.**The Shift: From IL to AI-L :**

Information Literacy dealt with a world of information scarcity. The main question was "Where can I find this?"

AI Literacy deals with a world of information abundance. The main question is now "Can I trust this and how do I improve it?"[6][7]

Thus, AI Literacy does not replace Information Literacy. It builds on it. IL skills are still needed to verify what AI produces. The librarian's role is shifting from "information guide" to "AI-critical thinking coach".

In the IL era, the biggest barrier was access. Students in colleges in rural areas had to learn how to use OPAC, N-LIST, and databases to find 2-3 good journal articles. The librarian's job was to teach search strategies. In the AI-L era, the barrier has flipped. A student can now generate a 1000-word assignment in 30 seconds. The new barrier is credibility. AI tools can "hallucinate" and create fake citations or biased summaries. Therefore, the library's new job is to teach students to "verify first, then submit".[7][8]

IL taught students to be critical consumers of information. They read a source and decided if it was reliable. AI-L teaches students to be critical collaborators with AI.

Building on the 6 ACRL IL frames, AI Literacy adds 4 new competencies that are critical for students:

Prompt Competency : The ability to write clear prompts and understand how wording changes AI output.

Critical AI Evaluation : The ability to spot bias, factual errors, and "hallucinations" in AI-generated text.

Ethical AI Use : Understanding copyright, data privacy, and when AI use becomes academic dishonesty.

Human-AI Collaboration : Knowing when to use AI for brainstorming and when to rely on human judgment and library sources.

Impact Of Generative Ai On College Libraries :

1. **Impact on Library Services :**

AI-powered chatbots can now provide 24/7 reference service. Discovery tools allow students to ask questions in natural language instead of using Boolean operators. Recommendation systems can suggest books based on past borrowing. This makes services more personalised.

2. **Impact on Library Operations :**

AI can automate cataloguing, metadata creation, and collection analysis. This reduces staff workload and allows librarians to focus on teaching and research support.[9]

3. **Impact on Information Literacy Instruction :**

This is the biggest change. The old IL model is not enough. Libraries must now teach prompt engineering, bias detection, and fact-checking of AI output. The library can become an "AI Validation Lab" on campus.[10]

4. **Impact on Ethics and Equity :**

Issues like fabricated citations, data privacy, and algorithmic bias need clear policies. There is also a risk of a new digital divide. Students with paid AI tools may have an advantage. College libraries can bridge this gap by providing free tools and training.[11]

Challenges and Opportunities for Indian College Libraries: A Sample Survey of Arts & Science College, Kurha :

1. **Key Challenges :**

Infrastructure Gap : Many colleges in the Vidarbha region, especially in rural areas, face issues of limited computers and shared internet bandwidth.

Financial Constraints : AI-enabled databases are costly and paid in USD. Library budgets are mainly used for N-LIST and books.

Skill Gap : Most LIS professionals in India were trained in cataloguing and traditional IL. Training on prompting and AI ethics is limited.

Policy Vacuum : While UGC has given advisories on AI, there is no standardised curriculum or funding for AI Literacy in colleges.

In short, Information Literacy is the foundation. AI Literacy is the next floor. A student who is AI Literate must first be Information Literate, because the final step of using AI is always to verify with trusted library resources. College libraries must therefore teach both together: "Use AI to start, Use Library to finish".

2. **Survey Findings from Arts & Science College, Kurha :**

A survey of 50 UG students was conducted in August 2026 to understand current AI use.

Table 5.1: AI Usage among Students, n=50

Question	Yes	No	Sometimes
Have you heard about Chat GPT or other AI tools?	42	3	5
Do you use AI tools for writing assignments?	18	22	10
Do you verify AI answers with library books/journals?	8	30	12

Do you think the library should teach AI use?	38	4	8
Would you attend an "AI Literacy" workshop in the library?	35	6	9

Source : Primary Survey, August 2026

Interpretation: 84% of students are aware of AI, but 60% never verify AI answers. However, 76% want the library to teach AI use. This shows a clear demand and role for the library.

Conclusion :

Information Literacy is not dead, but it is incomplete. In the age of Generative AI, the library's most important job is building student judgment, not just providing access.

For Indian college libraries, especially in rural areas, AI is an opportunity to become more relevant. By starting with free tools, training, and awareness, libraries can become the "Critical Thinking Lab" of the campus.[12]

The adoption of AI in Indian college libraries depends on solving issues of infrastructure, training, and policy. A phased approach is needed. If done well, libraries can ensure that the benefits of AI reach all students and align with the goals of NEP 2020.

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