‘Pop Culture and Information Literacy Teaching: Considerations from and for Irish Academic Librarians’

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation that I have submitted to Dublin Business School for the award of MSc in Information and Library Management is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, where it is clearly acknowledged by references. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any other degree.

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ABSTRACT

In the current information landscape, promoting Information Literacy (IL) skills is of the utmost importance, especially within academic settings where searching and evaluating information are integral to student success. Academic librarians play a vital role in transmitting these skills to students, as they employ diverse engagement methods to increase student's confidence and engagement. By conducting interviews with academic librarians in Ireland who have had experience with IL teaching, this research aimed to discuss one particular educational tool, popular culture, so as to address a geographical and contextual gap found in the literature. The findings suggest that despite potential limitations and the many factors that dictate its success, popular culture has been found to be quite beneficial by Irish academic librarians, mostly due to its accessibility and ability to showcase the transferable nature of IL skills to students, making it a valuable method for those looking to create engaging teaching moments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the Information Literacy Project (PIL) researchers started to conduct large studies at universities and community colleges across the United States with the goal of examining the perspective of undergraduate students on the ever evolving Information Literacy field (Head et al., 2022, p.2). At the time, the usage of research engines and public internet platforms such as Google and Wikipedia had just become quite popular amongst students, which raised concerns from the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), who believed that this widespread use of these new technologies might actually lead to the decrease of the students' abilities to evaluate information sources.

In the more recent years, as these technologies continued to evolve, students have become even more likely to get overwhelmed and confused when trying to navigate the "constant stream of digital news, memes, opinions, advertisements, and propaganda... impacting our lives, deepening societal rifts, and fostering polarization, extremism, and skepticism" (Head et al., 2020, p.1), which defines the current information landscape. Consequently, it has been deemed necessary to urgently equip them with the skills to "recognize the need for information and possess the ability to effectively locate, assess, and utilize the required information" (American Library Association, 2006), which is known as Information Literacy (IL). However, the teaching of this skill set is seen as being "everyone's job, but nobody's responsibility", and even within education institutions, IL does not have a specific place in the curriculum (Fister, 2021).

As a result, academic librarians are the ones who have embraced this challenge, and have been creating different teaching moments so as to pass onto the students the IL knowledge that they need for both their academic research and daily lives. There are a plethora of methods and

strategies for planning these moments, as different institutions and patrons have different priorities and needs which influence the structure and content of the sessions that the academic librarians carry out. When specifically focusing on methods for engaging students, one suggestion mentioned primarily by American academic librarians was the inclusion of popular culture.

Due to the widespread appeal that popular culture, more commonly known as pop culture, has, it is unlikely that its inclusion in library teaching is exclusive to North America, as the origins of the literature review might suggest. However, factors such the ongoing significance of IL teaching in academic libraries, the continuing necessity to promote it amongst students in engaging ways and the potential of pop culture as an educational tool, make addressing this gap and providing a different geographical and contextual perspective on the topic rather advantageous. Therefore, the present research aims to answer the following central question:

- To what extent should Irish academic librarians use pop culture to teach Information Literacy (IL)?

The purpose of this research is to then discuss whether pop culture can be potentially useful for academic librarians responsible for teaching IL skills in Ireland by examining different perspectives on the topic.

In the following chapters of this study, the researcher set out to reach the following objectives:

- Explore concepts related to the main themes of the research question found in the literature;

- Design a lesson plan for a hypothetical Information Literacy class using suggestions found in the literature, so as to garner feedback from Irish academic librarians in regards to its potential to generate student engagement;

- Discuss how pop culture can be beneficial to teaching IL;
- Showcase the stance of Irish academic librarians regarding IL teaching methods and the inclusion of pop culture.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Literature Introduction

The literature review intends to analyse the key ideas, issues, and findings within the publications relevant to the main themes of this study. Based on the research question, these themes are: the librarian as a teacher, Information Literacy (IL), IL teaching in Ireland, and pop culture, both in a general sense, and its application in academic librarians. The analysis of these themes will serve as a foundation for the research being undertaken (Denscombe, 2012, p.57), while simultaneously showcasing its timeliness and importance in the current environment of the Information and Library Management field.

When selecting the literature for this chapter, four main criteria were considered:

- Do the selected sources include well-established works that can guide the direction of the research?

- Do these sources demonstrate knowledge regarding the current field and its advancements?
- Does the selected literature demonstrate different perspectives on the same topic?
- Is there a suitable balance of books, articles, and online materials for the field of study?

Particular caution concerning the credibility of the sources was also taken into consideration, since the Internet has allowed making "literature publicly available without the involvement of a publishing company and, today, practically anyone can publish something on the web" (Denscombe, 2012, p.57), resulting in its evaluation being crucial as a discriminating factor.

This literature review consists namely of secondary literature sources, such as articles in academic journals and works published in traditional formats such as books, which explore different perspectives on either one or multiple themes previously mentioned.

1.1.2. Librarians as Teachers or the Concept of the "Teaching Librarian"

The first theme to be explored in this literature review is the evolution of the academic librarian profession. More specifically, the importance that teaching has gained for these professionals.

It must be first acknowledged that libraries are rarely standalone institutions. They usually are part of a larger entity, be it a business or government-related organisation, a school, or an academic institution (Evans and Greenwell, 2018, p.12). As a result, libraries, and by association their staff, are influenced by and strive to achieve the missions and goals of their parent organisation, by creating and maintaining appropriate information services for their stakeholders.

Consequently, in the specific case of academic libraries, the librarians are likely to play an integral part in the students' knowledge enrichment (Shank and Bell, 2018, p.106), expanding their access to learning, ensuring that students are able to attain their goals, "and scaffold student experiences to aid the attainment of independent learning capacity" (McGuinness, 2021).

While there is consensus on this basis of the academic librarian's role, the definition and components of what is an academic librarian have evolved along with the needs of its stakeholders. At first, a librarian assumed a custodian role, watching over small collections in libraries that were mostly dedicated to readers and their reading experience (Ariew, 2014, p. 210). As collections developed and became more "book-centred" in the 1920s and 1930s, librarians began to promote bibliographic teaching programmes in order to help students navigate these larger collections, and to advocate for collaboration with academic faculty in the development of these programmes.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as library spaces and user needs continued to evolve, librarians started to get more involved in educational moments that were not directly related to library resources. Librarians were previously able to filter information and select materials based on reviews, while attempting to maintain collections balanced by differing viewpoints (Grassian and Kaplowitz, 2009, p.88), however, the Internet and the new information and communication technologies "have revolutionised how information and knowledge are accessed, created and disseminated" (Russell, 2008). While established publishers and reputable publications also use the Internet to distribute their content, it is also important to note that any individual or group has the ability to publish their own content through various online platforms and formats. As a result, and in order to continue its mission to assist its users and parent institution, academic librarians now play important roles in teaching the necessary skills for

students to navigate the new information landscape, namely being able to filter and evaluate the information they find online no matter the form or format (Grassian and Kaplowitz, 2009, p.88). Libraries have, therefore, become centre for supporting teaching and learning, creating classrooms in the library for instruction, academic skills and information-related courses, IT support, collaborative learning areas, study rooms and student-centred spaces that encourage learning (Ariew, 2014, p. 210).

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Board of Directors admitted in May 2017 that this "changing higher education environment in which discrete skill sets rapidly evolve" (American Library Association, 2017) necessitated the creation of a new term for librarians that not only highlighted the importance of teaching and their educational goals, but was also deemed more border and participatory than "instruction librarian". As a result, the term "teaching librarian" was coined to describe a librarian "who teaches in various contexts, and for whom teaching may be all or part of their professional responsibilities" (American Library Association, 2017). As they work with and guide students "through this complex information ecosystem at different stages of their personal and cognitive development" (American Library Association, 2017), the teaching librarian is seen as a vital member of the university or educational institution. It is important to note that this term is not universally used to describe this aspect of the librarian's role in academic libraries. Nonetheless, this term and the definition provided by the American Library Association (ALA) and the ACRL Board of Directors, will be used for the purposes of this research as it provides an effective framework for it and the other subjects discussed in the following sections.

While the title of "teaching librarian" might not be widely adopted by academic librarians, the teaching component of their role has been developing and evolving over the past century,

appearing to now be increasingly beyond dispute (McGuinness, 2021). Still, it has been found in the literature that there is a reluctance to fully see librarians as teachers. Although certain professionals see themselves as equal to academic faculty in regards to their teaching, there are librarians that prefer to "describe their work as 'training,' which to them represented a more 'skills-focused,' and less 'complex and high-level' level of practice than the teaching carried out by academics" (McGuinness, 2021). The inability to recognise oneself as a teacher can also be linked to the fact that courses taught by librarians are sometimes supplemental to the primary curriculum. This means that librarians conduct brief sessions and spend little time with a single group of students, which deprives them of the opportunity to bond with students or of seeing any of their progress (Reale, 2017, p.94). The university's faculty and administration may also struggle to see the value of library courses which can in turn affect their professional relationships with the library staff and the resources which are allocated for these sessions. Other factors may include the irregular inclusion of teaching in the Library and Information Science curriculums, which leads to graduates and professionals feeling as if they do not have the instruction skills needed to teach (Hays and Studebaker, 2019, p.1), the conflicts between their teaching moments and other responsibilities related to the academic librarian profession, and even a personal dislike of teaching (McGuinness, 2021).

Nonetheless, despite all the aspects that professionals have listed in relation to equating librarians to teachers, the present information environment and changing user needs have made it vital to prioritise education as a critical part of the academic librarian profession.

1.1.3. Information Literacy (IL)

As the focus of this study will be on pop culture as a teaching tool for Information Literacy (IL), this section will provide an outline of the concept and its significance.

Information Literacy, as stated by the American Library Association (ALA), refers to the ability "to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information needed" (American Library Association, 2006). Information-literate people are then individuals who are capable of applying this skill regardless of where the source of the information is or the type of resource that is being used.

Different disciplines also have distinct "frames of reference and different ways of engaging with information" (Fallon and Breen, 2012, p.147), and as a result, IL is experienced differently for each individual and its definition is still much debated. Nevertheless, the majority of definitions tend to agree that in order to promote IL amongst students and other individuals, it is necessary to equip them with the skills to recognise a need for information, be aware of the different resources, effectively find and evaluate information by employing a range of tools and sources, use the information to support an argument and communicate it effectively, while also avoiding ethical issues such as plagiarism (Fallon and Breen, 2012, p.144).

Also worth noting is that while IL tends to be mistakenly equated with library instruction. The latter is a much broader term that incorporates different elements of critical thinking, media literacy and digital literacy (Head et al, 2020, p.8).

1.1.3.1. Information Literacy and Library Teaching

When searching for literature that defined the role of the academic librarian as a teacher, the concept of IL was often cited as a changing force behind the evolution of the profession and the increasingly important teaching component of the academic librarian. Grassian and Kaplowitz (2009), for instances, state that the concept of Information Literacy and defining its components is a central part of the librarians' "task as instructors. If we do not know exactly what IL is, then how do we teach it, and even more important, how do we know if we have succeeded in our instructional endeavours?" (2009, p.3). This is due to the changes in the rapidly changing information landscape which brought about the need to equip students with the skills to find and evaluate the content that they find, especially online.

In relation to the understanding and teaching in IL, these are often shaped by the standards, models and frameworks created over time to define all that defines an information-literate person and the skills that one must possess. All these can be used by academic librarians as a model or guide to articulate and structure their learning activities, engage with students and achieve the learning objectives that they set out (McGuinness, 2021). One example is the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (2015), which is a cluster of interconnected basic principles relating to information, research, and scholarship, with flexible possibilities for implementation in librarians' teaching activities (American Library Association, 2000, p.7).

In terms of how IL classes are conducted, teaching can be done in the form of complementary or credit-earning courses, taking place face-to-face in library spaces or through online platforms such as Zoom. Due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, classes taking place on online platforms

have become more frequent and many aim to assist in identifying misinformation and give advice on how to act when confronted with it (McGuinness, 2021).

IL sessions can be directed to academic faculty and other stakeholders, however, the target audience tends to be students, as "assessment of student learning has become the gold standard for best practices and characterizes the teaching library" (Ariew, 2014, p.217).

Fallon and Breen (2012, p.149) have mentioned three modes of delivery of Information Literacy programmes. The first are standalone classes, which provide students with additional support and are typically offered without the involvement of academic staff. Although its value and usefulness are acknowledged by the participants, attendance is often low. Secondly, there are integrated sessions which are related to the course of study and are likely the result of the cooperation between librarians and the academic faculty. Lecture time is then allocated for librarians to introduce students to key resources and library tools in their subject area. The downside of this strategy is that these sessions are not usually assessed in a formal sense and rely on lecturers' awareness of IL and its importance. Finally, there are embedded sessions, where Information Literacy is explicitly articulated as a core component of a course programme and consideration is given to relevant learning activities and appropriate assessment at different levels. It is often argued that this approach is the only one truly effective, as IL can only be successfully developed in the context of course content (Fallon and Breen, 2012, p. 149).

1.1.3.2. Teaching Information Literacy in Ireland

Since this research focuses on Information Literacy (IL) teaching in Irish academic libraries, it is then useful to briefly consider the situation of this concept in Ireland.

In the early 2000s, changes such as the investment in teaching and learning centres, allocation of funding for the purchase of electronic journals and datasets, the introduction of semesterisation and modularisation, and the increasing emphasis on quality procedures, have had a significant impact on the role of librarians in Ireland (Fallon and Breen, 2012, p.141). The range and amount of information provided by Irish university libraries have increased drastically, making materials such as electronic versions of peer-review journals from major publishers, databases with full-text journals, reference works, encyclopaedias and statistical data available to university staff and both on-campus and remote students (Fallon and Breen, 2012, p.142). By making all of these resources easily accessible, as well as by promoting initiatives between different libraries, Irish academic libraries hope to ensure that all students can develop the skills to locate and use information effectively in order to succeed in their academic journey.

However, one can not yet consider that IL has been given enough attention in Ireland, as the focus tends to be on information technology rather than Information Literacy (Russell, 2008) and all the skills that it incorporates. Furthermore, as of now, there is no cohesive national strategy or shared understanding of what IL is and its significance.

As a result, Irish academic libraries tend to look to international models in order to integrate IL into the academic curriculum "that is transferable across subjects and clearly demonstrates to academic staff where, when and how information literacy competencies can be embedded into their programmes" (McGuinness, 2021). Maynooth University (MU) Library's framework, for

instance, was fuelled by a curriculum reform and has adapted existing IL frameworks in order to identify five key competencies necessary to have as an information literate student, acknowledging that "IL skills are not isolated from the curriculum or from the development of other critical skills, recognising that they are intrinsically linked to other learning outcomes and graduate attributes" (Maynooth University Library, 2017). This framework is used not only as a foundation for their instructional activities but also mentions "the role that the library could play in supporting the implementation of critical skills in practice" (McGuinness, 2021).

1.1.4. Defining Pop Culture

Popular culture, commonly known as pop culture, is quite a complex term to define. Danesi (2018) suggests starting its definition by considering first what "culture" is. The author defines this term as a means of organising communal life, including aspects such as "everyday activities through specific beliefs, rituals, rites, performances, art forms, symbols, language, clothing, food, music, dance, and other human expressive, intellectual, and communicative pursuits and faculties that are associated with a group of people at a particular period of time" (2018, p.18). Consequently, pop culture exists within the broader term for "culture", but more specifically consists of "spoken and written work, sounds, pictures, objects and artifacts" (Moran, 1985, p.26) that rely on mass media consumption (Dyer et al., 2022, p.4) and are distinct from all those that are part of the high-culture elite.

According to the literature found, it is agreed that pop culture had its emergence in the twentieth century due to technological advances, global markets (Smith et al, 2022, p.24), and an

“ever-expanding and ever-reinforcing media-technology-business partnership” (Danesi, 2018,p.2). More recently, there has been an increase on mass media consumption and distribution thanks to social media, streaming platforms and other information technologies, which have also accelerated the creation process of artifacts. These factors have then led pop culture to play a crucial role in the evolution of practically every modern society and to being identified as not only a way of representing and acknowledging cultural ideologies but also as a means to “shape our ideas about gender, economic status, and other sociocultural classifications” (Peterson, 2010, p.66).

While this research only focuses on pop culture as an educational tool for IL, it is still useful to consider some of the ways in which academia has utilised this concept.

From what has been found in the literature, pop culture has garnered quite a lot of interest as a study subject, with the ever-growing media studies and fan studies showing that pop culture could be used as a lens when investigating social and cultural phenomena. Authors such as Erin Sweeney Smith (2022) have mentioned that pop culture involves intense periods of interest, or “crazes”, which can “blossom and then die away, sometimes to bloom once again several years or even decades later after lying fallow” (2022, p.23). Therefore, tracking these crazes can not only inform a consumption and distribution framework, but also offer new perspectives into the attitudes, ideas, and values of a society in a given place (Moran, 1985, p.26).

Other approaches to pop culture include analysing the representations found in pop culture artifacts. Jutta Welds (2003), for instance, focuses on how the legitimacy of representations of the political world in pop culture are influenced by how the audience views global politics, as well as the location and role of the states and actors in the political world. Furthermore, pop

culture also provides a “background of meanings that help to constitute public images of world politics and foreign policy” (Welds, 2003, p.7). Representations found in pop culture are then dependent on the cultural resources of a society, not only as a starting point for their creation but also in terms of how they are interpreted and understood. This particular aspect of pop culture, according to Smith et al (2022, p.27), can have positive and negative effects. Some representations found in pop culture can be quite valuable in social terms, namely when they challenge cultural norms and promote social justice by highlighting issues related to race, feminism, youth culture, queer culture, and disability culture. Nevertheless, pop culture also contains artifacts that can perpetuate inequality and contribute to a consumerist society that supports capitalist systems (Smith et al, 2022, p.27).

For academic libraries looking to employ pop culture as a tool for education, engagement, and outreach, all of these aspects should be under consideration.

1.1.5. Pop Culture as a teaching tool for Information Literacy

As seen in the previous section, pop culture is defined by its mass appeal to large audiences, accessibility and versatility as a study subject. It has such influence in modern societies, that it is estimated that, in the 1970s, the average American aged two to sixty-five spent about nine years of their life watching television while a five-year-old spent more time watching television than a four-year college student spent in the classroom (Dyer et al., 2022, p.5). A more recent study conducted by Forbes Home concluded that out of 1,005 American consumers, 90% had a streaming service subscription and that “four of the five subscription categories deemed most

important by Americans are entertainment-related: streaming, music, live TV and gaming" (Durrani, 2023).

One can then conclude that pop culture not only is linked to the attitudes, ideas, and values of a society, but is also massively present in individuals' day-to-day lives. All of these factors have led authors to suggest pop culture and its artifacts as a sound strategy for attracting more library users and also for educational purposes.

According to the literature, pop culture can be linked with a higher reasoning and critical skills (Dyer et al., 2022, p.9), and, as a result, can be employed as an educational tool that not only aids in motivating the students regarding the content of their courses, but also enhances the understanding of complex theories and concepts. Furthermore, it can also serve as a basis for lecturers to ground their content in a way that is potentially more relatable and accessible to students (Clapton, 2015, p.170). The drawbacks of using pop culture, generally speaking, tend to be related to skepticism on the students' part, either in terms of not accepting that pop culture can be used to gain knowledge or "based on their perception that popular culture is just a bit of 'silly fun'" (Clapton, 2015, p.172), and the potential emphasis of popular culture rather than the learning outcomes of the course. Nonetheless, while there are a variety of stances on pop culture as a teaching tool, it has been found that referencing popular culture in lessons can have positive effects on "motivation, understanding and attainment (...) and appropriate use of popular culture can enliven learning and enrich the scope of the subject being studied" (Jones, 2023).

Focusing now more specifically on pop culture in IL teaching, the literature found on the subject considers that there are multiple opportunities for library staff with teaching roles.

As mentioned before, academic librarians are in charge of conducting often short sessions in which they are unlikely to bond with students. In spite of this, they must still effectively interest students in the content that is being delivered. In the case of IL, Peterson (2010) deems it as an added challenge since librarians "are facing people who have grown up with the Web and consider themselves to be competent searchers. Add in the stereotype of the musty librarian...let's just say students need some serious convincing" (2010, p.66).

It is this familiarity that students tend to have with web search engines that may also conflate with their understanding of the academic research process, namely the components of critical thinking involved in research, such as synthesising information for an argument and brainstorming keywords (Chavez et al, 2022, p.56). Moreover, Grassian and Kaplowitz (2009) have also pointed out that since Google, Yahoo, Wikipedia and other online platforms offer quick and easy information, other resources, namely those offered by academic libraries, will seem overwhelming in comparison, since they "offer many complex means of getting to, selecting, utilizing, and interpreting results from multiple 'search engines' and then locating materials, online or in print" (2009, p.65). The close relationship that students have with web search engines may then lead to them mistaking the technicalities involved in research for critical thinking, making them believe that they possess the necessary skills to complete their research assignments.

Consequently, academic librarians must work to correct these perceptions, while also boosting students' confidence in their ability to conduct research and finding ways to get them to engage with the content of the sessions. Incorporating pop culture into the IL teachings has been found to be a successful method to address these concerns, while also being useful for illustrating Information Literacy concepts and designing authentic activities (Boss et al, 2015, p.5). The

following are some of the experiences found in the literature of how academic librarians who have used pop culture as an active element of their teaching. One must keep in mind, however, that these accounts are from North American libraries, and while this does not diminish their experiences nor the benefits of pop culture, it is important to not make generalisations since there are a number of social, cultural, and geographical factors at play.

Katelyn Angell's (2016) main concern was engaging students in Information Literacy classes and creating moments of interaction without compromising the learning outcomes. Angell was able to create a collaborative workshop focused on helping students learn the fundamentals of Modern Language Association (MLA) style referencing through several questions all pertaining to popular culture by grounding the new lesson plan on game-based learning and the idea of meeting students where they are. Upon reflecting on the class session, Angell notes that the students visibly displayed enjoyment during class. In fact, the feedback provided by the students indicated a preference for the interactive pop culture format over the more conventional lecture-style approach typically employed in a classroom setting. Angell's session format managed to engage students and effectively promote "teamwork and the incorporation of technologies and content relevant to students' daily lives into the library classroom (i.e., cell phones, popular media)" (Angell, 2016, p.452), allowing for students to become more self-confident in their skills. Another added aspect of including pop culture references is that its inclusion can also be beneficial for librarians, as those who genuinely enjoy pop culture are likely to find the experience of designing classes more enjoyable (Chavez et al, 2022, p.53)

However, simply including pop culture references in an instructional session is not enough to make it a successful and engaging learning experience. In fact, Springer and Yelinek (2011) encountered this issue in their attempts to utilise popular culture to captivate students. They first

tried to use examples such as a news organization falsely reporting the death of an athlete and vampire themes from franchises such as *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *Twilight* (2008), yet, both failed to fully capture the attention and participation of the students (Springer and Yelinek, 2011, pp.78-118). To avoid potential failure in generating student engagement, the selection of pop culture references and the manner in which they are integrated into the class should be of utmost importance. Springer and Yelinek (2011) recommend engaging with students, particularly library student employees, and scouring social media for inspiration on trending topics to enhance library instruction (2011, p.80). Chavez et al (2022), however, warns librarians to not make assumptions about students' interests that might stereotype them, since that may cause students to feel as if they are not seen as individuals (2022, p.57).

Nevertheless, Peterson (2010) warns that selecting a pop culture reference students are likely to love is insufficient because they may focus just on pop culture artifacts rather than IL. To avoid this, a brief overview of the literacy practises and how they relate to the references, as well as a practical activity that builds on the session's concepts and learning objectives, must be provided (2010, 67).

An aspect also worth noting is that the selected pop culture artifact does not have to be liked by the students. Due to its mass distribution, it is quite hard to not be affected by pop culture artifacts, so it is likely that students will have their opinions and perceptions of them. Mattera et al (2022) have mentioned that, when holding their classes based on *Hamilton: An American Musical,* there were students who clearly had negative or neutral opinions regarding this particular artifact. Even though there was the potential to disengage these students, "when given a chance to share their perspective, it was clear that the students in our classes wanted to share

their points of view, positive and negative, which we have found to be a good engagement tool" (2022, p.141).

1.1.2. Literature Conclusion

This section aimed to introduce the main ideas found in the relevant literature, while demonstrating the importance that this research has in the current Information and Library Management field.

The alignment with the mission of its parent institution makes it of paramount importance for academic librarians to be aware of the needs of all library users, in particular the ones of the students. These needs have changed over time and more recently due to the technological developments and an ever-evolving information environment, professionals have noted a bigger emphasis on the teaching side of the academic librarian role. While academic librarians may still feel hesitant to see themselves as teachers or "teaching librarians", they are now in charge of delivering classes that aid students in navigating multiple information sources and acquiring the skills to become information-literate individuals. However, due to the perceptions that students have of library resources as well as their familiarity with quick search results, librarians may struggle to motivate students during IL sessions. In order to tackle these concerns, librarians such as Angell (2016) and Chavez et al (2022) have suggested incorporating pop culture references as a tool to teach Information Literacy. While some negative aspects have been pointed out, the experiences outlined in the literature are generally positive, since pop culture's mass appeal not only generates engagement and interest, but also allows students to attach real meaning and understanding to the session's content when integrated effectively into class activities (Peterson, 2010, p.69).

When researching for relevant literature, the main gap identified is that the grand majority of the sources found are from American authors. While it is unlikely that pop culture is not currently being used as an educational tool for IL teaching in other parts of the world, not being able to find accounts from non-American librarians makes it important to address this gap and diversify the current literature available. Upon identifying this gap, this study then intends to showcase a different geographical and contextual perspective regarding these issues and answer the question: To what extent should Irish academic librarians use pop culture to teach Information Literacy (IL)?

2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to outline the methodology used to address the questions posed in the Introduction.

As a whole, this research falls within the explanatory category and aims to analyse qualitative data, with the primary objective of providing Irish academic librarians with alternative strategies to effectively engage students during Information Literacy (IL) sessions. Additionally, the study also seeks to present a different geographical and cultural perspective on the utilisation of pop culture in IL and library training, so as to address the gaps found in the literature review.

More comprehensive information on the proposed methodology and data collection methods can be found in the subsequent sections.

2.1. Participants

Since one of the objectives of this research was to collect insights from Irish academic librarians, the data collection process was done through remote interviews. Participants had to either be currently in charge or have had experience with designing and conducting IL sessions for first year undergraduates in Irish academic institutions.

2.1.1. Participant sample size

When deciding the methodology for this research, the practical factors were the ones under the most consideration.

Firstly, as it is not possible to interview every academic librarian currently active in Ireland, it was decided to opt for a sample that not only allows to conduct the interviews and data analysis within the timeline of this research, but that is also representative of the population being studied. A small opportunistic sample was chosen as a result, since it not only aligns with the aspects mentioned previously but it is also typical for qualitative analysis and Interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2019, p.145), which is where this research falls in methodological terms. The selection of interview subjects was based on volunteering and self-selection, which meant potential participants were the ones who identified their desire to take part in the research (Saunders et al., 2019, p.323). The only criteria set was that the participants must have had experience with teaching IL sessions, and no distinctions such as gender, job title, or the nature of the academic institution were made, as the goal was to gather as much information as possible within the time constraints of the research.

The original aim set in June 2023 was to interview 6 academic librarians at a minimum. After the recruitment process, the researcher managed to recruit 8 participants from 5 different academic institutions in Ireland.

2.1.2. Participant Recruitment

Due to the timeline of this research, the response rate was expected to be quite low, as potential participants could be on leave, their profession is quite time-consuming, and the time constraints of this dissertation only allowed for interviews to take place during a certain period. Consequently, it was necessary to contact as many potential interview subjects as possible and be open-minded regarding the sample's criteria.

All of the potential participants were contacted via email. The message contained information regarding the aims of the research, the structure of the interviews, the ethical procedures being undertaken, and the contact information of the researcher in case of interest. This email was then first sent to all the subscribers of the mailing list for the Academic and Special Libraries Library Association Ireland section. This ensured that different individuals in the same sector would be made aware of this research and could potentially show interest in being interviewed. The second step was to then contact different academic libraries in Ireland. Due to time constraints, a decision was made to not make any distinctions regarding location or whether it was a public or private institution. It was also agreed that interviews with librarians from the same academic library would not be discouraged, as these professionals still had distinct experiences and inputs that could be valuable for this research.

Through both of these channels, this research was able to gather 8 interview subjects. All the interviewees, consisting of 4 female and 4 male subjects, agreed to participate in the research for no compensation. Although the grand majority of participants are from institutions in County Dublin, the diversity in job titles, main duties in their respective institutions, insights, and

experiences with teaching have provided enough data for an interesting study on the subject under discussion.

Upon accepting the interview request, the participants were sent the Information and Consent Form (Appendix 1), which further details the study that was being conducted, the interviews, the data collection and analysis, their rights, and assurance that the research had been previously approved by Dublin Business School and was being supervised. The lesson plan (Appendix 2) that would be used as a starting point for the questions regarding pop culture was also sent shortly after so that participants would have time to review it prior to the interviews. The one-on-one interviews were scheduled according to the availability of the participants and were conducted online, using Zoom and Google Meet, for both the convenience of the interview subjects and the researcher. Using online platforms had the added advantage of allowing the researcher to reach out to participants that were located outside of their immediate location, giving this research a bigger geographical outreach, while saving on travel costs and time.

2.1.3. Interviews

The interviews took place in the space of 7 days, lasting between 20 to 50 minutes. Prior to the official start of the interview, the researcher debriefed all the participants in regards to their role in the study, the nature of the questions, and the participants' rights, so as to avoid any potential ethical issues. As mentioned in the Information and Consent Form, the interviews were to be recorded for the purposes of the data analysis, and so the researcher asked for the consent of all

the participants before employing the sound recording features on their personal computer and tablet.

Participants were only asked about their experiences with teaching, concretely on the subject of Information Literacy, their feedback on the lesson plan that was previously sent to them, as well as their insights on pop culture and its integration into teaching. Although there were a set of prepared questions (see Appendix 3), the interviews were semi-structured, with the researcher asking follow-up questions or guiding the conversation away from the pre-set questions in order to obtain as much useful data as possible.

2.2. Design

This section addresses the research design of the dissertation, which encompasses the overall strategy through which the researcher intends to address the research questions, objectives, philosophy, approach, and methodology for data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2019, p.163).

When considering the goals of this study, Phenomenology was the ideal option concerning a research strategy. This method rejects ideas such as the existence of universal reality, considering instead that "things can be seen in different ways by different people at different times in different circumstances, and that each alternative version needs to be recognized as being valid in its own right" (Denscombe, 2017, p.140). Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences and interpretations of the participants, and intends not to make statements about the world, but about people's conceptions of the world (Marton, 1986, p.32).

Aligned with the perceptions of Phenomenology, the research philosophy embraced by this study is Interpretivism, which focuses on gaining insights into individuals' beliefs and lived experiences through qualitative data analysis (Denscombe, 2017, p.8). This philosophical approach perceives the social world as a complex and multi-layered phenomenon, necessitating a process of interpretation to comprehend its nuances.

Also worth noting that this research is explanatory in nature, as it aims to ask questions and gain insight into a particular topic of interest or phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2019, p.187), in this case, pop culture as an educational tool in Information Literacy teaching and in academic libraries in Ireland.

2.2.1. Lesson Plan

Due to the particular topics that this research aims to cover, it was decided that simply going over the main considerations found in the literature and then using them for the data collection would not suffice. Although it was unlikely to only encounter participants that were not familiar with pop culture or how it could be employed as a teaching tool, it would not be prudent to make generalisations regarding the interviewees and their knowledge. As a result, having a hypothetical example of how to apply pop culture in a library session was the best way to ensure that all potential participants could have a discussion and reflect on the main research themes, no matter their experience or knowledge of pop culture. Consequently, it was necessary to design a lesson plan (see Appendix 2).

First, it was decided to focus on one single component of Information Literacy teaching. As mentioned in the literature review, there is a wide range of skills that make up an information literate individual and it is not possible to cover the entire skill set since library teaching tends to take place in shorter standalone sessions. After looking through some examples of workshops and classes that are currently being conducted by Irish academic libraries, the researcher settled on designing a class that focused namely on searching for information.

Afterwards, and to ensure that the lesson plan could potentially be successful and easy to adapt to different contexts, it was also important to take into account all of the considerations found in the literature review. One of the main concerns regarding pop culture in IL sessions was how it could be applied in an informative and interesting way, without unintentionally disengaging students who could potentially not be familiar with certain references or who came from different cultural backgrounds. The latter was of special concern since Irish academic institutions have quite diverse student bodies, hosting various courses, ages, and nationalities.

In the end, the suggestions made by Monika Chavez and Esteban Aguilar in *Integrating Pop Culture into the Academic Library* (2022) were found to be the most appropriate. The authors mentioned that instead of using specific artifacts such as series, films or music, they instead opted for streaming platforms as a basis for their sessions, due to how widespread they are as well as the influence that they have in the way that individuals currently interact with media and entertainment. Most importantly, they found that streaming platforms can be seen as analogous to academic library databases (Chavez et al., 2022, p.58). In spite of the latter tendentially having search mechanisms that are more complex, the concept is similar enough to showcase to students that the skills that they use to engage with streaming platforms are transferable and can be applied in an academic setting.

After establishing these foundations, the lesson plan was then prepared with a small group in mind, so that the class activities could be as engaging as possible and would ensure that students could construct new knowledge.

Since this lesson plan was not going to be put into practice and was instead supposed to showcase one theoretical example of pop culture in an IL session, it was necessary to employ a certain level of detail regarding the rationale of the lesson plan and class delivery so that the potential interviewees could understand what the aims of the session were without having to see it take place.

2.2.2. Interview design

Due to its explanatory nature, interviews were seen as not only the most appropriate way to gather data to answer the research question but also the method that aligned the most with the research strategy and philosophy.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were one-on-one and semi-structured. For the convenience of both parties, they were conducted through online platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet, with the latter being the preferred method.

Although it was always the intention to conduct semi-structured interviews, the researcher did not intended for them to have a rigid structure. Taking into account the philosophy, strategy and nature of this research, the main focus of these interviews was to understand how meanings are socially constructed and to promote reflexive engagement by the interviewee so they may explore their underlying assumptions and beliefs (Saunders et al, 2019, p.440) about the main

topics explored by this research. It was then necessary to lead the interviews in a more dialogic way.

After many drafts, it was then decided to settle for nine questions (Appendix 3), which placed the focus mainly on the experience of these professionals with teaching IL and the lesson plan previously designed by the researcher. The main aim behind this was to not only cover all the themes of the Literature Review in a non-biased way and gather enough data to answer the research question, but so that it would also allow librarians to discuss their thoughts on IL and pop culture more in-depth thanks to having the lesson plan as an auxiliary example, rather than plainly discussing pop culture as a whole. With the ten questions and following a semi-structured model, it was estimated that the interviews would last sometime between 30 minutes to 1 hour. This would ensure that participants could answer each question without having to feel pressured by time constraints, and also allow them to allocate different amounts of time to each question depending on their professional role and personal insights. This timeframe ended up somewhat matching the reality of the data collection since interviews actually lasted between 20 to 50 minutes.

During the interviews, the researcher also made follow-up questions or statements or would even stir away from the prepared questions in order to promote a discussion with the interview subjects and allow them to share more of their insights and experiences. This method allowed for a more conversational and non-rigid atmosphere, where it was possible to discuss multiple topics found in the literature review, and garner different perspectives from library professionals. The recruitment and selection process also further aided this aspect, since the variety of job titles, years of experience and insights of the participants also allowed for the collection of different

data regarding Information Literacy teaching in Irish academic libraries and the integration of pop culture.

2.3. Materials

2.3.1. Lesson Plan

The lesson plan was used as a foundation for the one-on-one interviews. Since these were held online, it was not necessary to print it out to ensure that the participants would have access to it; instead the 11-page digital document was sent to all interviewees upon their acceptance to participate in the research. The lesson plan was sent in Word format via email a few days prior to when their respective interview was scheduled, so that the participants would have time to review it and garner feedback. Since they had their own digital version, the participants could open the document on their devices during the interview, making it more convenient for them when answering questions about the lesson plan. The researcher also had their own copy of the document open when the interviews were taking place to make sure that they were following along with the discussion.

2.3.2. Interview prompt sheet

The interviews were semi-structured and dialogic, however, it was still necessary to have the prepared questions written down in order to ensure that all the topics were covered for the

purposes of the data analysis. During the interviews, the researcher had an interview prompt sheet open on their device with the 9 questions, and, as the interview progressed, they would add some prompts or statements for follow-up questions that could contribute to the discussion.

2.3.3. Information and Consent Form

After reaching out to potential interview subjects and them showing their availability to participate in the study, the researcher would send them the Information and Consent Form via email. This document contained information on the purposes of the research, the role and rights that the participants, the time commitment and structure of the interviews, as well as the contact of this research's supervisor. Furthermore, the document also mentioned that this particular research was previously approved by Dublin Business School. All the forms were then sent back to the researcher, containing the participant's signature, ensuring their willingness to proceed with the study.

2.3.4. Audio recording device

For the purposes of the data analysis, all the one-on-one interviews were recorded using the "Voice Recorder" feature on the researcher's personal computer and tablet. Having the recordings on both devices allowed the researcher to have more than one version of the recording, making the process of transcribing the interviews easier in case one of them was not particularly clear. Additionally, both recording features were tested prior to the interviews so as to ensure that there was no risk of malfunction or of the audio being lost.

2.3.5. Audio and transcription storage devices

After completing the interviews, all the audio recordings were stored immediately on the researcher's personal computer and Google Drive, both of which are password-protected. Another backup was created on a USB pen drive shortly after. The same procedure was performed with the transcripts of the interviews.

2.3.6. Interview transcription softwares

Manually transcribing eight interviews would be quite time consuming, and due to the rigid timeline of this study, it was decided to use a programme that could provide a a rough audio transcription that the researcher could then properly revise and polish for the data analysis. For this purpose, two audio editing softwares were used: HappyScribbe and Podcastle. The main two reasons behind this was their ease of use, the fact that both had clear data privacy policies, and the compability of the softwares with MAXQDA, the qualitative analysis software used by the researcher to do the coding and revision of the data. This compatibility allowed the researcher to match the time stamps on the document with the audio of the interview, facilitating the revising and polishing of the transcripts.

2.3.7. Qualitative analysis software

As mentioned in the previous section, MAXQDA was used in order to analyse all the data gathered by the researcher. Due to the amount of transcripts to be analysed, a computer-assisted

software proved to be quite advantageous, as this particular programme allowed the researcher to conduct the data analysis with ease, as the free trial version of MAXQDA contains different features especially made for analysing interview transcripts and for coding.

2.4. Procedures

2.4.1. Time Management

Due to the scope and strict timeline of this research, time management was one of the key components under consideration. A timeline was drawn up in mid-June which contained proposed submissions for each component of the study, and although these dates were flexible, it was helpful for the researcher to organise all tasks that they had to complete.

The interview questions and lesson plan, were developed in the last weeks of June and early July, alongside the literature review. This procedure allowed the researcher to create data collection tools that aligned with the previous research and could further contribute to answering the research question. A more focused account of the data collection process can be found in the section below.

2.4.2. Data Collection and Interview Procedures

The data collection itself started in the first weeks of July, when the researcher started to reach out to potential participants via email. Since it was previously established in the proposed timeline that all the interviews had to take place prior to the end of the month, the researcher

scheduled the 8 interviews to take place in a two-week period. In the end, after collecting all the Information and Consent forms from participants, all the interviews were scheduled to take place between the 17th of July and the 26th of July. It is worth mentioning that the participants did not have access to the interview questions, as the Information and Consent form and the lesson plan were the only documents sent to them prior to the interview. However, the participants were made aware of what topics were going to be discussed thanks to the Information and Consent form as well as the researcher's debrief before the official start of the interview. The pre-prepared questioned in interview prompt sheet were all asked in every interview, although the follow-up questions would vary according to the participant's answers.

All the interviews were transcribed shortly after they took place, using the HappyScribe and PodCastle software, and then subsequently edited and reviewed so as to ensure that they would be suitable for the data analysis.

2.5. Ethics

Although this particular research does not deal with controversial topics nor did it involve participants from vulnerable groups, it was still important to ensure that it adhered to the necessary ethical standards and that integrity and responsibility were upheld at all times.

The researcher made sure to include in the emails reaching out to potential participants the context of the research, the fact that it had been previously approved by Dublin Business School, and that the researcher would be anonymising and assigning pseudonyms for all those involved. Furthermore, the Information and Consent form was prepared and sent for review to all

professionals that showed interest in being interviewed. In this document, the potential participant would find their rights, which included the right to withdraw, not answer questions if they chose to do so and have their data destroyed, as well as the reassurance that anonymisation and pseudonymisation would be in place and that all personal identifiers would be avoided. All of this information was once again mentioned during the debrief prior to officially starting each interview. The researcher also made sure to have the consent of all participants before starting to record the audio of the interview.

Upon transcribing the interviews, the researcher edited and reviewed each transcript and removed all information that might be deemed too personal or that could potentially identify the participant. Moreover, the softwares used to transcribe and analyse the transcripts all had clear privacy statements or policies.

All primary data, including recordings and transcripts, was saved in the researcher's personal computer and Google Drive, both of which are password protected. A backup in a USB pen drive was also created for safekeeping.

2.6. Data Analysis

In order to go over the qualitative data recovered from the interviews, it was decided that a thematic analysis as stipulated by Braun and Clarke (2006) was the correct approach. This entails devising the coding and categorisation of the data, which in turn enables one to identify common patterns and themes within the data (Denscombe, 2017, p.116) and relate them to the research question of this study, while also ensuring that "any theory developed by the research remains

closely in touch with its origins in the data – that it remains 'grounded' in empirical reality" (Denscombe, 2017, p.116). Along with the thematic analysis, a more theoretical approach was also taken into consideration, since it required more engagement with the literature prior to the data analysis process (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.86) and the coding was specifically done with the intention of answering the research question. Once these codes were identified and analysed, and consideration was put into how they may relate to each other, these were then combined so as to form different overarching themes. These themes are meant to capture the "essence" of the data, so their names are very concise and punchy, so as to give the reader a sense of what the theme is about (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.93).

Following these suggestions and by using the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA, the researcher repeatedly went through the entirety of the data set in an active way so as to search for meanings and patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87) and identified certain sentences that could be assigned as codes. The codes found include "Factors of student engagement", "Information desk and teaching" and "Transferable skills and relevancy", amongst others. Upon identifying these codes, their respective quotes found on the transcript, along with the amount of times that they appeared throughout the different documents, were then gathered in order to enter everything into Excel table. This table then made it easier to find common codes between all the transcripts and then gradually combine these into themes and subthemes that related to the literature review and research question. In the end, "Teaching Information Literacy (IL)" and "Pop Culture in IL Teaching" were identified as two main themes, and from these, other subthemes and sub-subthemes were originated.

The final report of the results can be found in the next chapter.

3. RESULTS

The current chapter delves deep into the findings of the data collection process and its analysis.

To recapitulate the main aspects of this research, its aim is to answer the following question: To what extent should Irish academic librarians use pop culture to teach Information Literacy (IL)?

In order to do so, it was decided to follow a more explanatory approach, so as to ask questions and gain insight into pop culture as an educational tool in Information Literacy teaching in academic libraries in Ireland. The main goal upon completing this research is to then present a non-American-centred perspective in regards to these topics as well as demonstrate to Irish academic librarians' potential alternative methods for engaging students during IL sessions.

For the purposes of the data collection, the researcher conducted a series of semi-structured one-on-one interviews with academic librarians who are either currently in charge of planning and conducting IL classes or have had experience doing so in an academic institution in Ireland. These interviews consisted of non-strict discussions about their thoughts on the main themes of this research, their experiences with teaching and their feedback on the lesson plan that showcases an example of how pop culture can be used in library teaching.

As previously mentioned in the Methodology chapter, all the participants were informed that the researcher was going to anonymise and assign pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy and avoid any potential ethical concerns. Any personal identifiers such as the name of the institution where these professionals are employed, their gender, years of experience or geographical location were also taken out. As a result, the table below only contains the code names assigned to each participant as well as their job title.

Code Name	Abbreviation	Job Title
Librarian 1	L1	Library Assistant
Librarian 2	L2	Head of Academic Information and Resource Centre
Librarian 3	L3	Head Librarian
Librarian 4	L4	Information and Research Services Manager
Librarian 5	L5	Digital Literacy Librarian
Librarian 6	L6	Learning and Teaching Librarian
Librarian 7	L7	Subject Librarian
Librarian 8	L8	Assistant Head of Library Services for [Institution] Library Services

Upon completing the transcription and review of all the interviews, the subsequent transcripts were subjected to a process of thematic analysis, which followed the suggestions found in Braun and Clarke (2006). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the researcher wen through all of the transcripts in an active way, so as to find patterns, identify different codes and extract quotes that supported the coding process, all of which was then inserted into an Excel table. Due to its considerable size, it is not possible to show the full extent of this table. Nevertheless, two extracts of the researcher's work can be found below.

Main Theme	Subtheme	Sub-sub theme	List of Codes	Frequency	Quotes
Teaching Information Literacy	Student Engagement		What type of student are they?	1	**L8:** So whether they're like a certificate student or a degree student versus a postgraduate student, or if they're advanced entry or a mature student.
Teaching Information Literacy	Experiences with teaching	Factors for planning and designing lessons	First years have difficulties with IL skills	2	**L8:** Some of that we were finding, and they were coming in and we were jumping into how to find a journal article, and they didn't even know what a journal article was or they wouldn't even understand how to find a chapter in a book, that kind of thing, up to the more high level in the standard, like how to develop a search strategy, how to search in library databases, how to evaluate information to resources around classes, around, like, critical thinking or critical writing So they're useful in those classes around evaluating information or critical thinking and all that kind of thing. Or critical writing or critical research. Because again we find they come into us and they don't know what critical thinking is. They think critical just means criticizing. That's bad, do you know what I mean? So even that's useful to get them to know that

Main Theme	Subtheme	Sub-sub theme	List of Codes	Frequency	Quotes
Pop culture in IL Teaching	Potential Downside		Cultural fragmentation and subcultures	1	**L7:** No, it's more that I think culturally, I think we are more fragmented as a society now than in terms of culture and popular culture than we would have been in the past. There are just so many sub communities with their own cultures that I know nothing about. And often you will have different fashions, cultural fashions, that are in competition with each other within, let's say, a group of undergraduates.
Pop culture in IL Teaching	Benefit		Pop culture makes it memorable	2	**L5:** I think the benefit is the practical experience, but not just in the class itself, because this is memorable. So when it comes time for them to look for their own information, to conduct their own research, they are going to remember having done it before. They're like, well, I already know how to do this, I've learned how to do this, and I already know what this database I want to access test looks like. Because I think where a lot of people struggle with it is just getting used to the layout of a database. So introducing them to it, letting them play around with it, is going to make it less daunting for them. **L4:** My favourite classes were the ones that introduced pop culture to describe things like I will never forget.

The codes were divided into two main themes: Teaching Information Literacy and Pop Culture in IL Teaching. These themes, in turn, then led to the identification of other subthemes and sub-subthemes, which are used as subheadings for the more detailed exploration of these findings that can be found in the next sections.

3.1. Main Theme 1: Teaching Information Literacy

3.1.1. Librarians and Teaching

Although the original interview prompt did not include questions that were explicitly about this, the researcher found it important to mention the specific experience of librarians with teaching during the discussions with participants, since it was part of the considerations found on the literature review. For those purposes, the researcher asked two main questions: Did the participant have previous experience with teaching before becoming a librarian, and did they have a module during their Masters that focused on the teaching component of the profession?

Regarding the first question, the participants' answers matched to some extent. On one hand, L3 and L7 mentioned having had the experience from their previous employment as an academic faculty or educational background. On the other hand, there were those such as L4 and L8 whose teaching experience came with having been previously employed as a library assistant. L5's experience came about with their current position.

It is also important to note that both L8 and L2 have also mentioned that there is a distinction between formal and informal library teaching:

> **L2:** *"I suppose the thing is, when you think about teaching is how do you define teaching as a librarian? (...) the minute you work in a library, you teach. We call them informal teaching situations. (...) So I would have informally taught a lot of students in the library, at the library desk or through the stacks. Okay. In a formal classroom setting, then it would have been when I became IL Librarian (...)"*

> **L8:** "*And I suppose there's two elements: there's the informal teaching and then there's the formal teaching. So I worked as a library assistant and I was on the front desk, the main desk, dealing with the users. So that kind of reference interview, that informal teaching moment (...).*"

And these moments of informal teaching were also mentioned by L1 and L2 as part of their current or past experience with teaching. L3 has specifically outlined the importance of informal teaching as a part of the profession as it allows for the creation of a closer bond with students.

Worth noting as well is that when talking about their first experiences with formal teaching, L2 and L7 have also mentioned their initial mistakes, which were mostly related to trying to transfer too much information at a fast pace.

To either improve or so as to make up for not having a lot of experience with teaching, various participants have mentioned learning from predecessors or colleagues, which allowed them to gain confidence and even develop their own style of teaching.

Also related to this topic is the second question. When asked about having had a module during their Masters degree that focused on the teaching component of the profession, all have the participants have shown awareness of it. However, their perspectives on this module differ. There were those such as L1 and L5 who had a quite positive experience and discussed how important it proved to be on their current professions.

L6, however, mentions that their experience with this module was not particularly successful due to poor organisation of the module activities.

There were also participants who did not have the module during their masters. One of which is L8, who explains that:

> **L8:** "*I initially thought that I wouldn't need it (...) But then, when I went back to the workplace, the role that I was promoted to was heavily involved in teaching and learning. (...) if I was to give advice to anybody doing the Masters, (...) it actually should be an essential module that everyone completes because it's so much part of the fabric of what we do, you know?"*

3.1.2. Experience with teaching Information Literacy

Regarding their experiences with Information Literacy sessions, the participants' accounts tend to be quite similar to each other and to what was found in the literature review.

Besides the informal teaching at the information desks, the participants have mentioned that they held a variety of integrated, embedded and standalone sessions, with a diverse range of duration, class size and format. Some examples were theoretical demonstrations in workshops, lecture-based classes with large groups, first years' inductions and interactive activities with small groups.

It was often noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions, Information Literacy teaching had to be done through online platforms. This element has been implied to have had an impact on the content of the IL sessions, which started to focus on misinformation and identifying "fake news". Although the situation has changed since then and classes can now be conducted face-to-face, workshops and standalone sessions still tend to be conducted online.

One aspect often mentioned by the participants is the class requests from academic faculty. L5, L6, L7 and L8 have all mentioned that faculty members might ask for librarians to plan a class that is related to a particular assignment or skill that they wish students to acquire, and that time slots, number of students and format also tend to be dictated by the faculty member as well. This, however, tends to be the extent of their involvement with the lessons, as the class design is mostly up to the individual or to a team of librarians. When conducting the session itself, lecturers might be present and interactive, but more often:

> **L7:** *"(...) what will happen is they will introduce me to the group of students, and then sometimes they don't even stay for the actual session itself. Sometimes they will, but it's often the case that they will just introduce me, and then, in a sense, I've been given a space with the students and I will get going on my particular session."*

Another topic discussed during the interviews was what sort of elements or aspects librarians took into account when designing a class.

As classes can be requested by faculty, it has been mentioned by L3 that they must "be bespoke to what the academic wants".

Other important elements to have under consideration when planning a session are the time constraints and the size of the class. As librarians often do not have control over the time and the environment of these sessions, there needs to be a balance between being adaptable to different circumstances and transmitting the desired knowledge to students.

Above all though, the most important factor is the target audience. The participants have mentioned that the most crucial part of planning a class is to make it as relevant as possible for students that will take part in it. Consequently, other than the input of the academic faculty,

librarians tend to consider the need to align the sessions with the courses, disciplines, and the assignments of students, so as to make it as bespoke as possible for them and address the information needs that they have at that particular stage. This can be achieved by using examples that are related to the audience's area of study or by centering classes on a particular skill like database searching or critical thinking.

Other than relevancy, participants have voiced their concern with trying to make classes as engaging possible. In order to do so, L1, L4, and L6 have said that they try to avoid making their lessons on databases and other tools too lecture-based, by doing demonstrations and by interacting with students often. For example:

> **L4**: *"(...) I ask for students to explain how they use it for the ones that are using it. And I have had engagement where students explain how they use it. And that informs me on how students are using it and how I can better use it, because I think it is a reciprocal process."*

An important aspect that was voiced by participants as well was to avoid generalising students. Although classes conducted by librarians tend to be shorter and standalone, the students who attend them have different learning styles, experiences and knowledge. In particular:

> **L2:** *"(...) you need to understand that you have students in that room who are highly advanced with their Information Literacy skills and other ones that are fairly low. You need to teach them all in some way. They all need to learn something from it. (...) you're trying to create lessons and class activities beforehand and balance that with trying to deliver – as often you're under pressure – deliver as much classes as you can."*

Due to the fact that that Irish academic institutions tend to have a diverse student body with a considerable number of foreign students, participants such as L5 and L4 have also mentioned the particular needs that these students might have, namely in relation to language and differences in their academic background.

Along with all of these aspects, it is also important to take into account the aftermath of the sessions. It has been advised that:

> **L3:** *"(...) anyone who's designing information literacy sessions should be checking in with their customer service team, getting the feedback of that sort of thing. What's working, what's not working. So that's my biggest thing about Information Literacy, is that it should really encompass what's being experienced at the front line."*

3.1.3. Student Engagement

Due to the fact that this study focuses on pop culture's potential to generate engagement, it was necessary to ask about the participants' experiences in regards to students' participation.

The general consensus is that engagement varies depending on a range of factors.

One of the main ones is what sort of students they are. The grand majority of participants have mentioned that engagement with first year undergraduates tends to be quite low. Although, as L6 mentioned, first years tend to complete the tasks set out for the sessions, they are unlikely to speak up or ask questions. Participants such as L8, L5 and L1 echoed this sentiment, as, from their experiences, undergraduate students tend to be very quiet and more reserved than

postgraduates, likely due to the fact that they are new to the institution and might not to be confident in themselves and their skills at this stage, especially in regards to their critical thinking skills.

Nevertheless, it has been found that first years do get more confident as the academic year goes on and are likely to engage more over time.

Other factors that have been listed are age group, as, according to L1, mature students are more likely to participate; nationality, as from the experience of L8, Irish students tend to be more quiet than international students; and discipline or area of study, as:

> **L6:** "*I found generally that students in the arts topics like Literature or Theatre or maybe History might be a bit more responsive than, say, students in the sciences or in in sciences like Chemistry or like Engineering, because, in the latter subjects, they're used to being given single facts to absorbing information, whereas there's more debate involved in other disciplines.*"

Type or format of the class is also cited as a major factor:

> **L3:** "*It depends whether you do it on site, for example, in a computer room, or whether it's virtual, whether it's kind of mandatory, as in it's built into their program, versus they can just turn up to drop-in sessions.*"

Standalone sessions have been discussed especially with L2, who has mentioned that while these sessions happen frequently, the number of students who sign up tends to be quite limited. Still, the voluntary nature of these sessions makes it so that the students who attend are motivated to learn and are more likely to be active during classes.

Online learning has also presented a challenge since students are likely to have their cameras off, which makes it much harder to assess whether they are paying attention to the classes or are engaged.

In order to try and promote more engagement and confidence amongst students, particularly undergraduates, participants have listed some interesting methods, such as ice breakers, classes with practical group exercises and class discussions. Online tools such as polls, quizzes and online whiteboards have been highlighted by all participants as a particularly efficient method, both in an online and face-to-face environment.

Six out of eight participants have also discussed the importance of trying to build a relationship with students during classes, by making the sessions less formal, promoting a non-judgemental class environment so that students feel comfortable asking questions during or after class, or by trying to relate their experiences with the students.

Furthermore, L3 and L8 have both mentioned the importance of collaborating with academic faculty and making sure that they are aware of the library services and sessions, so that they may promote these to their students.

3.2. Main Theme 2: Pop Culture in IL Teaching

3.2.1. Benefits of Pop Culture

Although the participants seemed to have different experiences with popular culture, the consensus regarding this topic as a whole was quite positive.

There were those such as L5 and L7 who admitted to not have had much experience with it and were not sure how it could be incorporated into sessions, despite not having a negative view on it.

Other participants' experiences, namely L1, tend to be related to occasional references to pop culture during classes, either on a spontaneous way or, as mentioned by especially by L8:

> **L8:** "*(...) when I used to be teaching, we used to actually actively incorporate not only academic examples of how to evaluate information and how to look out for kind of predatory journals and maybe journals that weren't of an academic standard. But we'd always actually use pop culture references (...) we'd pick maybe where a songwriter had stolen another songwriter's lyrics or copied a video. Or maybe, I remember there was one here in Ireland (...) there was a fire in a Lidl in Tallaght. But the Irish Times put up a photograph of the actual – the picture they put up was of a Lidl and fire in Germany. But it was interesting that it came from our national broadsheet. So we used to use that as an example."*

It has been discussed that the main appeal of using examples such as these is that not only they tend to make classes more exciting for students, but also makes the process of lesson planning more enjoyable for the librarian as well.

L8, who out of all the participants seemed to have the most experience with teaching pop culture, also noted that incorporating references makes the content of the class more accessible to students, instead of "dumbing it down" as it might be perceived. This is especially useful since:

> **L8:** *"(...) you're fighting and competing for their time and attention. So you have to put things in plain English. You have to show it as engaging. It's worth their while. It's interesting. And then, once they're in the door and in front of you, then you also can talk about the more high-level academic language (...)"*

Also interesting to note, L4 mentioned their previous experience as a student in classes where pop culture artifacts have been used and how memorable these learning moments were.

In regards to the lesson plan and how it uses pop culture to teach Information Literacy, the feedback was also quite favourable. All the participants pointed out that the main appeal of using pop culture, more specifically of comparing streaming platforms and library databases, was its relatability and how it frames Information Literacy skills. In particular, participants see this comparison between the two platforms as a way of introducing students to the idea that the basic skills that they need to perform well academically, in this case, how to search for information, is already within them as they already often interact with different databases on their daily lives. By showcasing the transferable nature of IL, students can then build upon the basic skills that they already have, become more confident academically and develop more complex research mechanisms and critical thinking skills.

Other than being analogous to library databases, the choice of using streaming platforms was particularly well received due to the fact it addresses one of the main concerns related to pop culture. As mentioned in the literature review, pop culture artifacts are widely accessible but it is unlikely that everyone has the same knowledge or enthusiasm towards pop culture, which might lead to students being disengaged. Using streaming platforms is then seen as inclusive since, as mentioned by participants, they are a broad culture phenomenon, in particular because:

> **L7:** *"[It's] something that isn't, let's say, part of youth pop culture, but is actually a more general aspect of pop culture in the sense of in a way, you could say it's almost like it's more about a massive shift that has taken place this in media culture in general. (...) [It's] an example of something from in the way that media is consumed, in this particular case, movies and programs through streaming platforms. And I felt that that because you were looking at a broader cultural phenomenon that in many ways, nearly everyone is almost compelled to engage with – People have to, with the shifts that have taken place."*

Instead of using streaming platforms, L1 and L2 have pointed out other suggestions of databases, such as Airbnb and online shopping websites. L4 also suggested for a future class on searching for information, one could use YouTube, as the online platform is even more accessible than streaming services and could be an interesting method to discuss search algorithms and other implications of the current information environment.

Along with it being seen as a useful educational tool, participants have also noted that there are other benefits that pop culture brings to the library. L2 has mentioned that pop culture could be very effective for marketing purposes and outreach, while L4 and L8 have pointed out that if librarians decide to incorporate pop culture artifacts in their classes, they can ask for suggestions and feedback from students and faculty members, which, in turn, creates moments of cooperation between all entities as well as promoting the library services and inclusivity.

3.2.2. Potential Downsides of Pop Culture

Concerning the downsides of popular culture in general, the main one discussed by the participants was similar to what was found in literature review: there is always the possibility of students not understanding the references being made, which can lead to disengagement. Although pop culture is widespread and easily accessed, it is necessary to keep in mind that nowadays with the current information technologies, pop culture artifacts are created and distributed differently. As a result:

> **L7:** *"(...) I think we are more fragmented as a society now than – in terms of culture and popular culture – than we would have been in the past. There are just so many subcommunities with their own cultures that I know nothing about (...) I don't feel sometimes that I'm sufficiently attuned to the sort of things that [undergraduates] would be interested in, and I would think there would be a danger of doing something that would come across as rather artificial."*

Five out of eight participants have discussed the issue in regards to foreign students. In order to not make them feel excluded or even potentially offend them, it is necessary to be cautious of what sort of references one makes, and the advised route is to make sure that the artifacts being referenced have global appeal and influence.

L8 and L7 have also mentioned that this issue is also applicable to Irish students, as even examples involving local news, political events or an Irish television series might not be successful amongst these students.

Another point of caution mentioned is that one must consider that students have different interests and skills. It is important to remember that there are students who might not be as aware of pop culture due to factors such as age, or not being as comfortable with the technologies used in the current information landscape. This includes streaming platforms, that despite having contributed to a major shift in how entertainment media currently is consumed and amounted to 1.2 billion users as of 2021 (Stoll, 2023), might still not be accessible to every student that one encounters in an IL session. As voiced out by L3:

> **L3:** "*When we talk about the zeitgeist and stuff like that, it can kind of seem like everybody feels the same about something. But it's only when it's brought up in some sort of way that you find out there's actually a lot of differences and there's nothing that's completely universal.*"

In regards to the lesson plan itself, L1, L5, L7 and L6 have all pointed out that, although the comparison between streaming platforms and library databases is interesting and understandable for most, there might still be issues with making the students fully grasp this analogous relationship or making it past the more surface level understanding. L6 and L7 then advise that the person conducting the hypothetical session needs to stress the ideas being presented, as well as teach students how to use the tools that they are working with, instead of assuming that they will be familiar with it.

Overall, participants still consider that the identified issues do not dismiss the use of pop culture, nor the benefits previously mentioned. L5 and L8 in particular have stated that there is always going to be disengaged students or people who might not completely understand the content of the class, no matter what methods are being used. Nevertheless, it is still important to adapt the

material in order for the audience to learn the desired knowledge. And in the case of pop culture, this means constantly changing the examples or references so as to ensure a better chance of success.

4. DISCUSSION

This research aimed to discuss the potential that popular culture can have as an educational tool for academic librarians who are currently conducting Information Literacy sessions on academic institutions in Ireland. The rationale behind this research was to address the gap found in the literature, as the majority tends to focus on the experiences of American librarians. Consequently, continuing to study pop culture and its usefulness for IL instruction from another contextual perspective is quite beneficial due to the ongoing importance that IL teaching has in academic libraries.

The question at the center of this study is "to what extent should Irish academic librarians use pop culture to teach Information Literacy (IL)?", and in order to answer it and achieve the research aim, interviews with library professionals and thematic analysis were conducted. This chapter then discusses the findings that address the central question, the potential issues, strengths, weaknesses, implications of this study and recommendations.

Although participants have reported different experiences concerning the use of popular culture in Information Literacy classes, the general consensus regarding its usefulness as an educational tool was pretty positive. Some of the participants have given examples of how they use pop culture in their own classes, either by doing occasional references in a spontaneous manner or by using references to current or significant events to showcase academic practices, as they found that doing so tends to make the content of the class more interesting, memorable, and accessible for students, especially for first year undergraduates. When discussing the example of the lesson plan, the main advantage found was the way that streaming platforms showcased the transferable nature of IL skills. This is particularly beneficial, not only because of the reasons previously

mentioned, but also because it allows students, who might not feel confident in their skills, to start developing the skill set they need for academic success, by introducing them to something that they are most likely familiar with.

The downsides mentioned tend to be related to the fact that students possess different skills and hail from different backgrounds, therefore nothing is truly universal. These include students' unfamiliarity with the technologies that contribute to the creation and distribution of pop culture, unawareness of certain references due to factors such as age or nationality, and the presence of several subcultures that are not accessible to everyone. Even streaming platforms, which are considered to be widely available, might still not be as universal as one potentially assumes they are. Using pop culture might then prove to be disengaging for certain individuals. As a result, it is important to not generalise students, to be mindful of the references being used, and also ensure that a proper explanation of the artifact or tool that is being used as a base for the class is provided in order to avoid excluding students.

It is important to note then that regardless of the content of the class or the teaching method being used, it is not possible to consistently satisfy all students, as the potential for disengagement or misunderstanding is always there, especially since librarians tend to conduct conduct classes with different skill levels which can not all be individually addressed with the time given to them.

Consequently, the findings then suggest that as long as its inclusion is done in a way that addresses all of the concerns, and the necessary explanations are provided, Irish academic librarians should consider popular culture as a valuable tool for teaching Information Literacy and its related skills.

4.1. Summary and Discussion of the Findings

There were two main themes found by the researcher during the thematic analysis: Teaching Information Literacy and Pop Culture in IL Teaching.

Similar to the contents of the literature review, the first theme covered the librarians' experiences with teaching in academic libraries, the contents of IL sessions and their importance, as well as student engagement.

Unlike what was reported by McGuiness (2021), none of the participants had hesitations in describing their work as anything other than "teaching". There were mentions of not having had previous experience or formal preparation to perform this particular component of the profession; however, this was addressed by gaining the necessary skills in their current or past professional position. For some, having a module during their Masters degree that specifically addressed the teaching component was seen as extremely beneficial as it helped them acquire some of the necessary knowledge that they needed to conduct classes.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, L2 and L8 have both said that there is a distinction between informal teaching, which, for instance, might take place in the information desk of the library's institution, and formal teaching. In regards to the latter, all participants have mentioned performing the same types of Information Literacy sessions listed by Fallon and Breen (2012, p.149), which are standalone, embedded and integrated. Both in the literature review and in the results, it is possible to observe that standalone tends to be the most common one. This particular type of sessions, usually served as additional support and does not often involve the cooperation

of the academic faculty. Moreover, attendance and engagement both tend to be low. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the political events around that time, online classes in platforms such as Zoom are still being held, and sessions that focused mainly on evaluating online information started to become a priority for librarians.

In regards to student engagement, there is some difference in regards to what was found in the results and in the literature review. The main considerations about this topic are from the authors Grassian and Kaplowitz (2009), and Peterson (2010), who focus specifically on the added challenges that new information technologies have generated, especially Google, Yahoo and other search engines with whom students tend to have a close relationship with. From this relationship, students are likely to believe that they already possess all the necessary skills to conduct research, despite likely not being able to employ the critical thinking mechanisms essential for the task. Nevertheless, students are then led into not seeing the importance of IL teaching. The participants' accounts do not dismiss this argument, since L8 does mention that students tend to not see the value of IL teaching in spite of undergraduates not having fully developed confidence in their critical thinking skills. However, there were other factors mentioned by the participants, such as type of student, age, nationality, and format of the class, that have influence over the engagement and participation of students during IL sessions.

Participants have mentioned that to improve the level of engagement, and above all build students' confidence and transmit the desired knowledge, they have tried to steer away from lecture-based sessions, organise activities based on active learning, promote class interaction and discussion, as well as use online tools such as quizzes or polls. Moreover, it has also been deemed important to build a sense of trust with the students, as well as cooperate with academic faculty.

The second theme focused mainly on the benefits and downsides of pop culture in IL teaching, something which has also been covered in the literature review.

The general consensus of the participants are aligned with the experiences and arguments made by American librarians such as Boss et al (2015) and Angell (2016): that popular culture is quite useful for IL sessions. This is due to several aspects, namely that it allows for librarians to make their class content more accessible to students, as a result of the familiarity that they are likely to have with certain pop culture artifacts. The fact that it is possible to showcase the skills that students need to further develop so as to be information-literate through different examples, such as references to current events, and streaming platforms, amongst others, makes pop culture a valuable asset for librarians looking to illustrate the transferable nature of IL. Moreover, the inclusion of pop culture has been discussed by the participants as something which makes classes more memorable and exciting for students, as well to the librarian that is designing and conducting the class.

When discussing the downsides, the literature and the participants also have discussed the same issue: nothing is truly universal, even something as widely consumed and distributed as pop culture. This is especially true nowadays, as it has been stated namely by L7, that there are quite a lot of subcultures and different cultural groups. Furthermore, factors such as age, cultural background and technological abilities also influence how one engages with pop culture and the present information environment, so it is quite hard for all members of an IL session audience to have the same level of knowledge regarding an artifact. This what leads to cases such as the ones mentioned by Springer and Yelinek (2011) as well as the participants, where the references that they picked out did not have the intended result. Consequently, referencing or using an artifact as a basis for a session needs to be carefully planned, so as to avoid disengaging or excluding

students, but still be able to fully take advantage of the benefits that pop culture has for IL teaching.

4.2. Strengths and weaknesses of the research

A strength of this study is that all the participants had different experiences with not only pop culture but also teaching. As a result, it was possible to collect a diversity of insights regarding the main themes of the study. However, it is still important to note that there were a lot examples, background experiences and stories that had to be redacted in the primary data in order to ensure that the participants were not identified. Additionally, due to the amount of data that the researcher had to analyse and the constraints of the study, it was not possible to include certain accounts or suggestions mentioned by the participants, despite their level of interest and potential. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the importance of the participants' insights, as despite them being anonymised and summarised, they were of the utmost relevance for this study.

An effort was made in order to have a different range of participants, both in terms of professional experience, type of institution, gender, and geographic location. While the researcher still managed to recruit more participants than what was originally set, the recruitment process was still quite challenging, as due to the study taking place during the summer months, the response rate was quite low, as people tended to be unavailable or did not reply. Nevertheless, it is still possible to state that some diversity was accomplished, as there is a balance in terms of gender, with 4 female and 4 male participants, each with different job titles, backgrounds and

experiences, even though the grand majority of the participants were still based in County Dublin.

Finally, the main weakness of this research is its theoretical and subjective nature. An explanatory research is not able to precisely describe the efficiency of pop culture, only discuss the different topics and experiences of individuals. Consequently, the results are highly subjective. Furthermore, the focus of this study is the perspective of Irish academic librarians, rather than the students who participate in Information Literacy classes. In order to capture their perspective, a more practical approach such as an action plan using the lesson plan designed by the researcher would likely be more advantageous. Still, it is important to note that with the research taking place during the summer months, more practical issues would arise from this approach, as it would be difficult to allocate students. Consequently, the methodology and nature of this research not only originated less practical concerns but also allowed the researcher to accomplished their main goal, which was to discuss pop culture in IL teaching, and showcase its usefulness of Irish academic librarians through the experiences of their peers.

4.3. Implications of results and applications of this study

The implications of the results is that there are arguments in favour of the inclusion of pop culture in Irish academic librarians. Not only that, but it is actively being done in Ireland, as shown by participants such as L8, and that there are quite a lot of advantages of using pop culture in order to make topics such as Information Literacy more accessible to students, to build the skills necessary to academically succeed but also improve engagement and participation.

This study then managed to give a general introduction into the topic as well as showcase that there is potential for using pop culture as a teaching tool in a successful way in Ireland, and that it is not just phenomenon reserved solemnly for American libraries, as suggested by the origins of the majority of the literature. As long as one takes into account the limitations mentioned by participants and by the literature review when designing their classes, and finds ways to address them, either by gathering suggestions from the student body or ensuring that their examples have global and current relevance, pop culture can be a valuable tool for Irish academic librarians looking to diversify their teaching.

Furthermore, this research can also serve as an encouragement to further promote the study and inclusion of pop culture and other related topics in the Information and Library Management field. For instances, although there has been mentions of conducting classes that are focused on evaluating information on online sources, the state of the current information environment makes it of utmost importance to include pop culture artifacts and other related tools used by students on their daily lives as part of the IL curriculum. With the interest shown by participants such as L4, it would be beneficial to incentivise this initiative and continue to promote IL through these means in and out of academic spaces.

4.4. Potential Problems

As mentioned in the strengths and weaknesses section of this chapter, the research and the results here presented are of theoretical and subjective nature. While this in no way diminishes the importance of this study, the insights of the participants nor the implications and applications, it

is worth noting that this nature can not present one objective answer, method of application or solution on the topic. Instead, it showcases various accounts and opinions of professionals who have had different experiences with IL teaching and pop culture, so as to inform those who might looking into alternative methods of engaging students or who would like an outlook of this theme that does not originate from North America.

Similar to what has been mentioned in the previous sections, caution is always advised, as individuals need to take into account the limitations of popular culture and address them in a way that does not generalise their students, their needs and abilities. Irish academic librarians who wish to incorporate pop culture into their teaching moments, be it through referencing artifacts or using alternative tools to showcase academic practices, may use the findings of this research as a building or inspiration source, but ultimately, this incorporation needs to be adapted to their specific circumstances, institution and audience's needs.

4.5. Recommendations for future research

The researcher feels that there is a lot of potential for different research perspectives on Information Literacy and pop culture in academic libraries. As mentioned in the previous section, this particular research focuses solemnly on the perspective and experiences of academic librarians in Ireland, and so conducting a study which addressed the students' side would be quite valuable, and could serve as an auxiliary study for this research. A more practical study which evaluated more precisely the level of engagement of students in Irish institutions and the success of different classes based on pop culture would quite advantageous, and it would allow

for a more detailed exploration of the downsides of this educational tool, namely relating to the influence that a student's background has in relation to their reactions to certain references. Moreover, there could also be future studies that tested out what sort of artifact or pop culture device seems to be more successful to engage students.

Outside of just using pop culture as an instrumental tool, there are also other suggestions of future researches related to pop culture. One could, for example, focus on how the type of pop culture artifacts an individual engages with might influence their searching and evaluating information skills. It was also mentioned by participants such as L4 and L8 that instructing how to ethically use certain tools such as Youtube, Twitter and ChatGPT, as well as teach their limitations and implications to students, would prove to be quite beneficial. Conducting a study that focuses specifically on these platforms, namely their benefits and the challenges, as well as present suggestions on how to address them, would be quite valuable for the Information and Library Management field, as all of these are artifacts that are very much present in the current information landscape and influence the way people engage with pop culture and go on to perform certain academic tasks such as searching and evaluating information.

4.6. Conclusion

As technology and patrons' needs continue to evolve, so does the role of the academic librarian. At the moment, helping students gain the essential skills to achieve academic success as well as navigate the information environment has been found to be quite an important part of the profession. While the previous preparation and experience that professionals have had to perform

this task differs, academic librarians still manage to conduct a variety of classes and create teaching moments in order to promote Information Literacy amongst the students in their respective institutions. As of consequence, it is always worth looking into all the ways in which professionals can further improve their teaching of all the skills related to IL. This was ultimately the main goal of this research.

What has been found is that despite the grand majority of the literature centering on the experiences of North American librarians, the inclusion of pop culture in IL teaching can succeed outside of that specific geographical context. In spite of the theoretical and subjective nature of this study, the experiences and insights of the Irish academic librarians here presented have showed that that there is great potential, as using examples of pop culture moments, artifacts or platforms that are used by students in their daily lives makes it easier and more enjoyable for them to properly learn certain academic practices and skills, as well as help them build the confidence that they need to succeed in their academic journey.

Caution is still necessary however, as simply introducing pop culture references is not enough to create a successful and engaging IL session. It is important to not generalise students' experiences, knowledge and background, especially in more recent times, where the creation and distribution of pop culture artifacts has changed significantly due to technological advancements, such as social media and streaming platforms.

Maintaining a more inclusive environment by picking relevant examples and providing clear explanations of all class components, including all the tools and references that are being used, is the best method for Irish academic librarians to use popular culture in IL teaching and make classes more enjoyable both for the instructor and the audience.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Information Sheet for Participants and Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE

Pop Culture and Information Literacy: To what extent should Irish academic librarians use Pop Culture to teach Information Literacy?

You are being asked to take part in a research study on the topic of pop culture as a teaching tool for Information Literacy (IL) sessions, and its potential benefits for Irish academic librarians.
This research is being conducted as part of the dissertation to complete the MSc in Information and Library Management programme. It was previously approved by Dublin Business School and is currently being supervised by Marta Bustillo Esteban.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

In this study, **you will be asked to** partake in a semistructured interview for the purposes of data collection. The interview will be held either on Zoom or Google Meet, and it will be recorded for the purposes of the Data Analysis.

Upon acceptance and setting the date for the interview, the student will debrief you on the data collection and analysis, and once again confirm your consent to record the interview.

During the interview, all the questions you will be asked are only related to your feedback on a lesson plan previously designed by the student, your experiences teaching and planning IL sessions, and your thoughts regarding the inclusion of pop culture in library teaching.

To protect your privacy, the student will use anonymisation and pseudonymisation to avoid including any personal identifiers.

TIME COMMITMENT

The interview will take between 30 minutes to 1 hour, and will be scheduled according to the participant's availability.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation required from you. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn/destroyed.

You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you.

You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome. A full debriefing will be given after the study). If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

The data I collect does not contain any personal information about you, as all personal details identifiers will be erased through anonymisation and pseudonymisation.

The data collected is only for the purposes of the dissertation.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

I or / and Marta Bustillo Esteban will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact my supervisor at martha.bustillo@dbs.ie

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE:

Pop Culture and Information Literacy: To what extent should Irish academic librarians use Pop Culture to teach Information Literacy?

PROJECT SUMMARY:

A study of pop culture as an instructional tool for Information Literacy (IL) sessions and its potential benefits for Irish academic librarians.

By signing below, you are agreeing that: (1) you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, (2) questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily, (3) you are aware of the potential risks (if any), and (4) you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion).

_____ _____

Participant's signature **Participant's Name (Printed)**

Francisca Silva _____

(Student Name)

Student Name signature

_____

Date

APPENDIX 2

Lesson Plan for Information Searching Session

For the purposes of the Dissertation in MSc Information and Library Management

1. Introduction and Rationale

The following is an outline of a lesson plan for an Information Searching session aimed at first-year undergraduates. This session was designed with a small group in mind, with two instructors in charge of conducting the class.

Upon acceptance, the session will be held face-to-face in one of the available classrooms, lasting up to one hour and thirty minutes.

1.1. Definition of IL

This lesson plan views Information Literacy (IL) as the ability to "recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information needed" (American Library Association, 2006). In order to fully realise its potential as an educational component, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) created the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2015). This Framework is composed of six basic frames, each with its own set of knowledge practises and attitudes (American Library Association, 2015, pp.7-8), as shown in the table below.

ACRL CORE FRAMES	
Frames	**Definition**
Authority is Constructed and Contextual	Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognise different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help determine the level of authority required.
Information Creation as a Process	Information in any format is produces to convey a message and is shared via selected delivery method. The iterative processes of researching, creating, revising, and disseminating information vary, and the resulting product reflects these differences.
Information Has Value	Information possesses several dimensions of value, including as a commodity, as a means of education, as a means of influence, and as a means of negotiating and understanding the world. Legal and socioeconomic interests influence information production and dissemination.
Research as Inquiry	Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field.
Scholarship as Conversation	Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occuring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations.
Searching as Strategic Exploration	Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops.

2. Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The *Information literacy competency standards for higher education* (2000) was used as a foundation for this section of the lesson plan. Despite the revocation of these standards by the ACRL Board of Directors in 2016, standard two (American Library Association, 2000, pp.9-11) still remains a valuable reference point for this session on Information Literacy.

With this in mind, the objectives and learning outcomes are as follows:

Goal: To instruct undergraduate students on how to search and access the needed information effectively and efficiently.	
Objectives	**Learning Outcomes**
• Instruct learners on how to select the most effective investigation methods or information retrieval systems for obtaining the information they need; • Teach students how to develop and implement effective search strategies; • Explain to learners how to obtain information through various sources, whether online or in person; • Advise students on how to refine their search strategy if necessary.	**Upon completion of this programme, students will be able to:** • Select efficient and effective methods for obtaining information from the investigation method or information retrieval system; • Identify keywords, synonyms and related terms for the information needed, as well as controlled vocabulary specific to the discipline or information retrieval source; • Create a search strategy for the information retrieval system of choice by utilising relevant commands; • Implement the search strategy in multiple information retrieval systems, by using various protocols, search parameters and search engines; • Use different search systems to retrieve information in various formats; • Employ specialised online or in-person services available at their institution to retrieve the information they need; • Identify gaps in the information retrieved; • Determine whether alternate information retrieval systems or investigation methods are needed based on the amount, quality, and relevancy of the search results.

3. Resource Outline

For the purposes of this lesson, the resources needed include:

- 2 instructors, who will rotate between the roles of lecturer and discussion moderator. Both will support the students with whatever they might need during the session.
- The class will be held in a classroom with 1 working computer for the instructors with PowerPoint installed and Internet access, and 1 working projector;
- A printer and other reprographics tools will also be necessary for class handouts.

4. Class Delivery

The class will be delivered as a stand-alone face-to-face instructional session.

It will apply principles and practices from different learning theories and follow the suggestions of librarians such as Chavez et al (2022) regarding the inclusion of pop culture in library teaching.

4.1 Learning Theories

It was decided to incorporate different theories which promote student-centred learning.

The first is Constructivism, a theory which describes learning as a "process of trial and error. Any action or behaviour that receives positive reinforcement during this trial and error exchange will be repeated in the future" (Grassian and Kaplowitz, 2009, p. 29), resulting in the behaviour being learned.

The second theory, Constructivism, refers to the idea that students must be able to discover and construct knowledge autonomously. It includes concepts such as scaffolding or meditated learning, which is when students are assigned complex tasks which they might encounter in their daily lives, while only being provided with enough guidance to complete them (Slavin, 2018, p. 189). Constructivism also incorporates top-down processing, where students develop the necessary skills by attempting to solve complex problems (Slavin, 2018, p. 190).

Another technique to enhance their learning experience is to give out handouts to students, while also incentivising them to take their own notes and compare them to others, in order to receive feedback on their thought processes (Grassian and Kaplowitz, 2009, p. 51).

4.2. Class Activities

It was decided to use pop culture as a way to showcase how students can search for information. Using pop culture as an educational tool might have its downsides, namely the potential to further disengage or distract students from the content of the session. This is why instead of

focusing on a specific pop culture artifact, such as films, television series or music, it was decided to instead utilise streaming platforms.

Streaming platforms are quite prevalent nowadays and play a huge role in the way in which individuals engage with media and entertainment. It is likely that students have had some sort of interaction with platforms such as Netflix, Channel 4, or Disney Plus. According to Chavez et al (2022), these streaming media platforms are analogous to academic library databases (2022, p.58), and even though the latter is generally more complex in terms of searching mechanics, the concept is quite similar.

Since the class' main goals are to equip students with the skills to select appropriate information retrieval methods, evaluate sources and design their own search strategies, the main activities of the session will utilise their prior knowledge of streaming platforms as a foundation for understanding academic library databases. Lecturing students on the similarities between the two would not be advantageous, so instructors will employ the learning techniques in section **4.1.** so that students may construct new knowledge. Following the suggestions found in *Integrating Pop Culture into the Academic Library* (2022), the instructors will guide the students in connecting the process of selecting a film to selecting an article, by asking them to explain their usual search process and moderating group discussion.

The lesson timeline can be found in the section below. It is important to note that this timeline is flexible and will depend on how the students respond to the class activities.

5. Timeline

Introduction (5 minutes)

- The instructors will introduce themselves and the session;
- Instructors will give an overview of the objectives and learning outcomes of the session, emphasising the abilities that students will gain after completing the session;

Lecture and Discussion 1 (10 minutes)

- Instructors will start the lecture by asking students how they conduct academic research or how they find articles;
- Instructors will then explain streaming platforms, explaining their main functions and naming examples. This explanation will serve to introduce the first class activity.

Class Activity 1 (20 minutes)

- Dividing the class into small groups, students will discuss the steps one takes to search for a film on a streaming platform. For this activity, each student will be given one particular film to discuss, as shown in the example found in Appendix 1;
- After the group discussion, the groups will share their findings. During this time, instructors will be monitoring the class discussion as well as offer feedback on the students' work.

Lecture and Discussion 2 (15 minutes)

- Instructors will build on the students' findings to explain other ways of searching for information and how to narrow results (e.g. filters, Boolean Operators);
- Instructors will introduce library databases, explaining their primary functions and giving examples.

Class Activity 2 (20 minutes)

- Using both the knowledge that they acquired from the first class activity and the lecture, students will discuss in the same groups how they would search for an article. Each group will be given an article to discuss (Appendix 2).
- Following the discussion, the groups will share their findings with the rest of the class. During this period, instructors will monitor the class discussion and provide feedback on the students' work.

Lecture and Discussion 2 (10 minutes)

- Students and instructors will discuss the similarities found between searching for a film and an article;

Conclusion and Feedback (10 minutes)

- Instructors will summarise the session's content and the students' findings.
- Students will be asked to provide anonymous feedback using Menti.

Total: 90 minutes

6. Assessment

Since this lesson plan refers to a standalone class, it was decided to put continuous assessment in place throughout the session, in the form of interactions with the students, namely oral questions and answers. Students will also receive continuous feedback on their work throughout the class as well, as recommended by the learning theories chosen for this class.

7. Self-Evaluation

Various methods will be employed in order to determine the success of the lesson's objectives and learning outcomes.

Instructors will, for instance, collect feedback from students through informal questions throughout the session. At the end of the class, students will also be asked to provide feedback via an anonymous Menti survey.

Furthermore, instructors will access the progression of the students' understanding of the session content through class activities and discussion.

Finally, by liaisoning with the academic staff, instructors will be able to collect information regarding the students' academic progress.

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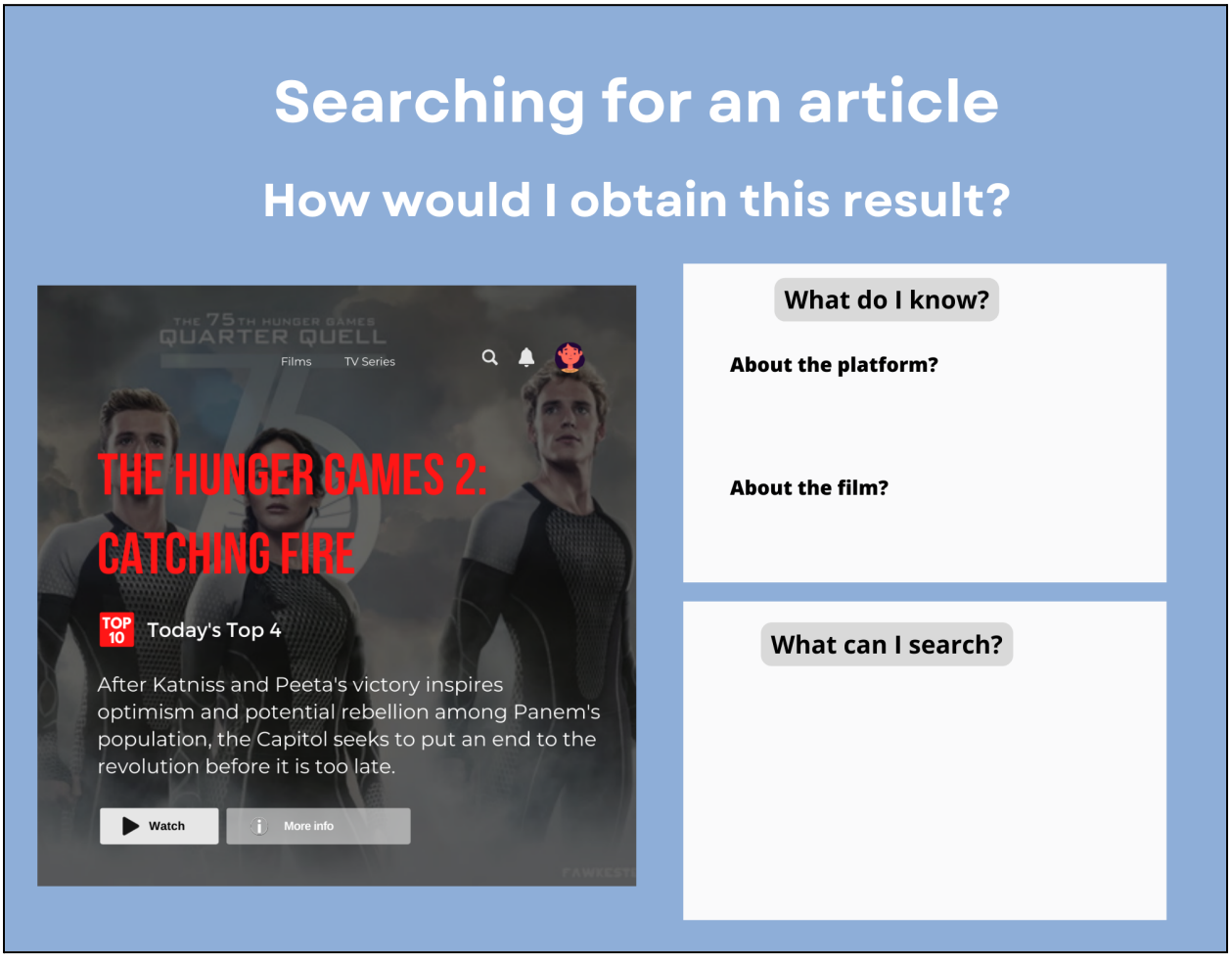
Appendix

Appendix 1 - Example of the handout for the first class activity



Appendix 2 - Example of the handout for the second class activity

APPENDIX 3

Interview Prompt Sheet

Participant's profile

- Position/Job title:
- First experience with teaching:

Questions:

1. What are the typical aspects or elements that you think about when designing a class?
2. From your experience, how would you describe the engagement and participation of undergraduate students during a typical IL session?
3. Have you tried any different teaching methods to further improve student engagement? If so, what about those particular methods interested you?
4. What is your overall opinion on the lesson plan?
5. How does it differ from your usual lesson plans?
6. Do you think the objectives and learning outcomes can be accomplished by the class activities and delivery?
7. What do you think of the class activities specifically? From your experience, do you think the rationale behind them makes sense?
8. Do you see any potential benefits to carrying out a session such as this?
9. Any potential issues, on the other hand?