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**INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS IN TWO  
UNIVERSITIES IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

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# **INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS IN TWO UNIVERSITIES IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated information needs and seeking behaviour of undergraduate students in the library of Federal University of Technology and Imo State University library, Owerri using a comparative approach. The instrument used for the study was the student questionnaire. One thousand, one hundred and fifty two usable responses from each of the two institutions compared in the study were analysed by the use of frequency counts and percentages. A descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study; a purposive sampling technique was adopted. The undergraduate students in Federal University of Technology, Owerri sought for information in relation to their academic and research needs while in Imo State University sought for information resources on academic / research information, business information and industrial attachment/employment information. The undergraduates in the Federal university of technology consulted shelves and catalogues to foster information seeking behaviour while in Imo State University, the undergraduates browse through the shelves signifying that the former utilized catalogues more significantly than the latter. Major reasons for seeking for information amongst undergraduate in FUTO include updating of knowledge and development of personal competencies, while that of IMSU include updating of knowledge, when carrying research , development of personal competencies and writing of assignment, the type of information resources mostly consulted by undergraduates in FUTO is the textbook, while that of IMSU is textbooks, periodical journals, reference books and project report. In FUTO the major militating factor affecting information needs and seeking behaviour was inadequate information resources while in IMSU inadequate information resources, inadequate qualified librarians and lack of time to access the information resources affected the information needs and seeking behaviour of students. Introduction of computerized or digital catalogues should be provided and made available to enable the students have access to information resources librarians should embrace effective management and use of ICT facilities to promote satisfaction of information needs and seeking behaviour of the students.

## **Introduction**

Information is an important tool used in the realization of any objective or goal of the library. Information is an important factor in any library because they are needed by users. Every library user needs information of increasing variety and diversity of levels, frequencies, volumes and with ease. Therefore, information need stems from a vague awareness of something missing and as culminating in locating information that contributes to understanding and meaning. Library patrons seek information because they need information resources to survive in all sectors of life (Ajiboye and Tella, 2007, Fiankor and Adams, 2004, Fatima and Ahmad (2008)).

The information need (or need for information) is a factual situation in which, there exists an inseparable interconnection with “information” and “need”, information needs can therefore be said to be the amount of positive information an individual or group of users need to have for their work, recreation and many other like satisfaction. Thus, information need arise wherever individuals find themselves in a situation requiring knowledge to deal with the situation as they see fit. In other words, lack of information needed to accomplish a task results in information need which several authors have variously described and explained ((Singh and Satija, 2006; Fiankor and Adams, 2004; Adeniyi, 2007)..

Information needs are diverse and constantly changing and not amenable to generalization. Information needs can be social, economical, political, cultural or educational. However, information need is characterized mostly by the information seeking behaviour of the person in need of information. Information seeking behaviour is a broad term, which involves a set of actions that an individual, such as undergraduates, takes to express information needs, seek information, evaluate and select information and finally uses this information to satisfy his/her information needs (Fatima and Ahmad, 2008). It is therefore described as an individual’s way and manner of gathering and obtaining information for personal use, knowledge, updating and development. In other words, information seeking behaviour involves active or purposeful information as a result of the need to complete course assignment, prepare for class discussions, seminars, workshops, conferences, or write final year research paper. Though, Singh and Satija (2006) see information seeking behaviour as a human process that requires adaptive and reflective control over the afferent and efferent actions of the information seeker in which information seeking behaviour results from the recognition of some needs, perceived by the user, who as a consequence makes demand upon a formal system such as libraries and information centres or some other person in order to satisfy the perceived information need. Thus, they pointed out that information seeking behaviour essentially refers to locate discrete knowledge elements concerned with the three basic resources namely, people, information and system.

Information seeking behaviour is an area of dynamic interest among librarians, information scientist, communication scientists, sociologist, and psychologists. Information seeking behaviour is expressed in various forms, from reading printed material to research and experimentation (Bhatti, 2010). Information users make active and intentional attempts to seek up to date information from the library resources, including, electronic sources. It is worthy to also note that the advent of information technology has revolutionized the field of library and information services and has brought about considerable changes in the information seeking behaviour of users.

Though there seems to exist many reasons and sources of information to the information user, the university library occupies a central position in the information seeking process of undergraduate students in Nigerian universities.

### **Research Questions**

The researchers seeks to ask the following research questions:

- i. What kinds of information are needed by the undergraduate students in Federal University of Technology Owerri and Imo State University?
- ii. What strategies for seeking information resources are adopted by undergraduate students in the institutions studied?
- iii. For what reasons do undergraduates seek information in the two institutions?
- iv. What types of information resources are consulted by the undergraduate students of the institutions?
- v. What tools are used for information search by undergraduate students in the institutions studied?
- vi. What problems are associated with realization of the undergraduates' information needs and seeking behavior?
- vii. What are the strategies for satisfying information needs and seeking behavior of the undergraduate students in the institutions studied?

### **Literature Review**

Information is needed because it affects peoples lives. People need information to obtain answers to specific questions. Therefore, information need arise whenever individuals find themselves in a situation as they deem fit. According to Singh and Satija (2006), the concept needs can be known through the various terms such as want (a state or fact of being without or having an insufficient, absence or deficiency of necessities), desire (an unsatisfied longing or craving),

demand (to require, asking for what is due or asking for something, and requirement (a need, a thing needed, necessary condition).

Fiankor and Adams (2004) sees information need as the amount of positive information an individual or group of people need to have for their work, recreation and many other like satisfaction. This however implies that lack of information needed into accomplish tasks results in information need. Their concept of information need also means the need for information whenever individuals are faced with situation that requires knowledge to handle such situation. Therefore, information need is a gap in person's knowledge, when experienced at the conscious level as a question, gives rise to a search for an answer. According to Tackie and Adams (2007), literature on information needs and information seeking, acknowledges that work related information seeking is different from everyday information seeking. In their view, information influencers, such as accessibility, availability, and familiarity of source consumed determines the suitability of the information.

Adelani (2002) in his study drew attention to the fact that there are spectrums of factors affecting information needs and this include age, educational level and linguistic ability of the user as well as other job related factors such as rank and length of experience, the nature of work (i.e. management, research or teaching) the subject field, the stage that a project has reached, size of the immediate work team, nature of the institution where the user works (academic or industrial), size of the institution and the communication structure within the institution. People according to Safahieh (2007) essentially need information for five broad functions and these functions are the fact- finding function, which provides answers to specific question, the current awareness function, which keeps information up-to-date, the research function, which investigates a new field in-depth, the briefing function, which obtains a background understanding of an issue, and the stimulus function, which provides ideas to obtain stimulus.

Owalabi, Jimoh and Okpeh (2010) in their study of information seeking behaviour of polytechnic students discovered that 285 (59.4%) of their respondents needs information in relation to their academic. It shows that students use information primarily for academic purposes. The study concluded that students at the polytechnic seek information to improve their academic performance. In a different study carried out by Fatima and Ahmad (2008), the findings show that 30 (50%) of the respondents seeks information on career development and other reason include seeking information for problem solving, keeping up-to-date and the need to write an article or research paper.

The study of Ajiboye and Tella (2007) conducted on university undergraduate's information-seeking behaviour show that 12% of the respondents (students) required information

for their personal development, while 11.25% claimed that they sought for information on health matter, and 64.1% sought for information for their academic development, 9.3% seeks information to secure employment. Also, Bhatti (2010) using faculty members at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, respondents indicated their purposes of seeking information eighty-eight percent sought information for teaching purpose (preparing class lectures), 68 percent for literature searches, 43 percent to borrow books or journal articles, fifty-four percent of faculty members consult the library for research and 43 percent for keeping their knowledge up to date, and 27 percent visit the library for reading newspapers and magazines (recreational purposes). This clearly show that nearly all the respondents use library resources or seek for information for teaching with more than half seeking for research and a smaller number for various other purposes.

The study of Adeniyi (2007) reveals that lecturers of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State seek for information in order to get information on teaching and research, while Oyediran-Tidings (2004) in her empirical research on information needs and seeking behaviour of library users reveals that greater percentage of the respondents usually seek for information concerning their course. To her, this is not unexpected because the quest for certificate in their respective field of study forms their primary aim of being in the college.

From the various studies carried out by various authors in different places, it is quite obvious that the reasons why individuals seek for information varies in line with the educational and economic background of the individual. Therefore, it is not safe to generalize the reasons for seeking information.

Factors that influence information needs and seeking behavior of undergraduate include age, gender, educational level, and situation. One thing that is clear from analysis on information needs and seeking behavior of undergraduates is that there is low level of information utilisation. The authors contend that if undergraduate are adequately sensitized and properly mobilized, they possess the potentials that can make them active users of information resources in libraries. The review of literature has also shown the importance and necessity of information to undergraduate student. Information is a must if academic success must be sustained.

Be that as it may, the review has shown clearly that there is a gap to be filled. The gap arises because from available records, none of the materials reviewed has shown any relationship between information provision and utilization among undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institution. This gap has made the embarking on of this research investigation quite imperative, as it will assist greatly in filling this existing gap.

## Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design type. It is descriptive in the sense that it attempts to investigate and report the variables as they already exist. The study employed a survey research method to elicit data about the information needs and information seeking-behaviour of the undergraduates under study.

The target population of this study comprises the undergraduates in the Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. The target population of undergraduates in the two selected universities as at 2009/2010 academic session, according to documentary sources, was as follows: sixteen thousand, one hundred and sixty-four (16,164) for FUTO and twenty six thousand, four hundred and seventy (26,470) Imo State University.

The researcher purposively selected equal number of sample of the total undergraduate population in the comparative study as also reported in table below

S/N	Name of Institution	Population	sample
1	Federal University of Technology, Owerri	16,164	1,152
2	Imo State University, Owerri	26,470	1,152
	<b>Total</b>	<b>42,634</b>	<b>3,304</b>

The instruments that will be used to collect data for this study are questionnaires and interview. The questionnaire will be the main instrument for data collection. The questionnaire will be used to collect the necessary data. The questionnaire is structured in two sections. Section A is on demographic information which includes name of the institution, gender, level and age category. Section B is on the information needs and information seeking behavior of undergraduates in the selected institutions.

A total of **3,304** copies of the questionnaire was distributed among the undergraduates of the selected universities, retrieved and used for the study. Data collected will be subjected to analysis using frequency counts and percentages with appropriate graphic illustrations.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

**Table 1: Distribution and retrieval of questionnaire**

Institution	No. Distributed	No. Returned	Percent
FUTO	1,152	1,137	98.7
IMSU	1,152	791	68.7

TOTAL	2,304	1,928	
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Table 1 showed that out of 1,152 copies of questionnaire distributed to participants in Federal University of Technology, Owerri, 1,137 were returned. Similarly, out of 1,152 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the participants in the Imo state University, Owerri, 791 copies were returned and used in the study.

Thus, the above analysis shows that there was a good return rate for both institutions.

**Table 2: Kinds of Information needs of undergraduate students**

Kind of Information sought for	N=1,137		N=791	
	FUTO	%	IMSU	%
Personal health information	235	20.7	215	27.2
Academic/research information	1,137	100	791	100
Current affairs information	284	25	324	41
Business information	185	16.3	396	50
Industrial attachment/employment	136	12	546	69
Sports/entertainment information	50	4.4	63	8
Information related to higher education	359	31.6	361	45.7

**N.B:** The participants were required to indicate more than one response to the items in the questionnaire.

From Table 2, 235 (20.7%) and 215 (27.2%) from FUTO and IMSU respectively indicated that they needed personal health information, while 735 (100%) from FUTO and 845 (100%) from IMSU reveal that they needed academic / research information. In the same vein, 284 (25%) and 324 (41%) from FUTO and IMSU respectively affirmed that needed current affairs information, also 185 (16.3%) and 396 (50%) from FUTO and IMSU needs business information. Also, 136 (12%) from FUTO and 546 (69%) from IMSU indicates that they need information on industrial attachment / employment, 50(4.4%) and 63 (8%) from FUTO and IMSU stated that they need information on sports and entertainment, while 359 (31.6%) from FUTO and 361 (45.7%) from IMSU do need information related to higher education.

Therefore, it can be accepted that students in both institutions seek for information on academic and research. Again students from IMSU indicate their needs for business information and industrial attachment / employment.

**Table 3: Strategies for Seeking Information Resources**

Strategies for seeking Information	N=1,137		N=791	
	FUTO	%	IMSU	%
Consulting the catalogue directly	989	87	323	40.8
Browsing through the shelves	696	61.2	544	68.8

Going through Bibliographical sources	38	3.3	52	6.6
Discussing and seeking help from staff	26	2.3	89	11.2

**N.B:** The participants were required to indicate more than one response to the items in the questionnaire.

From Table 3, 989(87%) from FUTO and 323(40.8%) from IMSU respectively consult the catalogue directly when seeking for information, 696(61.2%) from FUTO and 544(68.8%) from IMSU browse through the shelves.

Also, 38(3.3%) and 52(6.6%) from FUTO and IMSU respectively indicate that they go through bibliographical sources, while 26(2.3%) from FUTO and 89(11.2%) from IMSU indicate that they discuss and seek help from staff.

**Table 4: Reasons for Seeking for Information by undergraduate students**

Reasons	N=1,137		N=791	
	FUTO	%	IMSU	%
Updating of knowledge	966	85	671	84.8
When carrying out research	482	42.4	488	61.7
For reading purpose only	210	18.5	121	15.3
To develop personal competencies	495	43.5	515	65.1
When writing assignment	582	51.2	403	51
To complement lecture notes	359	31.6	297	37.6

**N.B:** The participants were required to indicate more than one response to the items in the questionnaire.

From Table 4, analysis showed that 966 (85%) from FUTO and 671 (84.8%) from IMSU seek for information to update their knowledge base, 482 (42.4%) and 488 (61.7%) seek for information when carrying out research, 210 (18.5%) and 121 (15.3%) from FUTO and IMSU respectively seek for information for reading purpose only, 495 (43.5%) and 515(65.1%) seek for information to develop personal competency, 582(51.2%) and 403(51%) seek for information when writing assignment while 359 (31.6%) and 297(37.6%) from FUTO and IMSU respectively seek for information to complement lecture notes.

**Table 5: Type of Information Material Consulted by the Undergraduates**

Type of Information material Consulted	N=1,137		N=791	
	FUTO	%	IMSU	%
Textbooks	1,137	100	570	72
Periodicals Journals	160	14.1	633	80
Government publications	76	6.7	32	4
Reference Book	347	30.5	487	61.6
Pamphlets	50	4.4	97	12.2
Project report	160	14.1	403	51

**N.B:** The participants were required to indicate more than one response to the items in the questionnaire.

From Table 5, analysis shows that 1,137(100%) from FUTO and 570(72%) from IMSU opined that textbook is the information material consulted, 160(14.1%) and 633(80%) from FUTO and IMSU indicate that they consult periodicals and journals. 76(6.7%) and 32(4%) from FUTO and IMSU indicate government publications as information materials consulted. Three hundred and forty seven (30.5%) from FUTO and 487(61.6) from IMSU consult reference books, also 50(4.4%) from FUTO and 97(12.2%) from IMSU consult pamphlets, while 160(14.1%) and 403(51%) from FUTO and IMSU respectively do consult project reports when in the library.

**Table 6: Tools Used for Searching of Information Resources in Libraries**

Library Tools	N=1,137		N=791	
	FUTO	%	IMSU	%
Library Catalogue	1,027	90.3	734	92.8
Indexing Journals	99	8.7	267	33.7
Book reviews	185	16.3	316	40
Abstracting Journals	25	2.2	388	49
References for periodicals	160	14.1	218	27.5

**N.B:** The participants were required to indicate more than one response to the items in the questionnaire.

From Table 6, 1,027(90.3%) from FUTO and 734 (92.8%) from IMSU respectively used library catalogue as a tool for searching for information, 99(8.7%) and 267(33.7%) from FUTO and IMSU respectively use indexing Journals as a tool, with 185 (16.3%) from FUTO and 316(40%) from IMSU do make use of book reviews. Also, 25(2.2%) from FUTO and 388(49%) from IMSU use abstracting journals while 160(14.1%) and 218(27.5%) from FUTO and IMSU respectively used references for periodicals as tool for searching for information.

**Table 7: Problems associated with information needs and Seeking Behaviour of Undergraduates**

Problems	N=1,137		N=791	
	FUTO	%	IMSU	%
Non-availability of information materials	656	57.7	589	74.4
Lackadaisical attitude of library staff	185	16.3	359	45.4
Incompleteness of records	248	21.8	351	44.4
Inadequate qualified librarians	149	13.1	593	75
Lack of time to access the Information resources	309	27.2	467	59
Inadequate knowledge of use of Catalogue	347	30.5	95	12
Information scattered in too many sources	272	23.9	201	25.4

**N.B:** The participants were required to indicate more than one response to the items in the questionnaire.

From Table 7, 656(57.7%) from FUTO and 589(74.4%) from IMSU respectively indicate non-availability of information materials as problem, with 185 (16.3%) and 359(45.4%) from FUTO and IMSU indicating lackadaisical attitude of library staff. Similarly 248(21.8) from FUTO and 351(44.4%) indicate incompleteness of records as a problem, 149(13.1%) from FUTO and 593(75%) indicate inadequate qualified librarian as a challenge. Also 309(27.2%) and 467(59%) from FUTO and IMSU are of the view that lack of time to access the information resources is a problem, 347(30.5%) from FUTO and 95(12%) from IMSU indicated inadequate knowledge of use of catalogue as the problem while 272(23.9%) from FUTO and 201(25.4%) from IMSU are of the view that information is scattered in too many sources.

**Table 8: Strategies for Ameliorating the Problems**

	N=1,137		N=791	
	FUTO	%	IMSU	%
Library should be stocked with relevant materials	858	75.1	735	93
Library staff should change their approach to work	273	24	459	58
Information material should be adequately protected.	248	21.8	312	39.5
Qualified librarians should be employed	273	24	435	55.1
Student should be trained on the use of catalogue	606	53.3	611	77.2

**N.B:** The participants were required to indicate more than one response to the items in the questionnaire.

From Table 8 above, 858(75.1%) from FUTO and 735(93%) from IMSU affirmed that library should be stocked with the relevant materials, 273(24%) and 459(58) from FUTO and IMSU respectively opined that library staff should change their approach to work. Also, 248(21.8%) from FUTO and 312(39.5%) from IMSU indicated that information material should be adequately protected. In the same view, 273(24%) from FUTO and 435(55.1%) from IMSU say that qualified librarians should be employed, 606(53.3%) from FUTO and 611(77.2%) from IMSU contend that students should be trained on the use of library catalogue.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In analyzing question 1 which sought to know the kind of information needs of the undergraduate students, it was find out that 1,137 (100%) of the respondents from Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University, Owerri respectively needed information for academic research. Therefore, it can be accepted that students from both institutions seeks information on academic/research. The above findings seems to be in agreement with the

findings of Fiankor and Adams (2004), Owalabi Jumoh and Okpeh (2010) that students use information primarily for academic purposes.

Research Question 2: sought out to know what strategies for seeking information are adopted by students in the institutions studied. It could be seen from the study that these, 989 (89%) and 32 (40.8%) of the respondents in Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University, Owerri respectively consulted catalogue directly when seeking information.

Therefore, it is obvious from the analysis that browsing through the shelves is a common approach used by students in both institutions to seek information. The students' from both institutions hardly go through bibliographical sources or discuss and seek for help from library staff.

Research Question 3: Sought out to find out what reasons for seeking information are perceived by undergraduate students in the institutions studied. From the result it could be seen that 966 (85%) and 671 (84.8%) of the respondents in Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University respectively indicated that they use information to update their knowledge. Also 582 (51.2%) and 403 (51%) of the respondents in Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University respectively indicated when writing assignment.

Therefore, findings shows that the major reasons for seeking in both institutions include updating of knowledge and writing assignment.

Research Question 4: Sought out to know type of information resources consulted by the undergraduate students of Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University, Owerri. On type of information material consulted by the undergraduates, it was discovered that 1,137 (100%) and 570 (72%) of the respondents in Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University respectively consulted mainly textbooks.

Therefore, findings clearly revealed that textbooks are the most consulted information material by undergraduates in both institutions.

On type of tools used for information searching by students in the institutions studied. 1,027 (90.3%) and 734 (92.8%) of the respondents in Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University respectively used the library catalogue.

The major problems associated with realization of undergraduates' information needs and seeking behavior was non-availability of information materials representing 656 (57.7%) and 589 (74.4%) of the respondents in Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University respectively.

In Imo state university, Owerri lack of time to access information resources 467 (59%) and inadequate qualified librarians 593 (75%) were also problem encountered.

On strategies for ameliorating the problems 858 (75.1%) and 735 (93%) of the respondents in Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University, Owerri unanimously agreed that library should be stocked with relevant and current materials and the employment of qualified librarians will go long way in ameliorating the identified problems.

### **Conclusions:**

The results from the study based on the analysis in the previous chapter clearly show that undergraduate students in Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) and Imo State University (IMSU) Owerri seeks for information in relation to their academic and research needs. It is quite obvious that their desire to satisfy their educational and academic information needs influences them to seek for information.

The undergraduates from the studied institutions do seek for information by browsing through the shelves and as well consulting the catalogue. The students as revealed hardly go through available bibliographic sources nor do they seek for information from staff working in the library. This approach to information seeking is quiet disheartening as most students out of self confidence has visited the library and returned without having their information puzzle dissolved even though they claimed to be having their information needs be met through the various approach they are using.

The students basically visit the library with a view that they will update their knowledge. The undergraduates in the institution under study only visit the library when they are writing assignment or carrying out research. This apparently is not surprising as only those with health challenges that have needs for the doctors. Similarly, those that are informationally sick have need for the information doctor (librarian) to have their information diseases handled.

The resource mostly consulted by undergraduates is the textbook. Only few consult the periodicals and project while library and abstracting journal remains the popular tools used in accessing information sources.

Non-availability of information materials is a major problem associated with students needs for information. In this age of Information and communication technology, where Internet has revolutionized every facet of librarianship, it is very important that librarians working in the various libraries should as a matter of urgency embraced the reality of ICT if they are to remain relevant to the information conscious society.

### **Recommendations**

The researcher in view of the identified problems wishes to make the following recommendations in line with the findings of the study.

i. **Introduction of Computerized or Digital Catalogue:-** Many students who used the library are ICT compliant. This calls for the need to introduced digital catalogue to the libraries under study. When the libraries are automated, we can easily have access to information sources available in that library.

ii. **Provision of Current and Relevant Resources:** there is need for the authorities in the institution under study to make provisions for the acquisition of relevant documents. Finance meant for the acquisition of library resources should be channeled appropriately.

iii. **Introduction Use of Internet / Virtual library as a Courses:** In view of the technological wind blowing across the information palace, it is imperative for a course on the Use of Internet and Virtual Libraries to be designed that will help in instructing the students on how to utilized the available technologies in accessing and meeting up with their information needs.

iv. **Recruitment of Qualified librarians:** Most staff in the libraries are not core professional staff hence their capacity to deliver efficient services to their client has been impeded. This apparently reveals the need for the heads of libraries to recruit qualified personal that will help in manipulating the available technologies and as well transformed the image of librarianship.

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