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Expressing Information Needs and Information Literacy Skills Amongst Final Year Undergraduate Students in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Information literacy is the ability of an individual to locate, evaluate, and use information. This study expresses the conscious information needs and information literacy skills amongst final year undergraduate students of three Universities in Nigeria; being the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Federal University Lokoja (FUL), and Baze University. A survey research design alongside a questionnaire for the instrument were utilised on a sample size of 307 final year undergraduate students from select faculties within the above-mentioned universities. The findings of the study amongst other show that undergraduate students at the final year level had a conscious knowledge of their information needs, while their ability to locate information was heavily reliant on the use of the Internet. Other finding of the study revealed that the student's skill level in regard evaluation of information and information sources was low. At a time when there is prevalent use of the internet by netizens and online publishing is at an all-time high. The study further recommends teaching critical reasoning and how to evaluate information sources by schools as a means of improving information need identification by students and literacy skills. The study concludes on the importance of students being conscious of their information need and schools emphasizing and building programs for information literacy skills acquisition.

Introduction

Information literacy is the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively and ethically. It is a critical skill for students in today's world, where access to information is vast and diverse. However, research over the past decade in Nigeria has shown that students struggle with information literacy. This has been attributed to the plethora of alternative sources of information (Fitzgerald 1999), the confusion of having to learn how to access these information sources at libraries (Fister, 2013; Ozoemelem, 2009), the anxiety and poor orientation on how best to use these information resources (Odigie et al., 2020). The consequences of this inability to make use of the plethora of information resources, results in resources being devalued and kept, gathering dust in various libraries and information centres (Bernhardt, Hinds & Katina, 2012).

Information is essential and basic to human existence and national development, and as such information resources and competency is key factor in lifelong learning (Umar, 2013). Information resources can be referred to as a collection of materials including print and non-print provided with a view to satisfying information needs of users to help them perform better in their chosen areas of studies. According to Simmonds and Andaleeb (2001), and Aina (2004), examples of information resources include; Books, Ebooks, Journals, Encyclopaedia, Dictionary, and Databases (Mochammad et al., 2020)

Information literacy is important to academic achievement and is desirable for all graduates. Students at university need to become information literate not only for their future careers but to enable active participation in the society. With the dynamic changes occurring in our information environment, these literacy skills have become fundamental competencies for undergraduate students thus enabling informed decisions makers (Issa, Amusa, Olarongbe, Igwe & Oguntayo, 2015). The contemporary information society has brought about tremendous changes in the way students learn. Students need these skills to utilise the abundant

print and digital information resources available in information databases and information networks. Information literacy skills enable students to master content and extend their research, which assures them a greater control over their learning activities.

Statement of the Problem

Libraries at universities are considered an important information resource to every academic institution. Libraries act as hubs to a vast array of information sources and resources which are meant to aid the lifelong learning, research and education of all its users (Maitaouthong, Tuamsuk, & Tachamanee, 2012; Sulieman, 2012). An undergraduate's recognition of inadequacies or gaps in knowledge is termed as an information need, which is the first point of reference that gradually progresses into a search for information resources. Information resources undoubtedly are meant to enhance the intellectual and academic growth of undergraduate students within the university community (Ofodile & Ifijeh, 2013). Based on the above assertion, it can be said that an individual's ability to understand his need, locate and efficiently evaluate information resources would require certain skills. Examination into undergraduate projects at these universities (Federal University Lokoja (FUL), Baze University & Ahmadu Bello University (ABU)) show inefficiencies despite huge sums expended by the University authorities. This is also apparent from assignments and reports and displayed in inability to access the right resource using search strategies, properly acknowledge sources of information and judge the quality of information retrieved online related to their academic activities. Hence this research sought to explore the information need and the information literacy of final year undergraduate student at these Universities

Research Questions

1. What are the conscious information needs of final year undergraduates?
2. To what extent can undergraduate student's locate information to meet these information needs?

3. To what extent can final year undergraduate students evaluate information for their needs?

Review of Related Literature

Information literacy has been gaining prominence as a result of the new information society. As the amount of information available to us expands, the ability to search, find, access and evaluate is a key component of lifelong learning. Information literacy is a crucial skill in the pursuit for knowledge. Information literacy is the ability to know when information is needed, know the techniques on how to locate this information, synthesize it and evaluate the information, and able to use the information. According to Frazier and Selleck (2009), who define information literacy involves defining a need for information, determining the type and amount of information needed, and then accessing, critically evaluating, and using information in an ethical way. Some students do not know when information is needed, how to recognize good sources of information, how to locate relevant information, use or communicate it effectively. We learn and become knowledgeable only if we possess the necessary information literacy skills that enable us acquire information when there is a need for it, search, locate and gather quality information (Ilogho & Nkiko, 2014). While acquiring information literacy skills, it is required that first the students know he/she needs information, then search and locate available information sources and subsequently organize and evaluate the information. The lack of information literacy skills is at the root of students' difficulties in obtaining relevant information and poor performance in school. Sasikala and Dhanraju (2011), observed from conclusions of previous research on information literacy skills that students think they know more about accessing information and conducting of library research than they are able to demonstrate in practice. However, information literacy education will equip them with requisite research skills.

To be information literate, students must demonstrate mastery over their ability to define their information need. Information need involves recognizing when an information

need exists, defining the problem, that is, students should identify the exact information problem presented to them and identifying the types and amount of information needed in order to solve the problem. Identified needs may lead to information seeking and formulation of key terms for information (Naumer & Fisher, 2017). Information needs do not operate in a vacuum but in particular context. Some of this information needs vary from one individual to another such as information about scholarships, sports, research and current affairs. Also in Oman, Al-Anif and Al-Azri (2013), listed the above; to complete course assignment, to conduct an article, to enrich general knowledge, to make decision on a particular issue and track advancement in my specialisation- all these are the information needs of undergraduate students.

Locating information becomes the next core when an individual has recognized the need for information. To locate information, it requires an individual to access through a variety of resources and found the specific information being seek. These will enable the students then to locate appropriate computer resources and technologies available throughout the institution and within the library and also use the internet. There are several ways in which students in higher institution can locate and access information- this is cited in “Information literacy: Essential skills for the information age” by Eisenberg, Lowe & Spitzer (2004), which states “to be able to locate information through examining the index or table content, using web-based OPAC, using the Internet, referral services, use of electronic reference materials and the use of tools specific to electronic information sources that assist finding specific and general information (e.g., Boolean logic strategies, hypertext links, graphic clues and icons, URLs, etc.) including the use of cross reference. Bitagi and Udoudou (2013), argued that the availability of all forms and types of information resources in academic libraries are highly imperative if these libraries are to meet with the information needs of researchers in their parent institutions. Information resources constitute a range of materials and equipment gathered by the library in order to meet the information needs of both intended and anticipated users.

Information evaluation is the ability of an individual to be able to assess themselves on how effective and efficient of the information source to meet the information needs. Evaluation focuses on how credible, accurate and just the information seeker is while solving their information problems. Igwe and Esimokha (2012), assessed the information literacy skills of students of Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria, and found poor information literacy skills, especially in evaluating information resources- citation/referencing and plagiarism. Students can evaluate information on the basis of reliability of the source; these require the information level of trustworthiness and an examination of details about the author: how accurate and relevant- these involves considering the quality of the content itself in relation to what is important to their purpose and whether what the author's claims are supported with evidence, authority of the work and judge the product effectively, is the information current, evaluate final results efficiently and critically, gain new knowledge after the evaluation and also achieve a sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Okiki, 2009, Al-Anif and Al-Azri, 2013). information level of trustworthiness and an examination of details about the author: how accurate and relevant- these involves considering the quality of the content itself in relation to what is important to their purpose and whether what the author's claims are supported with evidence, authority of the work and judge the product effectively, is the information current, evaluate final results efficiently and critically, gain new knowledge after the evaluation and also achieve a sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Okiki, 2009, Al-Anif and Al-Azri, 2013). Evaluating information requires revision in order to produce quality product or result. Coiro (2014), confirm that students are more concerned with content relevance and accuracy than with credibility in evaluating online information. However, this indicates an overall negative picture of skills in information evaluation. The information literate student articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources; recognizes prejudice and compare information from various sources.

Research Methodology Adopted

The study adopted a survey research design since the study needed a pool of opinions and measures from three Universities. A survey design provides a quantitative description of trends, attitudes of a population, or associations among variables of a population or sample. Survey design makes it possible for many subjects to be studied at the same time. Due to the large nature of the study population, the population was purposively and randomly sampled. Purposive sample was utilised for selecting faculties within the three universities, these were Faculty of Science and Education from undergraduate students of the Federal University Lokoja, Faculties of Law and Management and Social Science from Baze University. Arts and Medicine from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 307 respondents. Simple random sampling is to ensure that each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. The research instrument was the questionnaire which was used to elicit required information from the sample. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation was used to analyse the data collected for the research questions.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The data analysis was based on the responses to the questionnaire based on the sample. Out of the three hundred and seven (307) copies of questionnaire distributed, only 287 of the questionnaires were duly completed, returned, examined, and found useful for analysis. This sum represents 93.5% response rate and this was achieved through multiple efforts and establishing contacts with respondents. Table 1 presents the distribution of the response rate. The Information Needs of Undergraduate Students at the three Universities

S/N	Faculties	Number of Questionnaires Administered	Number of Questionnaires Retrieved	% of Questionnaires Retrieved
1	Science	48	45	14.66
2	Arts	42	42	13.68
3	Education	106	99	32.25
4	Law	28	26	8.47
5	Management & Social Sci	48	41	13.36
6	Medical Sci	36	34	11.07
	Total	307	287	93.49

RQ1: Conscious Information Needs of Final year Undergraduate Students

Research question one looks at the information need of final year undergraduates' students at the three universities. In order to answer this research question, a list of possible information needs for undergraduates was provided for the respondents to tick as many elements as possible. Table 2 below presents the data collected and analysed.

Table 2: The Conscious Information Needs of Undergraduate Students at the Universities

Types of Information	Arts	Med.	Sci.	Educ.	Law.	Man& Soc Sci	Total	M
Class Assignment	40	39	26	96	33	45	279.00	46.5000
Current Affairs	12	11	8	32	17	19	99.00	16.5000
Academic Matters	31	34	22	87	30	33	237.00	39.5000
Sports	13	12	18	42	16	9	110.00	18.3333
Research	42	41	25	90	31	43	272.00	45.3333
Registration	11	19	12	38	16	20	116.00	19.3333
Making Decisions	17	22	19	48	21	24	151.00	25.1667

Key: Med=Medicine, Sci=Science, Educ=Education, Man&Soc Sci= Management and Social Science

Table 2 presents the types of information needs of undergraduate students at the universities.

The table shows class assignment with mean score of 46.5, research with mean score of 45.3 and academic matters with mean score of 39.5 were the major information needs of

undergraduate students at these Universities. This relates with the findings of Al-Anif and Al-Azri (2013), that completing course assignment was the most frequently indicated reason for the students information need. This view collaborates with the findings of Baro and Fyneman (2009), revealed that majority of the students agreed that they need information to write their course assignments. The implication is that the undergraduate students of these schools need academic information that is related to their studies. The students are able to identify their information need in solving their academic problems. By contrast, the lowest average mean was indicated for current affairs 19.3 registration 18.3 and sports 16.5. This implies that respondents believe they were information literate and have the needed skills to formulate questions to solve problems.

RQ2: The Extent to which undergraduate students can Locate Information

The second research was to find out the extent to which these students from the selected faculties locate information. Table 3 presents the data collected and analysed

Table 3: Extent to which students could locate information for their needs

Locating Information	Arts 42			Med. 34			Law. 26			Man & Soc Sci 41			Edu. 99			Sci. 45			S.D
	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD	
Using Search tools	16	19	7	14	11	9	6	11	9	21	12	8	41	34	24	23	19	3	9.96
Internet	12	28	2	9	23	2	11	12	3	19	21	1	39	55	5	17	19	9	14.03
Indexes/table of content	12	21	9	10	19	5	8	17	1	14	23	4	27	58	14	11	25	9	12.80
Referral services/ Ask library staff	17	19	6	12	14	8	9	11	6	19	20	2	36	52	11	19	22	4	12.12
Reference materials	16	18	8	11	14	9	8	10	8	19	15	7	39	36	24	21	21	3	9.74
Online public access catalogue	16	19	7	14	11	9	6	11	9	21	12	8	41	35	23	23	19	3	10.03
Locate information using informal communication, email, phone, online chat, etc.	19	22	1	13	16	5	11	13	2	19	20	2	41	34	24	22	20	3	11.07
Informative databases	17	18	7	12	13	9	7	10	9	19	14	8	39	36	24	21	21	3	9.75

Table 3 revealed the students' ability in locating information. The table shows the students believed to a high extent in their ability to locate information through the Internet with a Standard dev score of 14.03, while indexes/table of content had a score of 12.80. This finding is in accordance with that of Gawhari and Al-Amoodi (2009) who discovered, that Internet was the first choice for accessing information by undergraduate students. The implication perhaps, is that undergraduate students rely mainly on the use of Internet because of its flexibility and timely access to information. However, on the other hand the extent to which they could locate information on information databases had a standard score of 9.75 with reference materials also at 9.74. These results suggest a limited use of such tools in locating information and therefore, inability to hone the skill. Lack of such skills could indicate a resultant low performance in academic pursuit as such sources of information are verified and scholarly

RQ3: Undergraduate Students Ability to Evaluate Information

The third research question for assessing information literacy skills, what is the extent of final year undergraduate student's ability to evaluate information for their information needs? This skill requires the students to evaluate how well the information sought after meets their information need.

Table 4: Extent undergraduate can evaluate information

I am able to evaluate the	Art. 42			Med.34			Law.26			Man & Soc Sci 41			Edu. 99			Sci.45			TOTAL	S. D
	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD	HE	LE	UD		
Reliability of document or information I find	17	19	6	13	15	6	8	12	6	16	18	7	38	35	26	23	19	3	287	9.87
Validity of the information	16	19	7	14	11	9	6	11	9	21	12	8	41	34	24	23	19	3	287	9.96
Ensure accuracy of all information retrieved	24	15	3	17	9	8	12	8	6	18	16	7	52	37	10	22	17	6	287	12.18

Authenticate the authority behind the information obtained	17	18	7	12	13	9	7	10	9	19	14	8	39	36	24	21	21	3	287	9.75
Relevancy of final products	12	28	2	9	23	2	11	12	3	19	21	1	39	55	5	17	19	9	287	14.03
Know if the writer or author of the information is objective	18	18	6	17	17	0	9	14	3	21	14	6	44	48	7	19	24	2	287	13
How current is the information	16	18	8	11	14	9	6	12	8	16	18	7	38	39	22	17	19	9	287	9.45
Previous stages of the work and gain new knowledge	17	20	5	11	14	9	9	11	6	17	16	8	35	38	26	18	22	5	287	9.58

The table 4 shows the extent of undergraduate students' ability to evaluate information. The table show that respondent's ability to judge the relevance of the products of the work was the most frequently indicated skills with a score of 14.03 followed by the ability to know if the writer or author of the information is objective scoring 13.00 and the ability to ensure accuracy of all information retrieved with standard deviation of 12.18. Coiro (2014), confirm that students are more concerned with content relevance and accuracy than with credibility in evaluating online information. The implication of this finding is that these students tend to believe any information they find on the internet as credible, thus leading to misinformation or even disinformation.

Other indices show respondents' ability to authenticate the authority behind the information obtained 9.75, ability to evaluate the previous stages of the work and gain new knowledge 9.58 and lastly is the ability to judge how current the information is had a score of 9.45. This means that the students in these universities had a tendency to be victims of false information and outdated information.

Summary of Findings

1. Information needs of final year undergraduate students from the three Universities are diverse but include information for the following class assignments, research and academics matters;
2. The extent to which the final year students of the universities are able to locate information is dependent highly on the Internet and not on reference materials (dictionaries, encyclopaedias etc).
3. The extent to which the students were able to evaluate information was low which meant they were prone to be victims of misinformation and disinformation.

Recommendation

1. The schools/lecturers should encourage critical reasoning teaching students how to source for information for their varied information needs. This could be through class exercises, discussions on where they might find credible information, identify key terms.
2. The use of the Internet cannot be discouraged rather the universities can emphasize on the use of Libraries as a course where students are taught how to get credible information within the context of subject areas by librarians and reference tools or guides.
3. Librarians should be required to teach undergraduate students how to evaluate information especially as regards online information resources.

Conclusion

Information needs and literacy skills are important concepts in the field of information studies that deal with an individual's ability to locate and evaluate information from varied information sources. The study was concerned with expressing the information need and information literacy of final year undergraduate students from selected faculties within three universities in Northern Nigeria. The study found that the conscious information needs of these undergraduates were varied, and they tended to rely more on the internet sources for their information, though certain sources of information contained within the internet could

be unreliable. The study recommends critical reasoning at classrooms teaching identification of information needs and librarians building on literacy skills of students through literacy programs at the school.

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