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Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Final Year Students of a Specialized University in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the information needs and seeking behaviour of final-year students of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun (FUPRE), Nigeria. The study seeks to identify their information needs, the purpose for which they seek information, sources of information consulted and challenges faced when seeking information. It employed the use of descriptive survey research design. The total population for this study is 1642, comprising all final-year students of FUPRE in the 2022/2023 academic session. The purposive sampling technique was used, where 50% of the entire population was selected giving a sample size of 821. A questionnaire was used to elicit data from the respondents, while simple percentage and frequency counts were used to analyze the data generated. The findings suggest that final-year students majorly seek information related to academic development/course work, project writing/defense, job-related information, and business/wealth creation. It also revealed that class assignments, examinations, project writing, self-development, and health-related reasons are the purposes they seek information. The major sources of information they consult are Google, other search engines, lecture notes, friends, and colleagues. However, the study identifies an uncomfortable library environment, lack of internet access in the library, too much information to deal with, lack of time, and poor facilities in the library as the major challenges they face while seeking information. It is therefore recommended that the university should provide an enabling environment for the students to access and use the library services as well as an internet connection to access a wide range of resources.

Keywords

Information needs, information seeking, students, information sources

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Introduction

People nowadays require information for different reasons, such as managing their social lives, improving their careers, and using it for personal use. They are thought to have distinct information needs, and information is thought to be necessary for modern society to function (Kalbande, 2019). This demonstrates the importance of information in today's society, where individuals have a wide range of information needs and can achieve both personal and professional objectives with access to it. This is suggestive that, information should be tailored to meet the specific needs of individuals, therefore highlighting the importance of having access to accurate, up-to-date information so that everyone can make the most of their lives. Information seekers ultimately need to evaluate the dependability, relevance, and correctness of the information they need before gaining access to it, according to Humbhi et al. (2022). They must acquire critical thinking abilities and become acquainted with the various kinds of information sources that are accessible to do this. They can make sure they get the most accurate and recent information by being able to recognize and access the most relevant sources. Information need is defined as the need for information that adds to, improves, or modifies an individual's knowledge or comprehension of a subject.

According to Okonoko et al. (2015), information need is the measure of knowledge needed by an individual or organization to achieve their goals, whether for work or leisure. This need arises from a gap between what an individual or group should know and what they currently know, implying that there are knowledge gaps. Therefore, an information seeker, regardless of level of understanding or profession, adopts different methods, approaches, and strategies for investigating, searching, selecting, using, and sharing information to gain access to these materials or sources to fill the information gap that exists. These strategies, techniques, and methods applied by any individual or group in their bid to acquire information to meet their needs are referred to as information-seeking behavior (Manjunath & Babu, 2018). The meaning of information-seeking behaviour is further explained in the study by Kannappanavar and Hugar (2019) as any behaviour that involves the active process of seeking out and using information to meet a specific need. In other words, when an individual or group of individuals can recognize the needed information, its goal, and the different kinds of information resources that are accessible, they look for, find, assess, and make appropriate use of the information.

According to Eke et al. (2019, p. 2) "understanding students' information needs and seeking behavior is paramount in the information service delivery of any academic library". Being aware of the information needs and understanding the information-seeking behavior of students would help the library design a more proactive and robust service mechanism to match the student's profile, as well as ensure academic progress. This will no doubt help fulfill the ultimate purpose of information access; which is meeting the myriad needs of a variety of library users, in this case, final-year students. The writers identified information on course-related issues, job-related information, and

information on postgraduate studies as information needed by final-year students. However, in contrast, the major information needs of final-year students identified by Sambo et al. (2021) are academic development and current affairs. Also, they identified internet sources, project reports/thesis, online public catalogues, print textbooks and journals, reference books, CD-ROMs as the information sources they consult therefore forming their information-seeking behaviour.

Statement of the problem

There are numerous sources of information in different formats available to undergraduate students in universities which if accessed and well utilized will be of immense benefit to them, especially in meeting both their educational and personal information needs. However, finding the proper resources, and knowing where and how to get them seem to be a struggle among undergraduate students, especially final-year students who are faced with the arduous task of meeting their academic requirements in the form of continuous assessments and projects while preparing for post-educational commitments. Despite having access to various sources of information such as library print resources, online databases, search engines, and other information sources, some are still faced with the hurdle of locating and utilizing relevant information to meet their information needs. Others seem to struggle with selecting appropriate sources, evaluating the quality and relevance of information, and generating the information for effective use. This may be due to poor search skills or locating the right sources for getting the right information, leading to poor academic performance and difficulty in acquiring critical thinking and research abilities. It is against this background that it is essential to understand the information needs and information-seeking behavior of final-year students, using the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun (FUPRE), Nigeria as a case study.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to examine the information needs and seeking behaviour of final-year students in the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun (FUPRE), Nigeria as a case study. Specifically, it seeks to;

1.   identify the information needs of final-year students of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, Nigeria
2.   examine the purposes for which final-year students seek information in FUPRE
3.   assess the sources final-year students consult to meet their information needs
4.   investigate the challenges final-year students face while seeking information

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the information needs of final-year students of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, Nigeria?
2. What are the purposes for which final-year students seek information in FUPRE?
3. What are the sources final-year students consult to meet their information needs in FUPRE?
4. What challenges do final-year students face while seeking information?

Literature Review

A variety of information needed by an information seeker to satisfy a need or close a knowledge gap could be categorized as information needs. According to Coetzee (2017) cited in Mnguni and Kekana (2022), these needs vary widely depending on the person, their educational background, their capacity for expressing their needs, their openness to learning, and their capacity to apply the knowledge that they have found. It is always crucial to take into account a variety of aspects that almost directly relate to an individual's personality when assessing his information needs. This is to close the gap that needs to be filled and provide the appropriate information that is suitable for meeting the actual need. Considering the area of the information needs of final-year students in tertiary institutions, According to Eke et al. (2019), an information need is a recognized need for particular data to complete a task, such as a project, assignment, test, or recreational activity. Depending on the goal, there are many different places from which this information may be needed, such as for a school assignment, research project, exam, school assignment, project, or leisure. It is important to determine the information needed and what is required to accomplish the goal. The student should then look for sources of information that can supply the information needed, and assess the accuracy and dependability of those sources to make sure the information is reliable and relevant. The study further revealed that the information needs of final year students in the Federal University of Technology, Owerri are course-related information, job-related information, topic selection and defense, information on postgraduate studies, health-related information, information on sports, and lastly information on entertainment and recreation. In the same vein, Jan and Khan (2022) posited that information about the course of study, scholarships for further education, employment opportunities, postgraduate education, and career development are the most crucial information needs for undergraduates enrolled in regular and remote learning programs.

Since the middle of the 20th century, the term "information-seeking behavior" has been used in professional literature to describe the range of strategies, techniques, and methods people use to find, evaluate, use, and share information for social, professional, and personal goals. However since everyone has different information needs, they must use a range of techniques to obtain information that will serve them (Manjunath & Babu, 2018). Information-seeking behavior as asserted by Agarwal (2018)

is demonstrated when a person recognizes a need for information and makes a conscious effort to obtain it by taking the required steps to address that need. These activities could involve a range of tactics, like speaking with coworkers, browsing scholarly and subject-based databases, and using the internet, until they locate the information they require. On a general note, a mix of internal and external factors affects information-seeking behavior. Individual characteristics, including their knowledge, skills, motivations, beliefs, and attitudes, are considered internal factors. On the other hand, external factors are things that are not directly related to the person, like their job or tasks, educational background, hobbies, and the availability of resources. Therefore, to best understand the information-seeking behaviors of final-year students, it is essential to understand and appreciate the commitments and expectations that come with that level; especially the fact that it is the peak of one stage (university level) and the beginning of another (post-university level). Therefore, everything done at this level is a cumulative assessment of everything done throughout the years of study and preparation for a new phase of life after a period of study, making it a burden on its own that librarians should understand to better serve them and meet their information needs. Eke et al. (2019), support this line of reasoning when they assert that students display a variety of verbal and nonverbal cues when seeking information to meet goals and solve specific academic problems, including questioning, commenting, offering feedback, and changing their body language or posture. By recognizing these cues, educators and librarians can gain a better understanding of the motivations and interests of their students and more effectively direct them to the resources they need.

The entire university community comprising students and a variety of personnel, including researchers, scholars, and even casual readers, have long relied on academic libraries as an invaluable source of knowledge and information. Through librarians or the provision of catalogues, books, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and digital sources like databases and webpages, in addition to audio and video materials, they helped users locate the information they needed. Libraries are now widely recognized as the go-to places in academia for trustworthy and easily accessible knowledge and information. Students working on their research have greatly benefited from their accuracy and convenience, which has led many of them to turn to libraries when looking for information (Sani, 2017; Nwone & Mutula, 2018). The University of Fort Hare (2021) identified books, encyclopedias, magazines, databases, newspapers, library catalogues, and the internet as sources of information in a university. This may or may not be directly provided by the university library, depending on the information-seeking behaviour of the student. Findings in a study by Okoh and Ijiekhuamhen (2014) on the information-seeking behaviour of undergraduates in a Nigerian university revealed that 63% of the respondents use Google or other search engines and printed textbooks, 45% e-books, 31% reading list as their major source of information, 78% Google scholar, 30% Wikipedia, 61% social media, 57% library materials, 33% friends and family and 16% use other sources.

Regardless of the abundance of information sources available to students at the university to meet their diverse information needs, they still face several challenges that hinder their ability to effectively access and use information resources, whether in print or digital formats. A study by Humbhi et al. (2022) on information needs and information-seeking behavior of undergraduate students identified slow internet speed, lack of ICT knowledge, poor ICT facilities, and lack of knowledge on how to use the library OPAC as the top-ranking problems affecting undergraduate search for information. Others include a lack of expertise to access electronic resources including a lack of awareness on how to use electronic databases. Sambo et al. (2021) however listed an uncomfortable library environment, inadequate internet bandwidth, and insufficient computers, as the major constraints hindering the information-seeking behaviour of final-year students in a study on the information-seeking behaviour of final-year students in three universities in Kwara State. Findings by Okoh and Ijiekhuamhen (2014) showed that lack of computer skills, poor infrastructure, lack of time, irregular electricity supply, lack of good search skills, not knowing where to go to meet information needs and poor internet availability within the school premises are the major factors affecting undergraduate's information seeking behavior.

Research Methodology

The study employed the use of descriptive survey research design because of its large population and its capability of providing objective feedback from respondents that will be useful for drawing the right conclusion. The total population of the study is 1642, comprising all the final-year students of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources in the 2022/2023 academic session.

Population

Department	No final-year students
Chemistry	59
Industrial Chemistry	129
Physics	104
Environmental Management and Toxicology	65
Geology	147
Geophysics	144
Computer science	213
Mathematics	50
Chemical Engineering	120
Mechanical Engineering	169
Electrical/Electronics engineering	110
Marine Engineering	153
Petroleum Engineering	179
Total	**1642**

ICT Department, FUPRE (2023)

The purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study because of the large size of the population. 50% of the students were selected from each department, giving a sample size of 821.

Sample Size

Department	50% of Population
Chemistry	29
Industrial Chemistry	64
Physics	52
Environmental Management and Toxicology	32
Geology	73
Geophysics	72
Computer science	107
Mathematics	25
Chemical Engineering	60
Mechanical Engineering	85
Electrical/Electronics engineering	55
Marine Engineering	77
Petroleum Engineering	90
Total	**821**

A well-structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data from the respondents. 821 copies of the questionnaires were administered after their exams. However, 681 were collected and found usable, giving an 83% response rate. Data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency counts.

Findings of the Study

Research Question 1: What are the information needs of final-year students of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, Nigeria?
Table 1 provides answers to the question.
Table 1: Information needs of final year students of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, Nigeria.

S/N	Information Needs of Final Year Students	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Academic development/course-related information	627	92	54	8
2	Health-related information	238	35	443	65
3	Project writing and defense	627	92	54	8
4	Information on postgraduate	136	20	545	80

	studies				
5	Job-related information	627	92	54	8
6	Current Affairs	238	35	443	65
7	Sport/Entertainment	238	35	443	65
8	Business/wealth creation	409	60	272	40
9	NYSC information	627	92	54	8

Table 1 revealed that 627(92%) of the respondents need information for their academic development/course-related information, project writing and defense, job-related information, as well as NYSC information. 409(60%) of the final year students need information for business/wealth creation, while only a few 136(20%) agree to need information for postgraduate studies.

Research Question 2: What are the purposes for which final-year students seek information in FUPRE?
Table 2 provides answers to the question.
Table 2: Purposes for which final year students seek information in FUPRE.

S/N	Purpose for which you seek information	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Class assignment	681	100	00	00
2	Examination	681	100	00	00
3	Project writing	681	100	00	00
4	Updating Lecture notes	232	34	449	66
5	Health-related	347	51	334	49
6	Self-development	599	88	82	12
7	Current Awareness	313	46	368	54
8	Sports/Entertainment	327	48	354	52

Table 2 shows that all the respondents 681(100%) seek information for class assignments, examination, and project writing. Others, 599(88%) seek information for self-development, 347(51%) for health-related information, 327(48%) for sports and entertainment, 313 (46%) for current awareness, and 232(34%) for updating their lecture notes. This shows that, while most final-year students will seek information to meet up with their class assignments, examinations, and projects, most of them do not consult information materials to update their lecture notes.

Research Question 3: What are the information sources final-year students consult in meeting their information needs in FUPRE?
Table 3 provides answers to the question.
Table 3: Information sources consulted by final-year students while seeking information in FUPRE.

S/N	Information sources consulted by final-year students	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Google/other search engines	681	100	00	00
2	Print textbooks/journals	490	72	191	28
3	Newspapers/magazine	286	42	395	58
4	Project report	490	72	191	28
5	Reference books	259	38	422	62
6	Lecture Notes	654	96	27	4
7	Librarians	123	18	558	82
8	E-books/e-journals	259	38	422	62
9	Social media	613	90	68	10
10	Friends and colleagues	654	96	27	4
11	Internet databases	395	58	286	42

Table 3 revealed that all 681 final-year students in FUPRE representing (100%) of the respondents mostly consult Google/other search engines as information sources. 654(96%) consult lecture notes, friends, and colleagues rather than any other information sources. 613(90%) of them get consult social media, 490(72%) print textbooks/journals and project reports, 395(58%) e-books and e-journals. Only a few 123(18%) would consult librarians to seek information.

Research Question 4: What challenges do final-year students face while seeking information?
Table 4 provides answers to the question.
Table 4: Information sources consulted by final-year students while seeking information in FUPRE.

S/N	Challenges faced by final year students	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Lack of computer/internet skills	245	36	436	64
2	The lukewarm attitude of library staff	327	48	354	52
3	Difficulty in searching databases	565	83	116	17
4	Too much information to deal with	620	91	61	9

5	Poor/ lack of internet access in the library	661	97	20	3
6	Lack of time	592	87	86	13
7	Poor ICT facilities in the library	592	87	86	13
8	Insufficient information resources	484	71	197	29
9	Uncomfortable library environment	661	97	20	3
10	Poor organization of materials in the library	293	43	388	57

As indicated in Table 4 the challenges faced by final year students while seeking information are uncomfortable library environment and lack of internet access in the library, which was agreed to by 661(97%). Other challenges as indicated are too much information to deal with 620(91%), lack of time, and poor facilities in the library 592(87%). 565(83) and 484(71) indicated Difficulty in searching databases and Insufficient information resources respectively. 327 representing 48% of the respondents indicated the lukewarm attitude of library staff as a challenge. Whereas only 293(43%) and 245(36%) identified Poor organization of materials in the library and lack of computer/internet skills respectively as a challenge.

Discussion of findings

From the findings of the study, it was gathered that the information needs of final year students of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun is majorly centred on information about academic development/course-related information, project writing, and defense, as well as job-related information and for business/wealth creation. However, only a few are interested in getting information for pursuing a post-graduate degree. This finding is similar to the outcome of research by Eke et al. (2019) on information needs and seeking behavior of final-year students of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri which revealed that final-year students need course-related information followed by topic selection/defense, and the least preferred type is information on entertainment and recreation. This also conforms with the findings of Sambo et al (2021) on the information-seeking behaviour of final-year students in three universities in Kwara State, where it was revealed that academic development and current affairs make up the highest information needs of the final-year students in the three universities selected for the study. This shows that the information needs of final-year students of FUPRE, though a specialized university are consistent with that of students of other conventional universities; meaning final-year students are generally concerned with information related to their final-year academic work.

The findings revealed that the purposes for which the majority of final-year students of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources seek information are for class assignments, examinations, project writing, self-development, as well as health-related.

However, only a few seek information to update their lecture notes. This varies to a large extent with earlier findings by Okoh and Ijiekhuamhen (2014) on the information-seeking behaviour of undergraduates of the same university which showed that undergraduate students seek information to enhance academic performance, do assignments and course-work, and read ahead of the lecturers Samuel (2016) argued that project writing by final years students offer greater opportunities for self-sufficiency and educational exploration, leading to a higher likelihood of achieving honors as a graduate, for students in Nigeria and the world over. The findings of the study conform with current findings that there is a dearth in the reading culture of students in tertiary institutions. Also, the purpose of final-year students seeking information varies significantly from that of other undergraduate students who are not preparing for their final examination and obligations.

Also, the findings show that the information sources consulted by final year students of the FUPRE are Google and other search engines, lecture notes, information from friends and colleagues, and social media, including consulting print textbooks/journals, project reports, and e-books/e-journals. It also shows that only a few would consult librarians to seek information. This slightly differs from the findings of Eke et al. (2019) on information needs and seeking behavior of final-year students of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, where it was revealed that most final-year students rely on their lecture notes as a strategy for seeking information, searching institutional repository with the least applied strategy being the use of library database. These findings indicate that students seldom use the FUPRE library, giving the impression that the library is either not conducive or does not possess the needed information sources.

Finally, findings from the study show that the challenges faced by final-year students are especially uncomfortable library environments and lack of internet access in the library. Others are too much information to deal with, lack of time and poor facilities in the library. Only a few see a lack of computer/internet skills as a challenge though. This is at variance with the findings of Ekong and Ekong (2018) who attributed the underutilization and effective usage of electronic information resources by students to lack of ICT skills and inadequate information literacy. this further aligns with the stance of Salihu and Olatokun (2021) who noted, that for students to fully benefit from electronic information resources, they need to possess ICT skills and information literacy. Lack of these skills can act as a barrier to effectively utilizing such resources, as students who have the necessary ICT skills and information literacy will be more inclined to utilize e-journals, e-databases, and institutional repositories.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusively, the study highlights the information needs and seeking behaviour of final-year students at the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun which is a specialized institution for the training of high-level manpower in the oil and gas

industry. It shows that final-year students need information for their academic development, their course of study, project writing, defense, and job-related information. They seek information to take care of class assignments, examination, project writing, self-development, as well as their health. Only a few however seek information to update their lecture notes. They mostly consult Google, other search engines, lecture notes, friends and colleagues, social media, print textbooks/journals, project reports, and e-books/e-journals. Many of them do not consult librarians when seeking this information. The study further identified an uncomfortable library environment, lack of internet access in the library, too much information to deal with, lack of time, and poor facilities in the library as challenges FUPRE final-year students face while seeking information.

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommendations that would help final-year students access and use different sources to meet their information needs;

1. The university should make provisions for students to access and utilize the library's services in a comfortable environment. This entails having computer systems and other ICT devices available, as well as comfortable seating, sufficient lighting, and ventilation.
2. The university should ensure that the library has a reliable internet connection, as well as a wide range of electronic resources such as e-journals, e-databases, and institutional repositories, are made available.
3. The university should introduce and encourage the use of ICT skills and information literacy programs for final-year students to enable them to effectively use electronic information resources to save their time.
4. The university library should market its offerings to sensitize students on the availability of various sources of information and how to effectively use them.
5. The university should provide adequate funding for the acquisition of relevant and up-to-date information resources in the library.

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