

Information Seeking Behaviour of Undergraduates in a Nigerian University

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Abstract.

This study investigates the information seeking behaviour of undergraduates of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources (FUPRE). A structured questionnaire was used for data gathering in the University. The questionnaire data was analyzed using frequency, bar chart, and percentage for easy interpretation. The research findings show that the respondents use goggle, print textbooks, library materials and social media as major research resources. Lack of computer skills, irregular electricity supply and lack of good search skills were found as factors affecting information seeking behaviour of the respondents. The following were recommended in line with the findings of the study: Training of students on computers skills, provision of alternative power supply as well as adequate coverage of information literacy skills in the use of library currently taught in the university.

Keywords: literacy skills, information seeking behavior, users' needs

Introduction

The assessment of information seeking behaviour by undergraduate student is vital in supporting them to access and use information resources to meet their required information needs. According to Ajiboye and Tella (2007), information is data that has been processed to be well understood to satisfy the user's query. They go further in their definition to say that 'information is data value in planning, decision making and evaluation of any programme. KOC University Library Glossary (2014) see information as data presented in readily comprehensible form, to which meaning has been attributed within a context for its use. In a more dynamic sense, the message is conveyed by the use of a medium of communication or expression. Bruce (2005) states that, "information plays a significant role in our daily professional and personal lives and we are constantly challenged to take charge of the information that we need for work, fun and everyday decisions and tasks.

Wilson (2000) posited that information needs are influenced by a variety of factors such as the range of information sources available, the uses to which the information will be put, the background, motivation, professional orientation and individual characteristics of the user. While other factors according to Nwagwu and Oshiname (2009), are the socio-political, economic, legal and regulatory. There must be a need that would prompt an individual to engage in information seeking. Information Need is an innate desire that prompt an individual leading to a search for information.

Undergraduates have a lot of information needs which prompted their demand for information. When undergraduates are searching for information to meet their needs, they use different sources of information. Akinola, Afolabi and Chinedu (2009) defines information sources as the materials or means through which information can be found to meet a particular need. Case (2002) defines information seeking as a conscious effort to acquire information in response to a need or gap in your knowledge. Information seeking behaviour is a key concept in Library and information science profession. Pettigrew Fidel and Bruce (2001) defined information behaviour as the study of how people need, seek, give and use information in different contexts, including the workplace and everyday living. According to Odongo and Bukenya (2004), information seeking behaviour is the way people go about searching for information. They also observed that students' information seeking behaviour involves purposeful information seeking as a result of the need to complete course assignments, prepare for class discussions, seminars, workshops, and write final-year research papers. Information seeking behaviour is expressed in various forms, from reading printed material to research and experimentation (Bhatti, 2008). Information-seeking behaviour remains a key research area; academic librarians around the world strive to understand the information needs of undergraduate students and ways of satisfy these needs. Ossai-onah (2013) posit that 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. Undergraduate students' information seeking behaviour was considered the biggest problem to be investigated. Most undergraduate students find it difficult to locate the right sources of information to meet their needs and without adequate information succeeding academically would be a great challenge. This study is therefore

aimed at determining information seeking behavior of undergraduates with a view to improving their academic performance.

Objectives of the Study

Studying the Information seeking behaviour of undergraduate students will enable libraries and academic librarian deliver standard services which will improve the academic performance of their students. This study sought to establish ways of improving the information-seeking behaviour of students. To attain this goal, the study stipulated the following objectives:

- To find out the sources of information undergraduate students are familiar with.
- To discover the information needs of undergraduates students
- To determine the undergraduate students' information demand and use
- To establish the problems that undergraduate students encounter in information seeking

Research Questions

For the purpose of this research the following questions have been formulated:

- What are the sources of information undergraduate students are familiar with?
- What are the information needs of undergraduates?
- How do undergraduate students demand for information to meet their needs?
- What are the factors militating against the availability and accessibility of information by undergraduate student?

Literature Review

Information Seeking Behaviour deals with the psychological behaviour of the seeker. It involves the searching, locating, retrieving and using of information (Karunarathna, 2008). Wilson (2008) posits that, "Information seeking behavior is the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. Information seeking behaviour can be described as an individual's manner of gathering and sourcing information for personal use, knowledge updating and development (Emmanuel, George & Oni, 2010). Ellis (1989) in his information seeking behaviour model identified six actions

in sourcing for information, which include: starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, and extracting. According to Ellis, 'starting' is identifying the initial materials to search through and selecting starting points for the search. He explained 'Chaining' as following leads from the starting source to referential connections to other sources that contribute new sources of information. Ellis simply explains 'browsing' as casually looking for information in areas of interest. 'Differentiating', one of the search strategies as explained by Ellis is selecting among the known sources by noting the distinctions of characteristics and value of the information. 'Monitoring' is keeping up-to-date on a topic by regularly following specific sources as well as using small set of care sources including key personal contacts and publications. 'Extracting' is methodically analyzing sources to identify materials of interest. Information seeking behaviour deals mainly with the study of information needs, demand and use by a particular set of people. The behaviour people exhibit while in search of information differs significantly according to background, culture, conditions, needs, and requirements.

A lot of studies have been conducted on the information seeking behaviour of undergraduate students. The study by Barakutty and Salih (1999) cited by Owolabi (2007) at Calicut University, India, shows that the students used the Internet as the major source of information for their academic development. Kakai, Ikoja and Kigongo (2004) in their study observed that most students concentrate on using particular materials recommended by either their lecturers or colleagues who have used them before, rather than searching to find the most appropriate document to use. Ajiboye and Tella (2007) maintain that the way students organize their learning and search for information is crucial to their overall performance. Wilberley and Jones (2000) asserted that, though undergraduate students in the humanities do turn more frequently to librarians, they do so with some reluctance. According to the findings of Kim, Joanna and Yoo- lee (2013), almost all participants (98.6%) reported using Wikipedia as an information source, while (95.7%) of the participants reported that Face book is an important source of information to them. These researchers agreed that social media is an important source of information for undergraduate students. Mabawonku (2005) highlights ways in which students can seek for information, which include colleagues, the Internet, library, friends, family members, recognized institutions, agencies, and private organizations. Mann (2003) posited that most

researchers, even with computers, find only a fraction of the sources available to them. He explained that undergraduates tend to work within one or another mental framework that limits their basic perception of the universe of knowledge available to them. Students according to him use a subject-disciplinary method that leads them to a specific list of sources on a particular subject. He points out that while this method allows students and researchers to find more specific sources, it is limiting in that they may not realize that work of interest to their own subject appears within the literature of many other disciplines. He also observed that users want 'good enough' sources, not necessarily the best sources available. The evaluation of 'good enough' is based on a number of factors, the most important being ease of access and availability of full-text sources. The sources chosen follow the principle of Least Effort; they tend to choose perceived ease of access over quality of content in selecting an information source or channel. Ajiboye and Tella (2007) find out from their research on university undergraduates that 12 percent of the students required information for their personal development, while 11.25 percent claimed that they sought information on health matter, and 64.1 percent sought for information for their academic development, 9.3 percent to secure employment. Baro and Fynman (2009) in their study pointed out factors such as: information illiteracy among library users; absence of computer systems with Internet connectivity in the university libraries; poorly conducted user education programmes; reliance on manual information retrieval tools which leads to poor filing and slow retrieval; and limited sensitization of the library information resources and services as factors that hinder the effective utilization of library resources and services. This makes it difficult for undergraduate students to meet their information needs. Zondi (2002) in her study established that a majority of students show a very low level of competence in the use of a library and display poor information seeking patterns. It could be assumed that students could be experiencing technical problems in accessing information resources; being card catalogues, the library catalogues do not provide adequate access to the libraries' collections; or students are information illiterate and lack the required library literacy skills. Mellon (2006) concluded in his study that undergraduates encounter technical problems trying to locate materials from university libraries. Beyond the problem of facilities is the inability of students to use different search strategies to source information and how to source the academic information needed for

them to excel. Meyers, Nathan and Saxton (2006), found out that information barriers transcend access to information to constraining forces which affects the information search of students. Hartmann (2001) concluded in his study that undergraduate students experienced difficulty in locating items from the library collection and do not understand the processes for retrieving journal articles. According to the study of Kakai, Ikoja–Odongo and Bukenya (2004), undergraduates face the following barriers in their access to information; limited borrowing of the most relevant books in the closed access section; insufficient copies of the relevant information materials (books); out-dated (old) information materials dominating the stock; poorly conducting user education; reliance on manual information retrieval tools which lead to poor filing and slow retrieval; and, limited sensitization of the library information resources and services.

Research Method

A Survey research method was used to carry out this study because of its large population. The instrument used for data collection in this study was questionnaire. Questionnaires was used for collecting data for this research because Cohen and Morrision (2012) is of view that the questionnaires is widely used and it is a useful instrument for collecting survey information providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher and often comparatively straight forward to analyze. The target population of this study comprises the undergraduate's students of the Federal University of Petroleum Resources. The total population of the study was 1,816 undergraduate students of federal University of petroleum Resources (FUPRE). A total of 816 of respondents were selected out of the total population. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents across the two colleges in the university. These colleges are college of technology and college of science. The researcher administered and collected the questionnaire from the respondents. Thus there was 81% rate of return distributed.

Findings and Discussion:

Out of 816 copies of the questionnaire that were administered to the undergraduate students, 665(81%) were retrieved. The data collected in the study is presented according to the objectives of the study.

Fig 1: Distribution of respondent by sex

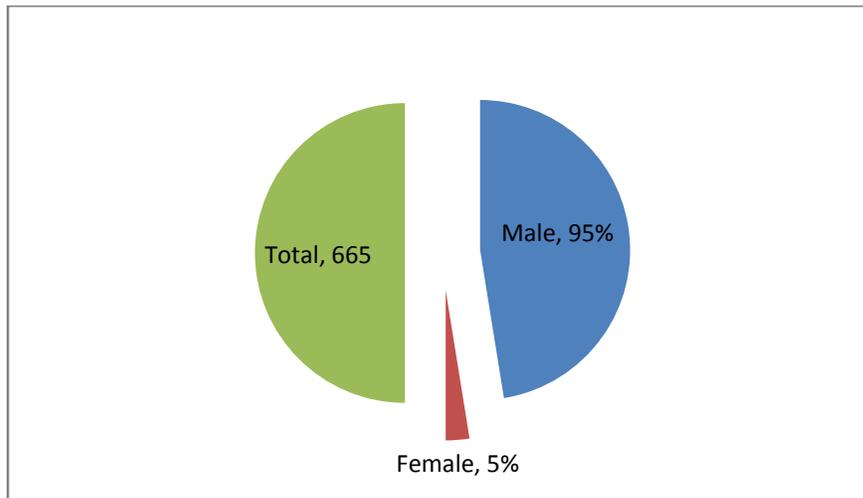
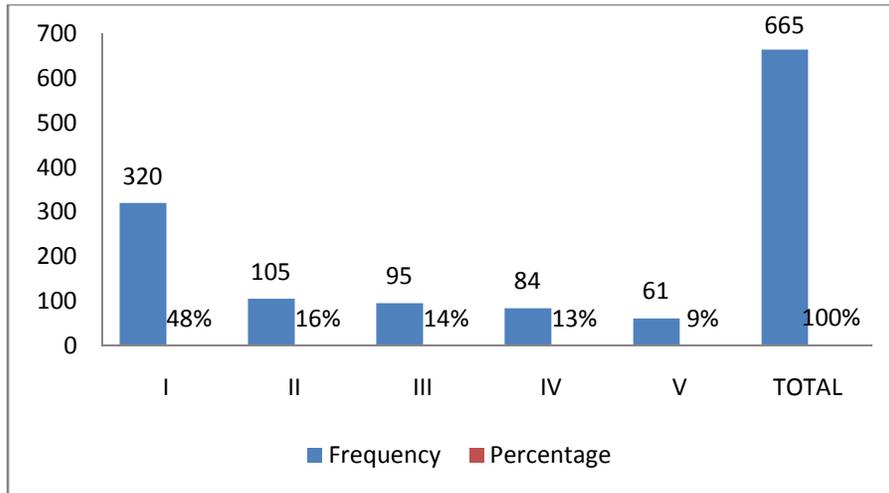


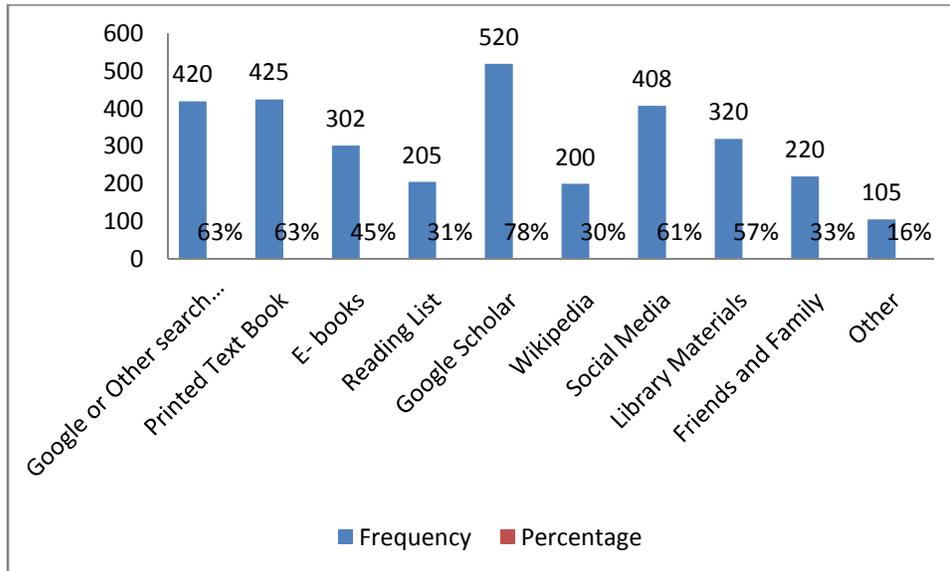
Fig. 1 shows that (95%) of the respondents are male while (5%) are female. This represents the gender distribution of students involved in the survey.

Fig 2: Year of respondents/ Students.



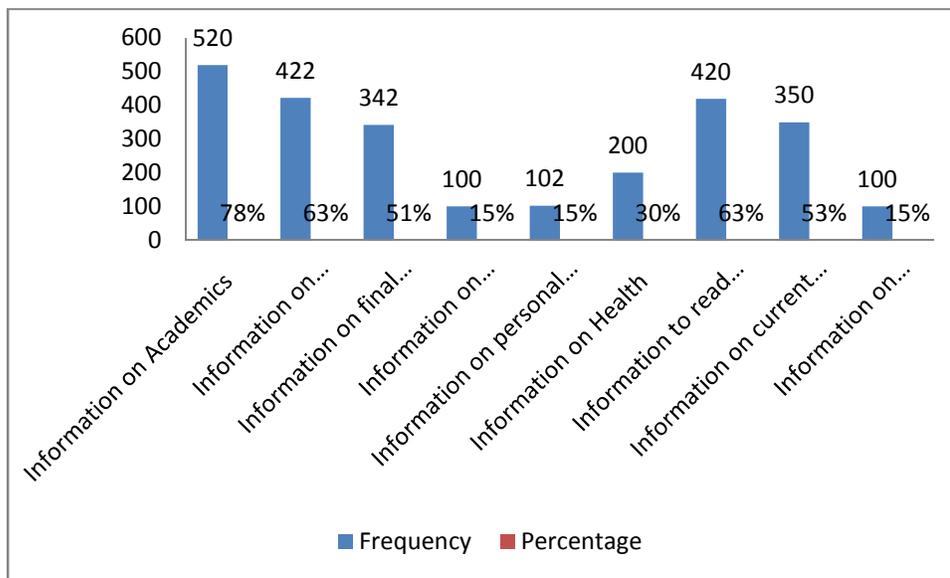
It is obvious from fig 2 that majority (48%) of the respondents are students in their first year while 16% are second year students, 14% are third year students, 13% students in their fourth year, 9% are fifth year students.

Fig 3: Source of Information



As observed from fig 3, 63% of respondent use goggle 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.

Fig 4: Use of information obtained



As observed from fig 4, that (78%) of the respondent use the information obtained for academics, 63% for assignment, 51% for final year research, 15% for relationship issues, 15% for personal development, 30% for health improvement ethics, 63% to read ahead of lectures, 53% for current happenings/ inventions, 15% for entertainment.

Fig 5: Demand for information

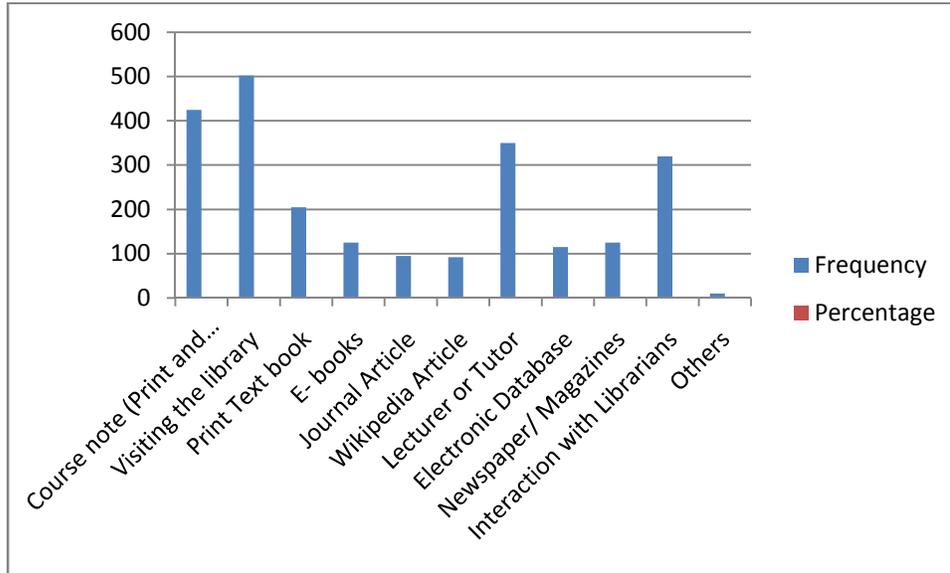


Figure 5 indicates that 64% of the respondent demand for information from course notes, 75% from visiting the library, 31% from print text books, 19% from e-books, 14% from journal articles, 14% from Wikipedia, 53% from lecturer or tutor, 17% from electronic database, 19% from newspaper/ magazines, 48% from interaction with librarians and 5% demand for information from other sources.

Fig 6: Purpose of use of Information by undergraduate students

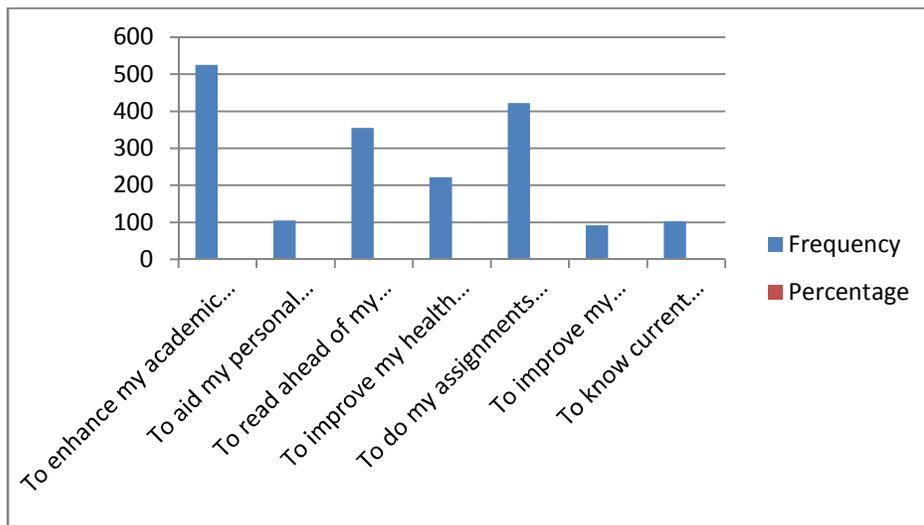


Fig. 6 shows information use by undergraduate students. 79% to enhance academic performance, 16% to aid personal development, 53% to read ahead of the lecturers, 33% to improve health ethics, 63% to do assignments and course works, 14% to improve relationship challenges while 15% to know current happenings and inventions.

Fig.7: Factors affecting undergraduate’s information seeking behavior

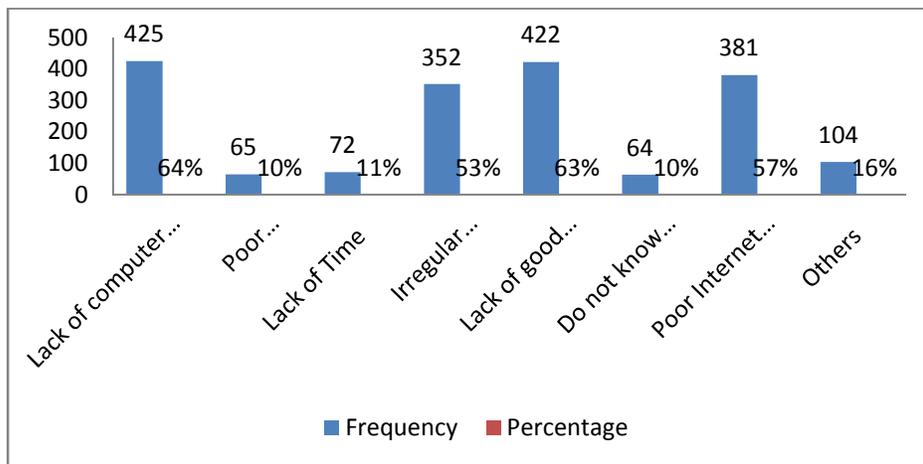


Table 7, shows that, 64% lack of computer skills, 10% poor infrastructure, 11% lack of time, 53% irregular electricity supply, 63% lack of good search skills, 10% do not know where to go to meet their information need while 57% poor internet available within the school premises and 16% other factors.

Findings reveal that 78% of the respondent’s sources for information through Google. It was found to be the most popularly used information channel, followed by social media. These findings correlate with the findings of Garcia and Silicia (2003) and Oyewusi and Oyebobe (2009). Google was found to be the major search engine used by the university students. Finding also reveals that 78% of the respondent use the information obtained for academics purposes. 63% for assignment, 51% for final year research, 63% to read ahead of lectures, 53% for current happenings/ inventions. Findings indicates that 75% of respondents visiting the library, 31% from print text books, 19% from e-books, 14% from journal articles, 14% from Wikipedia, 53% from lecturer or tutor, 17% from electronic

database, 19% from newspaper/ magazines, 48% from interaction with librarians and 5% demand for information from other sources.

Finding reveals that, 64% lack of computer skills, 53% irregular electricity supply, 63% lack of good search skills while 57% poor internet facility within the school premises. This is in line with Baro and Fynman (2009) in their study which pointed out factors such as: information illiteracy among library users; absence of computer systems with Internet connectivity in the university libraries; poorly conducted user education programmes etc. as factors that hinder the effective utilization of library resources and services. This makes it difficult for undergraduate students to meet their information needs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the study: students at the University know the importance of information, given the fact that a majority of them seek information to improve their academic performance. In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

- That Federal University of Petroleum Resources students should be exposed to interactive learning that would implant the habit and skills of researching in Information and Knowledge Management
- University administration should provide more books and journals to the library.
- The students should be educated on the importance and use of information in their academic pursuits.
- Training programmes should be organized for the library staff so they can be more effective in meeting students' information needs.
- Information sources should be well-organized, classified accurately, and entered in the catalogue.
- Computer training should be introduced so as to enhance search skills of the students.

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