



Information Needs and Utilization among Social Science Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

Information is a means through which knowledge about a phenomenon derived from observation, study experience or instruction and collection in varying ways. However, failure rates continue to increase in some universities in Nigeria, and information dissemination is not improving. This study, therefore, examines the information needs and utilisation of undergraduates in the Departments of Accountancy and Business Administration within three selected Nigerian Universities based on ownership. The study adopts qualitative research approach using interview method to collect data in the federal, state and privately owned universities. The research adopted snowball sampling method as it was difficult to determine the specific sample frame due to non-availability of intake records. The study therefore recruited ninety respondents for an interview from the three universities covering various disciplines in social sciences including Business Administration, Accounting, Economics and Finance. The study was guided by Wilson's 1991 information behaviour model using its major variables of information needs, seeking, awareness, utilisation and outcome. Findings revealed that students require relevant information that will assist them to succeed in their academic career. It also found that information needs of students vary depending on their course of study. Students, however, utilise information for various purposes including academic work, social networking, community development and lifelong learning experience.

Keywords: Information needs, Information utilization, Undergraduates, Academic success, Universities, Social Sciences, Accountancy, Business Administration and Nigeria.

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I. Introduction

Undergraduates in Nigerian universities are students undergoing various degree and professional academic programmes that span three to five years depending on the conditions set by the universities and the National University Commission (NUC). Kerins, Maddens and Fulton (2004) described Irish higher education undergraduate programmes as incorporating research and development similar to the work done by professionals. Globally, universities are regarded as the highest citadel of knowledge where different disciplines are offered with the aim of gaining understanding at improving people's standard of living.

Ajiboye and Tella (2007) indicated that Higher education institutions particularly universities are today gaining recognition by national governments and donors as main agents for social and economic development because of their collective ability to foster knowledge

creation, processing and dissemination of information. The Universities as academic institutions are organisations that facilitate learning to its members by revealing the information, obtaining it and making information seeking behaviours appropriate in the light of new information acquired (Bennett, 1999). Suzigan (2011) also pointed out that universities play a supporting role towards attaining economic or social success. These successes can be achieved through the research activities of the institutions of higher learning.

Moreover, experienced academics in the Universities in addition to teaching and research roles also mentor junior academics to sustain the academic tradition of training middle and upper-level manpower to promote informed society. De Castro, Sambuco, Ubel Stewart, and Jagsi (2013) pointed out that mentorship in academic is very importance because it seeks to better the relationships among researchers in the institution. Universities academics invariably passed the knowledge

acquired through their relationship to their students for improved educational experience. Combinations of varying activities in the universities assist the institutions in the promotion of intellectual attainment and goals for which the universities focused. Therefore, the role of universities in the promotion and sustenance of any society cannot be underestimated.

According to Mukoro (2014), universities are a citadel of learning for the development of knowledge and experience manpower at promoting the technological and sustainable development of a nation. The University is noted as a social institution whose basic tasks are to preserve the cultural heritage of society, produce new knowledge and transmit it (Igwe & Ilechukwu 2013).

Therefore, universities are expected to provide certain services to the students to enhance their academic experience and success where information plays a significant role in achieving learning success through the provision of quality information. The quality of information provided by academics determines the performance of their students. Towards this end, information is prominent pivotal in achieving educational success. Tella (2009) asserted that information plays a significant role in the academic activities of learners in this digital era where information has become a factor that is considered as a production aggregate. It is pertinent to stress that for learners to succeed in academics, they need to be highly informed, well equipped, and relentless in the quest for the right information and utilise it wisely. However, Capon (2009) pointed out that universities are providing lower quality of service that is not able to meet students' expectations, particularly sufficient information required to succeed in academics is absent. Therefore, information provision is needed by the social sciences academics to prepare students adequately for post-school challenges.

II. Study Objectives

The objectives of this study are;

1. To examine the information needs and utilisation of the social science undergraduates in Nigerian Universities.
2. To assess the information needs and utilisation of social science undergraduates for the purpose of improving their academic performances and challenges.
3. To suggest solutions on how undergraduates can surmount the obstacles relating to information provision and utilisation to improve their academic performance.

III. Research Questions

1. What are the information needs and utilisation pattern of undergraduates of social sciences in Nigerian Universities?
2. What is the extent of information needs and utilisation of undergraduates of social sciences in Nigerian Universities and their challenges?

3. How can undergraduates of social sciences in Nigerian Universities overcome their information needs and utilisation problems?

IV. Literature Review

a. Nigerian Universities

Nigerian universities are diverse due to their focus and date of creation that categorised them into first, second and third generation. The regional and central government created the first generation of Nigerian universities pioneered with the establishment of University College in Ibadan in 1948, which became a full-fledged university in 1962. Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) noted that six universities established during this period 1960-1970 are still referred to as first-generation universities. The second generation of universities was established between 1970 and 1975 in response to the yearning of moving the country forward among the comity of nations (Babalola, Jaiyeoba, & Okediran, 2007).

In the pursuance of the third national development plan (1975-1980), the government established seven universities in the country known as the third generation of universities in Nigeria. The Universities were located in the six geo-political zones of the country, their establishment were dedicated to specialities of Technology and Agriculture. According to Okojie (2007), the fourth generation universities are those established between 1991 to date that include more state universities, National Open University of Nigeria and private universities.

Among the Universities in Nigeria are formal institutions with collegiate and faculty structure for administrative and academic convenience. For the purpose of this study, three universities were selected based on their ownership and establishment generation. They include the University of Ilorin, Al-Hikmah University and Kwara State University, Malete.

The University of Ilorin was established by the federal government in 1975 thus belonging to the third generation of Nigerian universities. The university now has fifteen faculties including Arts, Agriculture, Environmental Sciences, Life Sciences, Management Sciences, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, Communication and Information Sciences. Others faculties in the institution include Education, Engineering and Technology, Pharmaceutical Science, Veterinary Medicine, and Law. Additionally, a College of Health Sciences (with two faculties of Clinical Sciences and Basic Medical Sciences); the two institutes of Education and Unilorin Sugar Research Institute); and the University of Ilorin Postgraduate School (Unilorin 2014).

Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin was founded in 2005 by the Abdur-Raheem Oladimeji Islamic Foundation (AROIF), Nigeria. The University came into existence via an operational license by National Universities Commission (NUC) to function as a Conventional Private University and it commenced academic activities in 2005/2006 academic session with 70 students across the three Colleges: Humanities, Management Sciences and Natural Sciences (Al-Hikmah, 2015).

Meanwhile, the bill for the establishment of Kwara State University was signed into law in 2007 and the National Universities Commission granted the licence for its operation on 9th February 2009. The University has campuses in the three senatorial districts of Kwara State, namely: Malete campus proposed as the main campus to house the Colleges of Pure and Applied Sciences, Information and Communication Technology and Education. Osi (Ekiti Local Government Area) campus to house the College of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences while Ilesha Baruba (Baruten Local Government Area) Campus to house the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences (KWASU, 2015).

The selected Universities for this study are in Kwara State Nigeria. The state is in the North Central geographical zone of Nigeria. The location of these institutions has increased the potentiality of citizens in the zone to have easy access to university education, improve the availability of manpower and bridge the usual perceive of education imbalance. Duruji *et al.* (2015) opined that destructive tendencies of ethnicity have filtered down to education, and national development has been affected which required some form of mitigating effects. The objectives of establishing universities in Nigeria are to create employment in the communities where the institutions are located and as an extension of the political will of government in power. The role of higher education as a pivot of development as noted in Arikewuyo (2004) that establishment of the university provides employment attracted revenue and brought about the development of the knowledge economy. However, the intricacies of social, political and economic situation nonetheless have affected the quality of university education in Nigeria and stands to defeat the essence of their creation if care is not taking. University as the creation of law consists of structures designed for smooth running and attainment of academic goals. The University library, for instance, is one of the important structures for provision of information through the acquisition, processing, preservation and dissemination of the resources with recourse to courses being offer in the institution. Anunobi and Okoye (2008) posit that, a well-established library in an academic institution is a nexus for teaching and learning, research and to provide basic information resources. The reverse is the case in most Nigerian universities to the extent that it had affected the quality of graduates in the institutions; although, the poor information infrastructure in Nigerian Universities is a tide that also affects other African Universities. Previous studies revealed that service quality in most university libraries in developing countries has been poor since the 1980s (Paulos, 2008; Nawe, 2004). In Malawi for instance, Chiweza (2000) observed that it has been difficult for academic libraries to purchase books and print journals. Moreover, Mann (1993) also confirmed that most researchers now found only a fraction of the information sources available to them a situation that limits their understanding of knowledge that they need to acquire.

However, universities in Nigeria need to carved a niche for themselves through the exposition of their graduates to modern information sources and resources that will

enable them to compete favourably with graduates from other parts of the world. Aina (2002) posited that the primary and traditional role of universities is the transmission of knowledge and the training of human resources for lecturers, students and their domiciled communities. According to Ifidon and Okoli (2002) universities in Nigeria now have additional functions in the pursuit of promotion and dissemination of knowledge; provision of intellectual leadership; manpower development; promotion of social and economic modernisation; promotion of intra and intercontinental and international understanding. Meanwhile, additional efforts need to be channel at enhancing the information and utilisation of undergraduates in the Nigerian universities. Additionally there is need to justify the establishment and investment in education for a guaranteed future for social, political and economic growth of the country.

b. Information

Information has been described by various writers in different contexts to mean the key resource in an organisation for its survival. Lin and Wang (2012) noted that quality of information in education is an antecedence that affects continuation of learning intentions through the receipt of current teaching resources and knowledge sharing with colleagues and getting notification in preparation for exams. Information provision is contingent on organisational success especially where organisations are satisfied in making available information only on their websites, but this information might not be detailed enough for the need of users' remotely positioned. Shigang (2010) referred to information as one of the items that organisations can use for innovation's strategy. Information has become a household commodity, especially in an educational institution. There is a growing number of sources of information in universities through subscription to both soft and hard copies of information from vendors also access to the information resources that are still limited due to some unforeseen circumstances (Šimek, Stočes and Vaněk, 2014).

Ejiwoye and Ayankola (2011) showed that the essence of teaching and learning in any educational institution is to impart knowledge to students. Meanwhile, academic success of students is measured by their performance and how they meet the standards set out by the regulatory bodies and the institution by maximising the available information.

c. Information Needs

Students from different universities and disciplines have similar information needs necessary for their academic pursuit (Kerins, Maddens, & Fulton 2004). However, Ellis and Haughan (1997) reported that information needs of an individual vary as he progresses through life. The study further indicated different information need approaches and that individual student information need may differ on the same subject and task. The administration of institutions, therefore, needs to

provide varying information for academic purposes. Zhang (1998) however, pointed out that the understanding of users' information needs and information seeking behaviour is fundamental to the provision of outstanding information services.

Students sometimes find it challenging to identify the right information required for their studies. Oladokun (2010) asserted that the beginning of the problems of information seeking is the issue of information need that must be defined by the user and assisted by the information provider within limited resources. Wilson (1997) is of the opinion that for a person to experience an information need, there must be the reason for it. Therefore, reasons for undergraduate information surround their need for academic success and acquisition of skills to apply the knowledge gained in their studies.

However, the procedure for information seeking was premised on information need of user that points at meeting specific or general information need. Information seeking therefore according to Kingrey (2002) is the search, retrieval, recognition and application of meaningful content. The information must regularly update student's need and expectations of change over time. Therefore, the first step in providing quality learning to the students is to develop a system for gathering information about the learners' needs and expectations (Allred and Addams, 2000).

d. Information and the Library

O'Brien and Symons (2007) showed that there is much concern about the ways in which university students utilise library and other information resources to locate, synthesise and use information. Library promotes the quality of information for an academic purpose. According to Omopupa and Abdulraheem (2013), a library is a place where students could have access to information ranging from print, non-print and other materials conveying information like television, computer and several other information held devices. Recently, libraries are focusing on external assessment of their users, to ensure that a multi-dimensional assessment of achieving learning quality by the traditional methods of fulfilling the goals to meet successfully users' demand for information through dynamic resources and services (Sahu, 2006).

e. Utilisation of Information

The utilisation of information provided by the university offers many advantages and benefits to the student undergraduates. According to Saleh and Large (2011) learning tasks for the students in an educational setting differ from other work tasks that demand the application of knowledge gained towards passing the examination conducted on regular basis. Students' information needs are equal to the required information for utilisation in their academic routines at meeting the requirements of their studies. Whitmire (2002) is of the opinion that undergraduate students' information-seeking and utilisation differ from faculty and graduate students because their skills for gathering information are not outstanding. It is therefore pertinent that the culture of

information utilisation is built on the personal, organisation and institutional elements (Widén-Wulff & Suomi, 2007). Moreover, the basis of understanding information utilisation of students in higher education is with heavy reliance on limited available information resources that might be of individual students' ability to access and use them.

In the pursuance of strong delivery of academic goals, Universities need to build structures that will deliver the right information to the right user at the right time (Law, 2000). There is, therefore, a connection between information utilisation and enabling internal environmental information culture that will make it successful. It includes improvement in their academic performance as well as providing knowledge about current issues and new concepts in the academic world. Haag *et al.* (2007) stressed that knowledge comes from having timely access to information and knowing what to do with. The positulation was buttressed by Ifidon and Okoli (2002) that the training of undergraduates in Nigerian Universities should encompass the provision and delivery of needed information. The setting of goal to achieved this can be through the pursuance and promotion and dissemination of knowledge for the provision of intellectual leadership and manpower development in the Nigerian Universities. It will also enhance the institutional achievement in the area of the delivering relevant and current information to the students to increase efficiency of productivity and quality of education (Michael and David, 2005). While focusing on the information needs and utilisation of learners, Wilson (2004) affirmed that present and potential students will contribute to organisational learning through their information requests and satisfaction with academic library services. One obstacle to this is the dilution of information and irrelevant information that can hinder the improvement of students' experience in information utilisation in the library. The experienced information provider can address this problem in the institutions of higher learning by bequeathing information literacy knowledge to the learner to ease access and utilisation of relevant information to learners.

V. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Wilson's 1999 information behaviour model as the theoretical framework towards identifying factors that influenced students' information behaviour. The framework illustrates the relationship between the different constructs of Wilson 1999 models and the study variables of information need, utilisation and tasks outcome. The adoption of the model provides useful insights into determinants of the information needs and utilisation behaviour patterns of students in the context of undergraduates in social sciences for academic performance.

According to Case (2007), information behaviour is a conscious effort for acquiring information in response to what is known already to fill the gap of knowledge. In this study, information behaviour is referred to as acts of identifying needs for information, needs, seeking and searching for information through information utilisation and sharing it for a specific purposes or purposes (Wilson

1999). The model describes information behaviour as a framework for thinking about a problem that may evolve into a statement of the relationship between the constructs that include information needs, seeking, utilisation and sharing for the accomplishment of specific or general tasks. Therefore, this study specifically focused on the information needs and utilisation of undergraduates of Accounting and Business Administration in selected Nigerian Universities.

VI. Research Methodology

The study employed the qualitative method and face to face interview to collect data from the respondents. The method of interview encouraged the respondents to participate in establishing rapport with the researcher during the interview. The adoption of Wilson's 1999 information behaviour model this gives credibility to the process of collecting data for the information behaviour research (Mattson & Haas, 2014). The qualitative research has also demonstrated to encourage full descriptions of researcher roles with regards to emotional maturity and strong interpersonal skills (Hawamdeh & Raigangar, 2014). Saunders *et al.* (2007) pointed out that qualitative research approach enables the researchers to understand and interpret the behaviour and experiences of individuals and groups in the process of the interview for gathering data. The study adopted the use of snowball sampling since the exact population of the social sciences students in the three universities was not known. It, therefore, makes the creation of sample frame tough because what constitute social sciences in one university is different from another university and the movement of some courses across faculty. The researchers randomly interviewed a total number of ninety students, thirty respondents each from the three universities across various disciplines in social science (Business Administration, Accounting, Economics and Finance). The respondents were interviewed since qualitative research recognised interview was the most important tools of data collection (Zhou & Nunes, 2013). The study also pointed out that interview offers the opportunity to look closely into responses that are unclear or not consistent. Interview method is also often perceived as a more flexible method of collecting contextual data.

The use of the qualitative approach is most suitable when the researcher is investigating an issue in detail, and it produces explanations that can deal with the compound, uniqueness and complex nature of real life situations (Merriam, 2002). The three universities were selected based on their ownership structure. Thus, selection of a university from the federal, state and privately owned institutions with the aim of understanding the funding system for providing relevant information resources that will enable the students to access pertinent information. Moreover, choice of these universities provides a fair representation of all the types and nature of Nigerian universities. Additionally, the premise for selection of the three universities was on the available faculties of social sciences and, more importantly, the choice of departments of Accountancy and Business Administration for this study. Furthermore, the population of students required

for study sample is found to be adequate in similar departments regarding admission requirements and academic grading.

The data collected was transcribed thematically with additional contents analysis of the interview. The interview schedule was refined and critiqued before it was cleaned finally for a gathering of data to capture the variable of the study. The analysis of the interview scripts was further rephrased and interpreted to reflect the themes of the study. The interview method in research can be subjective. However, the researcher strived to reduce the incidence of bias that is always associated with the use of interview to collect information on research. Collins and Cooper (2014) argued that proper handling of subjectivity strengthen the study validity in qualitative research.

VII. Analyses of Findings

The result of findings is into four categories. The first category is related to responses of students on the needs and importance of information. The second category addresses the adequacy and relevance of information provided by the universities. The third category of respondents relates to the access of information, and the fourth category discusses the utilisation of information and its outcome and challenges.

The study found that the kind of information needs of the undergraduates in social sciences should relate to their academic activities. The first type of information required by the student undergraduates is the information that relates to their various courses to assist them score higher grades. The second type relates to current affairs and social issues of world concern. The third kind of information is on social networking to relate with people around and far. The finding was also not only the volume of information availability that is of importance but information that has value to the students. The study revealed that provision of information is one of the indices that support information need of users, particularly students for their successful academic performance.

A student in the Department of Economics opined that the importance of information that: *"Information is crucial. We need information if we are to perform better in our studies."*

Another student of Finance Department said:

Without information on my courses, I will find it challenging to do my assignments. It will also be difficult to improve my skills and knowledge and contribute meaningfully to the development of this society.

Another respondent from Department of Business Administration also commented on the type of information required:

"I need to know the theoretical arguments relating to my discipline. I expect to find relevant materials in the library relating to Business Administration."

A student of accounting however argued that information on current issues is equally important:

"National and world issues are also important to our academic activities. I need information on issue of national interest that people have shared their opinions. It might not relate to my discipline or courses but on

matters of societal concern or development.”

Meanwhile, a student of Business Administration said:

“I need to network with other students around the world. Information on social networks and how to use them is also desirable. I am aware of social information sharing sites (e.g. Blogs, Wiki’s, Facebook, twitter, etc.)”.

The adequacy and relevance of information provision in the universities revealed that information needs of the students vary depending on the area of discipline and the courses offered or registered. Students require the latest information on their courses that will enable them to understand the trends in the world environment and changes in theories advanced by renowned scholars.

One of the students from the economics department said:

“We need to compete favourably with students from other universities, and this could only be achieved if we are well informed in our field. Provision of adequate information will serve as a way of enriching our knowledge” A student of Business Administration.

“I usually find the correct information from the library”

Another category of respondents relates their information access to various resources. Opening and closing hours of the libraries are major challenges faced by the students. Respondents are of the opinion that it is not easy to access information in the universities. Provisions of books are not adequate, and subscriptions to databases are not consistent in the universities.

A student of Finance said:

I need to access information at my convenience time. This is not possible because of the opening and closing hours of the library. In my university, the library will open at 8.00am and close at 6.00pm thereby limiting the time spent in the library to access information. I expect the university library to open for 24 hours.

A student of Business Administration said:

“My university does not subscribe to some databases relevant to my discipline. It is, therefore, difficult for me to access peer-reviewed articles provided by those databases. The private subscription will be required to download some relevant articles, and this is very expensive for me.”

The response of an Accounting student was different: *“Information resources in my institution library are provided with ease of access.”*

The other category of student discusses the utilisation of information. Respondents explained that they utilised information for their academic activities. They also utilise information to enrich their knowledge so that they can contribute their quota to the development of the society.

An accounting student pointed to information as priority thus:

My priority is to pass my examination. I utilise information for my academic activities such as coursework and other examinations within the university. I also utilise information for provisional examinations.

Another student of Economics bluntly said: “I utilised information mostly for examination.”

One of the students of Business Administration relates

information need to entrepreneurial acumen:

I am an entrepreneurial undergraduate. I use the information to develop my entrepreneurial skills. I do not want to search for jobs after my graduation and information on entrepreneurial activities will make me actualise my dreams of becoming a successful person”.

“Societal development is my concern. I engage in various activities that will enhance community development. I utilise information to better the life of community people by teaching them basic things relating to their businesses that will lead to business growth.

VIII. Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that there are lots of information in an academic environment that can be used to improve students’ knowledge and prospect. Some information relates to the academic discipline of the students while others are general information useful for all undergraduates irrespective of their levels to cope with a life situation. The finding is similar to Altbach (2015) that point to the underlying conviction that education at all levels is not a commodity to be bought and sold in the marketplace. It referred to University education system as that provides needed skills for economic successes and build a civil society for national participation through the constant training of undergraduates. Huang and Kelly (2013) also found that undergraduate courses required a variety of individual and group presentations by the students conduct research and are required to present their results. The students, therefore, used information that relates to their academic discipline for various academic tasks with the aim achieving higher grades. The type of information needs of the students, however, relates to their academic activities. The finding indicated that students’ access, acquired and used information relevant to their academic works while others use it for social networking and community development projects.

The social science disciplines are wide and covered numerous courses from one university to another. For instance, in some universities, discipline such as Business Administration, Economics, Political Science, Accounting are in the social sciences and are they exclude disciplines such as Visual and Performing Art. However, Visual and Performing Art is a discipline in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kwara State University. Therefore, information needs of the students vary depending on the area of discipline and the courses offered or registered.

Undergraduate students are allowed access to information in the university libraries irrespective of their courses and level of study. All the universities maintain the main library as well as departmental libraries that provide relevant information through diverse resources and human capacities. The libraries are open to students to utilise for their research work and other academic related activities. However, university libraries run different working hours and during which students can access information resources and seek information literacy. The findings revealed that some universities run

ten hours library services from 8 am - 6 pm daily exclude weekend library services. The library opening hours, therefore, limits the undergraduates' access to information and regulates the time that students can visit the library for information. Some universities run twelve hours, but none of the selected universities have twenty-four hours service except University of Ilorin main library that opened twenty-four-hour library services during semester examinations.

IX. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study used Wilson's 1999 information behaviour model to analyse information needs and utilisation of social sciences in three Nigerian universities. The study identified that student's need information for their academic success. Findings from this study revealed that students require information for various reasons including examination, community development and social networking. Quality information provision will also enhance undergraduates' academic performance in Social Sciences. Provision of information services in the universities is fulfilling their mandates as laid down by the National Universities Communication in the areas of information infrastructure and library personnel.

Since utilisation of information is an essential part of our daily lives, undergraduates should be encouraged to imbibe the use of available information infrastructure to advance their academic pursuits that ultimately will assist them in their future careers. Universities should provide an enabling environment that will make it easy for students to access information and utilise it towards their academic success. Libraries should endeavour to increase their service hours and if possible to twenty-four hours daily so that students can access information at their convenient time.

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