

Information Needs and Information Seeking Behavior of Agricultural Students at Kogi State University, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The essence of meeting the information needs of agricultural students is tantamount to effective improving production in the agricultural sector. This study investigated the information needs and information-seeking behavior of agricultural students at Kogi State University. The specific objectives of the study were to establish the information needs of agricultural students, determine ways in which agricultural students seek information, and identify challenges facing the agricultural student at Kogi State University. The study employed a survey research design. The questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Out of 356 copies of questionnaires administered to respective students, only 286 questionnaires were successfully filled and completed by students. The study established that agricultural students need information purposefully for assignments and that the Internet is the major source of seeking information. The study, among others, recommended that the university management should provide funds to acquire more relevant books in the library that will meet the information needs of agricultural students.

Keywords: Agriculture, Information needs, Information seeking behaviour, Students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Information is a communication mechanism that can be given different interpretations based on societal perspectives. According to Adomi (2016), information enables man to get informed to make accurate decisions. It can be said that information provides answers or clues to a question which usually bring a reduction in the level of uncertainty among human being. Extant literature revealed that people need information primarily for different reasons and purposes and they seek information from various sources. On the other hand, information needs are the ability of people to locate and at the same time retrieve information to meet their needs. Felquer, et al. (2015) argued that information need is related to mental gaps in which men always look for ways to gratify their needs. Fiankor and Adams (2004) defined information need as all relevant information a person or group of persons need to accomplish their work, activities, tasks, etc. This means that the absence of information needed to perform their activities leads to their information need. This indicates that information need is more cognitive that needs to be satisfied by looking for relevant sources to meet the need.

The term information needs have also been used in a variety of ways. According to Ehikhamenor (2007), information needs could be referred to as the extent to which information is required to solve problems, as well as the degree of expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the information. Also, Wilson (2004) opined 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 orientations, and individual characteristics of the users. Information need is described by Ikoja, Odongo, and Ocholla (2004) as a situation that arises when students encounter work-related problems which can be

resolved through some kind of information. Case (2007) defined information need as a recognition that your knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal that you have. The type of information a user needs depends on the user of the information. Thus, information need is a condition in which certain information contributes to the achievement of genuine or legitimate information purposes. Therefore, information needs arise from the fact that an individual needs information whether to satisfy immediate needs or future needs. The need to acquire information is what helps someone to survive. Everybody needs information for survival including students. According to Kerins, Madden, and Fulton (2004), the whole essence of information needs and seeking behaviour reveal the actual process of acquiring and using information content by individuals. Having access to relevant and timely information has a role to play in the way the information is used and sought after.

Information-seeking behaviour is the purposive seeking of information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goals (Wilson, 2000). According to Kakai (2004), information-seeking behaviour is a way people search for and utilize information. From the above definitions, it can be deduced that information-seeking behaviour is the purposive search for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goals. However, among various groups that need information are students, particularly agriculture students considering the nature of their studies to the society at large. It is in line with this that, this study sought to identify the information needs and seeking behaviour of agricultural students at Kogi State University, being the first university in the state with the Faculty of Agriculture to train students and produce graduates in the field of agriculture.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The information serves as an important resource needed by agricultural students primarily for solving agro-economic problems and pursuing their academic and research endeavours. In so doing, the important role of agricultural students, who thereafter, become officers has massively helped to increase food supply and sustainable environment development in Nigeria, hence it becomes paramount for research to be done to examine how agricultural students seek information and the information they need before they will be sent to the field. Several studies (Yahaya, 2021; Ndagi, 2014; Mahewarappa, 2013; Akua & Richard, 2012) have been conducted on the information-seeking behavioral of university final year students, law students, engineering students, communications students, and medical students. However, there is a paucity of literature on information-seeking behavioral and the need of agricultural students in Nigeria. Based on the researchers' knowledge, it appears that this study is the first of its kind to examine the information needs and information-seeking behavior of agricultural students in Nigeria, particularly at Kogi state University.

In Nigeria, it has been reported that students in many faculties of agriculture and agricultural research institutes are lagging in in terms of productivity and intelligence, especially for sustainable agricultural development which can be attributed to poor information access that will influence their behavioral patterns (Oyeniya, 2020; Ankpa, 2000). It should be noted that agricultural students can only attain growth and development in their agricultural practices and activities when they can have access to relevant information. Based on this, the study investigated the information needs and information-seeking behavior of agricultural students in Nigeria, since man needs information for his day-to-day activities.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study was to examine the information needs and information-seeking behavior of agricultural students in Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study were to:

- (i) establish the information needs of agricultural students at Kogi State University;
- (ii) determine ways in which agricultural students seek information;
- (iii) identify the challenges facing agricultural students in seeking the information at Kogi State University.

1.3 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the information needs of agricultural students at Kogi State University?
2. What are the ways agricultural students seek information?
3. What are the challenges facing agricultural students in seeking the information at Kogi State University?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Information needs of undergraduates and preferences for use have been influenced by several factors as captured in the literature. In this regard, the information needs of students vary in line with their disciplines, subject of study, and level of study (Owolabi et al, 2015). Supporting this, Kumar (2009) opined that, the information needs of undergraduate students vary from discipline to discipline and from one level of study to another level of students. Information needs are different and it is continuously changing and can be related to social, economic, political, cultural, or educational needs (Nwobasi, et al., 2013). However, Adetoro (2011) argued that every student no matter the level of studies needs accuracy, time, and relevance for better academic performance. Fiankor and Adam (2004) identified various ways in which undergraduate students seek information including library, friends, the internet, and a host of others. Information-seeking behavior in general involves a set of actions that a person, such as students takes to reveal their information needs, search for information, examine and choose information, and lastly, use this information to satisfy their immediate needs (Fatima & Ahmad 2008).

Mabawonku (2005) listed various ways in which agricultural students seek information in Nigerian universities. These include the fact that they seek information through their colleagues, internet resources, university libraries, family members, various agricultural institutions, and private agricultural organisations. Mabanwoku (2005) maintained that academic libraries assist agricultural students to have access to timely information, by providing an opportunity for them to read in a more conducive environment and at the same time provide lifelong learning opportunities for agricultural students. Emmanuel and Jegede (2011) suggested several patterns in which agricultural students seek information. They include the ability to participate in classroom activities, seminars, workshops, and improve academic performance and for their final year research projects. Safahieh (2007) classified the information needs of agricultural students into the following which include information about their academic activities, information about current awareness services, information related to farm activities, and information about agricultural-related issues as related to their course of study. Bhati and Venkata (2011) investigated the information-seeking behaviour of undergraduate students in a university in India, particularly in the digital era. The finding revealed that the students like to have access to information in a very simple manner with easy-to-use resources. Emmanuel and Jegede (2011) revealed that undergraduate students at the University of Agriculture in Nigeria used the internet to seek information.

Ogba (2013) revealed that agricultural students usually seek information in the library through the use of the Open Access Catalogue (OPAC) and the internet. This was attributed to the fact that OPAC allowed them to have access to quick information. Kin and Sin (2007) revealed that students in India preferred to search for information through the use of search engines, websites, textbooks, and journals. Ogba (2013) investigated the information-seeking behavior of final-year students in South Western Nigeria Universities. The survey revealed that lack of information skills was the main challenge to the students and also a search term was a problem. Ikoja, Odonga, and Ochalla (2004) revealed that Uganda students faced various challenges in seeking information which includes limited access to library materials, failure of users to access library resources, and a poor filing system, the relevant information is not available in many copies among the resources dominating the stock, inadequate users education, dependence on traditional retrieval tools which lead to poor filing and retrieval becomes slow, sensitization of library resources are also limited.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is survey research anchored on the positivism paradigm. The questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The population for this study comprised 5, 000 agricultural students at Kogi State University, Anyigba. Using Krejcie and Morgan's sample determination table for a population size of 5,000, the sample size was 357 (Anakwe, 2016). Therefore, 357 agricultural students were considered appropriate for this study. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to sample 357 respondents from the seven (7) departments in the Faculty of Agriculture. The first stage involved the systematic probabilistic selection of four (4) departments from seven (7) departments (Animal Production, Crop Production, Soil and Environment, and Agricultural Economics and Extension). In Stage 2, only 89 students each from the four (4) departments comprising Animal Production, Crop Production, Soil and Environment, and Agricultural Economics and Extension were systematically selected, bringing the total number of randomly selected students from the four (4) departments to 356. Finally, in Stage 3, 356 undergraduate students in each selected department in the Faculty of Agricultural Science were identified by their students' identity cards of the department before the administration of questionnaires to respective students. Out of 356 copies of questionnaires administered to respective students, only 286 questionnaires were successfully filled and completed by students. In ascertaining the reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach Reliability test was conducted with an overall index value of 0.75 which indicated that the instrument was reliable. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentages were used to analyse the respondents' bio-data and research questions.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Data was obtained from the Faculty of Agricultural Science, Kogi State University, Anyigba. Between the four researchers, tasks of quantitative data gathering from the agricultural students were shared, thus the four (4) selected departments were equally managed by 4 of the researchers. Out of 356 copies of questionnaires administered to respective students, only 286 questionnaires were successfully filled and completed by students, making an 80.3% return rate.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Agricultural Students

Variables	Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Age</i>	>20	93	32.5
	20-30	193	67.5
	40-50	0	0
	<50	0	0
<i>Sex</i>	Male	117	40.9
	Female	169	59
<i>Level</i>	100	56	19.5
	200	33	11.5
	300	49	17.1
	400	47	16.4
	500	101	35.3

The data reveals that 32.5% of respondents were less than 20 years, 67.5% of the respondents were between the ages of 20 and 30 years while none of the respondents were within 40-50 years and 50 years above. This indicates that the majority of the agricultural students were between 20 and 30 years of age. Table 1 also shows that 40.9% of respondents were male while 59.1% of respondents were female. This implies that the majority of the agricultural students were females. Furthermore, table1 reveals that, 19.5% respondents were in 100L, 11.5% respondents were in 200L, 17.1% were in 300L, 16.4% were in 400L and 35.3% respondents were in 500L. This means that majority of the agricultural students were in their final year (500L).

The findings in table 2 show that 2.6% of respondents need information for intellectual development, 16.4% of the respondents need information for research, and 50.3% of the respondents need information for an assignment, while 30.8% of the respondents need

information for development on subject knowledge. This implied that the majority of agricultural students need the information to do assignments.

Table 2: Information Needs of Agricultural Students

Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage (%)
For Intellectual Development	7	2.6
For Research	83	16.4
For Assignment	144	50.3
Development of Subject Knowledge	47	30.8
Total	286	100

Table 3 below shows that 11.5% of respondents sought information from lecture notes, 65.3% of the respondents sought information from the Internet, and 5.9% of the respondents sought information by consulting books/textbooks, while 17.1% of the respondents sought information from the library. This implied that the majority of agricultural students sought information through the Internet.

Table 3: Ways Students Seek Information

Ways to seek Information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lecture Note	33	11.5
Internet	187	65.3
Consult books/Textbook	17	5.9
Library	49	17.1
Total	286	100

As regards to challenges agricultural students face in seeking information, table 4 shows among other challenges; lack of essential textbooks in the library, lack of library staff support, lack of internet search skills, poor internet connection, and high cost of internet to lack of awareness of available information resources.

Table 4: Challenges Agricultural Students Face in Seeking Information

Challenges In Seeking Information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of internet search skills	45	15.7
Poor internet connection	41	14.3
Lack of essential textbooks in the library	86	30.1
High cost of internet	33	11.5
Lack of library staff support	56	19.6
Lack of awareness of available information	25	8.7
Total	286	100

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The results from the study revealed that the majority (50.3%) of agricultural students need information for assignments. This finding supports the findings of Yahaya (2021) who found that final-year undergraduate students in the North-central zone of Nigeria need information for class assignments, research papers, and examinations. In addition, Abdullahi et al. (2015) in a study on information needs and seeking behaviour of undergraduates at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, found that undergraduates need information resources to prepare for examinations, tests, and assignments. The respondents further indicate that they seek information such as books, journals, etc.

The findings also show that agricultural students at Kogi State University sought information from the Internet. This finding is in line with the findings by Makani and Wooshue (2006) conducted in the School of Business Administration at Dalhousie University Canada, who discovered that most of the students (92%) used computers and the Internet as sources of information. This is also in line with the study of Yahaya (2021) who supported that internet browsing is rated one of the information patterns of final year undergraduate students in North Central Nigeria.

The study has revealed several challenges in information seeking among students. Some students (30%) indicated that the lack of essential textbooks in the library is the major challenge facing agricultural students at Kogi State University. This is in agreement with the study of Makinde et al. (2019) which established the lack of current books as one of the problems confronting users in seeking information. This contradicts the findings of Eke et al. (2014) and Obioha (2005) who observed that inadequate electricity is the main problem confronting library users while searching web resources. Also, Perley et al. (2007), Kamba (2008), and Ugah (2007) stated that lack of awareness of available services in the library; poor library opening and closing hours, insufficient library environment, increasing cost of international journals and books, inadequate facilities/surrounding and inadequate funding are the main barrier affecting retrieval of information in research works.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has established that the information needs of the agricultural student are purposefully for assignments, adding that, the internet is their major source of seeking information and one of the major challenges faced by agricultural students was a lack of essential textbooks. In so doing, the study suggested that the university management:

- (i) provide funds to acquire more relevant books in the library to meet the information needs of agricultural students;
- (ii) train students on information retrieval skills and should support the students in meeting their information needs by assisting in their information search
- (iii) improve internet connectivity to ensure easy access to the information resources by the students.

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