Information Seeking Behaviour of Undergraduate Students of Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper highlights the results of the study of information seeking behaviour of undergraduate students of F.U.T. Minna, Nigeria. The study population was 900 and the survey research method was used for the study. The main instrument used for gathering data was questionnaire. Descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage tabulation were used in analyzing the data. Results showed that most of the respondents 500 (55.6%) consult current information on recent developments in their field and preferred browsing the Internet when seeking information. The study equally revealed that the purpose of seeking information is mainly to prepare for their examinations; and Internet services, textbooks and, periodicals were mostly used when searching for information. Majority of the respondents indicated lack of current textbooks and journals as the main problem they face when searching for information in the university library. Recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.

Introduction

Federal University of Technology, Minna is one of the universities of technology established in 1980s in Nigeria as a result of the need for science and technical education at higher educational level. It was established in order to provide highly skilled manpower for the economy and also to provide technology needed for the development of the nation. To buttress this point further, the National Policy on Education (1998) in defining the objectives of higher education emphasised that higher educational institutions should pursue educational goals through:

i.   Teaching;
ii.   Research;
iii.   The dissemination of existing and new information;
iv.   The pursuit of service to the community and
v.   Being a store house of knowledge.

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that the undergraduate students of Federal University of Technology (F.U.T.), Minna are always expected to seek for information that would up-date their knowledge in their areas of specialization. This is important because there is a universal assumption that man was born innocent and should actively seek knowledge (Patitungkho et al 2005).

The present era is the era of information and knowledge revolution. Nearly all information resources have increased, at times dramatically, over the last several years. For instance, the United States from 1999- 2002, books (original print) have increased by 83% while online scholarly journals nearly doubled from 1997-2001 (Lyman et al, 2003). Faced with increasing competition from such a major information source as the Internet combined with patron demands, the average library budget that is spent on electronic materials has increased almost fourfold, from an estimated 4% in 1992-93 to 13% in 1999-2000 (Association of Research Libraries, 2005). Thus, many electronic resources are available in the library. In the modern society, the types of information and the media which present them have become manifold and multifarious, offering men and women a vast selection (Fidel et al. 1999). Regardless of which group in a human society is discussed, as pointed out by Patitungkho et al (2005), each one bases its actions upon current information and discards the earlier data.

"Information seeking is thus a natural and necessary mechanism of human existence" (Marchionini, 1995). Wilson (1999) describes information behaviour as those activities a person may engage in when identifying their own needs for information, searching for such information in any way, and using or transferring that information. In   another study, Wilson (2000) further stressed that information seeking behaviour is the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of need to satisfy some goal. In the course of seeking, the individual may interact with annual information systems (such as a newspaper or a library) or with computer- based systems (such as the web). To be more specific, information seeking behaviour involves or has to do with some personal reasons for seeking information by an individual. It also has to do with the kinds of information which are being sought and the ways and sources with which needed information is being sought (Leckie et al, 1996). Information seeking behaviour is usually expressed in various forms, from reading printed materials to research and experimentation. Scholars, students and faculty members generally seek current information from various media such as encyclopaedia, journals and more currently, electronic media available in libraries. Abel (2004) believes that the frequency of use of the Internet in 1998-2000 had greatly increased and influenced the information seeking behaviour of the faculty members and this has to a large extent influenced the information seeking behaviour of the students too.

The undergraduate students of Federal University of Technology, Minna are not left out in this quest for information search. To acquire the technical or technology education needed for national development the students from this type of universities are expected to be knowledgeable enough in their areas of specialization. Acquisition of adequate man-power, skills and technical know-how is necessary for the rapid development of individuals and the societies. With such knowledge students in technology oriented institutions would always have current information in their various disciplines and other related fields and could always be well informed in the recent happenings globally. This is why it is necessary for one to ask the question, how do the undergraduate students of Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria seek for information?

Statement of the Problem

Studies have revealed that most students graduate from universities without adequate knowledge of information searching. This situation is disturbing especially these days that universities spend huge amount of money to equip their information centres such as libraries. It is only when students know how to search for information that they would effectively use the library resources to improve their academic performances. Based on this, it is therefore, important to determine the information seeking behaviour of undergraduate students of Federal University of Technology, Minna so as to proffer suggestions for improvement.

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

i.   To determine the information seeking behaviour of undergraduate students of F.U.T. Minna, Nigeria;
ii. To determine the type of information sought by the undergraduate students of F.U.T. Minna, Nigeria;
iii. To identify the type of information sources used to seek information by these undergraduate students;
iv. To determine the type of information technology (I.T.) facilities use in information searching and
v.   To find out the purpose of information seeking by undergraduate students of F.U.T. Minna;
vi. To identify the problems faced by the undergraduate students of F.U.T. Minna in seeking information.

Literature Review

Pettigrew et al (2001) defined information seeking behaviour as the study of how people need, seek, give and use information in different contexts, including the workplace and everyday living. In the context of this study, one is concentrating on the information seeking behaviour of the undergraduate students of F.U.T. Minna. That is, the way they seek, search for and use information to support their scholarly endeavours. A well known study on information seeking behaviour of the undergraduate students is that conducted by Online Computer Library Center (OCLC, 2002) and was reported in the OCLC White Paper on the information habits of college students. The objective of the study was to describe college and university students' views of successful information delivery. The study examined such issues

as what students think about the information on the Internet, in the library, in print, how they access information and what they value. Some other studies focused on how students, primarily undergraduates and/or professionals in specific fields or disciplines seek information and the related issues (Fidzani, 1998; Challener, 1999; Foster, 2004; Kerins et al. 2004 Suriya et al 2004 and Steinerova and Susol, 2005)

Another nationally recognized study on information seeking behaviour of undergraduate students was conducted by the Digital Library Federation and the Research Firm Outsell, Inc., focused on information use of students and faculty members at colleges and universities (Friedlander, 2002). Using structured, telephone interviews, this study surveyed 3,234 faculty members including, graduate students and undergraduate students from colleges and universities on how the Internet affects their scholarly work and the consequences it might have on campus libraries. This study examined such issues as what information resources support scholarly work, how users find information and what problems are encountered. In another related study, Nwokedi (2004) aimed at identifying the information needs and seeking behaviour of Medical Laboratory Scientists in Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH). The instrument used in collecting data was the questionnaire and survey research method was used for the study. The findings revealed that Medical Laboratory Scientists often preferred to have information resources in their specific fields; that textbooks, monographs and journals were mostly used by the Medical Laboratory Scientists and that in searching for information, they often preferred to browse the shelves to other methods of information searching.

Furthermore, Shokeen et al (2002) investigated information seeking behaviour of social scientists working in the universities located in Haryana. They reported that most of the social scientists visit the library daily. The study equally reported that they use information in indexing and abstracting journals, citation in articles, current journals and books.

Method

Data were collected by using questionnaire. Questionnaire was found to be more appropriate for this kind of survey because it gives respondents enough time to independently respond to the questions asked. As at the time of this investigation, the information gathered from the Academic Planning Unit of F.U.T.Minna showed that the population of the undergraduate students in F.U.T.Minna was about fourteen thousand (14,000). A total of one thousand (1000) respondents were selected for the study, out of the total population. The random sampling technique was used to select respondents across the different schools in the university. Questionnaire which was the main instrument for collecting data was distributed to the respondents across the various schools in the university. A total of 900 (90.0%) of the respondents completed and returned the questionnaire. The respondents are the undergraduate students of the different schools in F.U.T.Minna, comprising of old and newly created schools. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage tabulation were used in analyzing the data.

Data analysis and Discussion
Table 1: Information Sought by Undergraduate Students of F.U.T. Minna

Types of information sought	No of respondents	Percentages (%)
Current information on recent developments in your field	500	55.6
Current information on recent developments in related field	230	25.6
General information	130	14.4
Information not related to your field at all.	40	4.4
Total	**900**	**100%**

Table 1 revealed that, 55.6% of the respondents disclosed that they usually search for current information on recent developments in their fields, 25.6% indicated current information on recent developments in related fields, 14.4% stated they normally seek for general information, while 4.4% indicated information not related to their fields at all.

The results in Table 1 showed that majority of the respondents, 55.6% of the undergraduate students of F.U.T.Minna usually need current information on recent developments in their fields while the respondents that indicated they sought for information not related to their fields was ranked lowest in number 4.4%. This is similar to the findings of Nwokedi (2004) which reported that about 89.28% of the Medical Laboratory Scientists sought up-to-date information on recent developments in their areas of specialization while only 5.35% of them seek for information that are not related to their field at all.

Table 2: Information Seeking Behaviour of Undergraduates of F.U.T Minna

Methods	No of respondents	Percentages(%)
Browsing the Internet	400	44.4
Discussion with colleagues	150	16.7
Searching the library shelves	130	14.4
Consultation of library catalogue	100	11.1
Discussion with librarians	80	9.0
Consultation of indexes, bibliographies and abstracts	40	4.4
Total	**900**	**100%**

From Table 2, it is revealed that 44.4% of the respondents indicated that they browse the Internet while seeking for information, 16.7% of them stated they discuss with colleagues, 14.4% reported they search or browse the shelves, 11.1% of them consult the library catalogue, 9.0% discuss with librarians, while 4.4% consult indexes, bibliographies and abstracts.

From Table 2 it is obvious that the undergraduates of F.U.T .Minna use a combination of methods when seeking information. However, the method mostly used as the findings revealed is browsing of the Internet 44.4%, followed by 16.7% that often consult their colleagues. This is similar to the findings of George et al (2006) which revealed that graduate students rely heavily on the Internet as well as the university libraries' online resources for information

Table 3: Information Sources Consulted by Undergraduates of F.U.T. Minna

Types of sources	No of respondents	Percentages(%)
Internet services	430	47.8
Textbooks	200	22.2
Periodicals	120	13.3
Newspapers	100	11.1
Reference materials	50	5.6
Total	900	100

The study also investigated to know the type of information sources used by the undergraduates of F.U.T. Minna. From Table 3, 47.8% of the respondents use Internet services, 22.2% of them use textbooks, 13.3% use periodicals, 11.1% use newspapers and 5.6% of them use reference materials. From Table 3, it is clear that majority of the respondents use Internet services, textbooks and periodicals more as sources of their information, while newspapers and reference materials are used at a lower rate. This finding corroborates that of George et al (2006).

Table 4: Information Technology (I.T.) Facilities Sought by the Undergraduates of F.U.T Minna

Information Technology materials used	No of respondents	Percentages (%)
Internet	700	77.8
Online databases	100	11.1
Compact Disk Read Only Memory(CD-ROM)	80	8.9
Local Area Network(LAN)	20	2.2
Total	900	100%

Table 4 revealed that 77.8% of the respondents indicated that the I.T. facilities they use most is Internet, 11.1% of them use online databases, 8.9% use CD-ROM and 2.2% of them use LAN. Table 4 revealed that Internet services is mostly used by the respondents since searching through Google, Yahoo, Excite engines, Youtube, Whatsapp, Facebook, LinkedIn, e-resources such as e-journals, e-books, e-newspapers, e-databases to mention but a few could make them have access to current information in their areas of specialization. These findings corroborate that of Oyedum (2007) and Odesanya and Ajiferuke (2000) who on separate accounts reported similar observations.

Table 5: Purpose of Information Seeking by the Undergraduates of F.U.T Minna

Purposes	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
For preparing examinations	600	66.7
For project writing	150	16.7
For routine assignments	100	11.1
For seminar presentations	40	4.4
To keep themselves abreast	10	1.1
Total	900	100%

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The questionnaire further investigated the purposes of information seeking by the undergraduate students of F.U.T.Minna. Table 5 shows that 66.7% seek information for preparing their examinations, 16.7% for project writing, 11.1% for routine assignments, 4.4% for seminar presentations and 1.1% to keep themselves abreast. These findings have revealed that majority of the undergraduates of F.U.T.Minna seek for information when they are preparing for their examinations, followed by when they are writing their projects and doing routine assignments.

Table 6: Problems Faced by the Undergraduates of F.U.T. Minna in Information Searching

Problems	No of respondents	Percentages(%)
Lack of current library textbooks and monographs	350	39.0
Lack of current library journals	200	22.2
Inadequate number of journals in various disciplines	200	22.2
Inefficient Internet services in the library	100	11.1
Lack of time to visit the university library	30	3.3
Inadequate knowledge of using the library catalogue	20	2.2
Total	900	100%

The last question requested the respondents to indicate the problems they usually encounter in the course of seeking for information. Table 6 reported that 39.0% of the respondents indicated that lack of current library textbooks and monographs pose some problems in their information searching, 22.2% of them revealed lack of current library journals, 22.2% stated there is inadequate number of journals in various disciplines, 11.1% reported that there is inadequate Internet services in the library, 3.3% revealed lack of time to visit the university library, while 2.2% reported inadequate knowledge of how to use library catalogue.

From Table 6 above, it is revealed that majority of the respondents do not usually identify current library textbooks and journals in their areas of specialization in the university library of F.U.T. Minna. A good number of the respondents equally claimed that the Internet services in the library are inefficient as this service is not always available to users. Many a time Internet facilities could develop some problems or there could be power outage that could last for some days. Also interesting is that a good number of the respondents indicated that they hardly have time to visit the library and even when they visit they are not quite knowledgeable enough about how to use the library catalogue.

These findings are similar to that of Nwokedi (2004) which revealed that about 35.71% of the Medical Laboratory Scientists indicated that their medical library resources are poor while only 7.14% of the respondents reported that the resources are very adequate.

Discussion

From the findings, the picture in Table 1 reveals that majority of the undergraduates of F.U.T.Minna use current information on recent developments in their areas of specialization. This is not surprising because this is technology oriented university where the students would always search for current information to equipthemselves in their various fields. The study equally revealed that in seeking for information in their fields, the undergraduate students of F.U.T .Minna prefer browsing the Internet to other methods of information searching. This could probably be that internet has various search engines through which information could be retrieved. E-journals, e--books, e-newspapers and magazines, e-databases etc are all available and retrieved from Internet services. Finally, the study also revealed that Internet services, textbooks and periodicals are the major information sources consulted by the students.

Conclusion

From the outcome of the findings, it could be concluded that the undergraduate students of F.U.T. Minna, Nigeria usually seek for current information in their areas of specialization through various methods and information sources. The search for current information is necessary because this would assist the students in achieving their educational objectives as well as equip and place them in the better positions to acquire science and technical education. This would in turn create the opportunity for these students after graduation to be self- employed; and also provide for the society necessary skilled manpower and technology needed for the development of the nation.

Recommendations

On the basis of the specific findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

i.   F.U.T.Minna library should endeavour to provide current and sufficient information sources such as books, journals, monographs etc on all the disciplines offered in the institution.

ii.   The Internet services in the library should always be functioning and the library should through the assistance of university management provide a standby power supply generator for efficient services.

iii   The library staff should put more efforts when teaching this category of students "Use of Library Course" as this would enhance their understanding of using the library, especially the library catalogue.

v.   Finally, the undergraduate students of F.U.T.Minna should endeavour to create time to visit the library frequently. By so doing, they would be conversant with the information searching techniques in the library. This is the best way they could effectively use the library and always be good friends of the library.

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