

Exploring the information needs and seeking behaviour of final-year students of the University of Africa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The research studied the information needs and seeking habits of final-year students at the University of Africa, Bayelsa State. For this study, the authors chose a descriptive survey design. A total of 251 final-year students formed the study population. Total enumeration sampling was employed so that every member of the population took part in the study for better data representation. The questionnaire was used to obtain information from the students. The questionnaires were distributed to 201 final-year students, and 193 of them were collected and processed. Data were examined through frequency counts, simple percentages and means. The study confirmed that final-year students have diverse information needs, which include information on project writing, course-related information, exam-related information, NYSC-related information, and job-related information, among others. The Internet/digital resources, print resources, past project works, and academic advisers were the most important sources consulted by final-year students. Lastly, the study established that poor Internet connectivity, time constraints, lack of awareness of the resources in the library, inconsistent power supply, and inadequate resources in the library were the major challenges faced by final-year respondents when seeking information. The study emphasizes the varied information needs and preferred sources of final-year students at the University of Africa, Bayelsa State, while also highlighting the substantial barriers they face in accessing the information they require. The authors recommended that the university should improve Internet connectivity and electricity supply, while the library should enhance awareness campaigns regarding the available library resources. Moreover, the library should also acquire more information resources based on their information needs and the preferred sources mostly consulted by final-year students.

Keywords: Final-year students, Information needs, Information seeking behaviour, University of Africa

Introduction

In today's complex world, information plays an essential role in every aspect of human endeavour, enhancing the decision-making process, efficiency, and enhancement of knowledge. Information is organized data or knowledge that has been processed in a systematic manner. Ogunbodede and Ambrose (2020) defined information as processed data that can answer user queries and assist in the decision-making process. It can be in the form of text, images, videos, or a sound, which can be disseminated in printed books, journals, online media, or even online databases. Information is, therefore, a consequence of the interpretations or analysis of data, which is useful in offering insight, a solution or an answer to a specific question. It can also be used in learning, decision-making, problem-solving, leisure, and even for communication purposes (Cekule & Cekuls, 2022).

As a result, information is a valuable resource for final-year students' success and performance because it helps them in their academics, decision-making as well as future employment. Final-year students are those enrolled in their final academic year prior to awarding them an undergraduate degree. Most are completing their first degrees and are particularly well-placed to meet both academic and professional or postgraduate needs. Consequently, they

would have diverse information needs, which are essential to their learning and future careers.

In this regard, information needs are defined as the specific types of information final-year students need to advance academically or accomplish a given objective. Rashid (2023) defines information needs as the type of information that is needed to finish a task. The final-year students' information needs encompass several requirements motivated by academic, personal, and career needs. Eke et al. (2019) established that final-year students' information needs include course materials, assignments, research projects, and career information, information about NYSC, job vacancies, admission requirements for postgraduate studies, grant and scholarship information, and self-development information. These needs consequently give rise to information-seeking behaviours to identify information that meets these specific demands.

Information-seeking behaviours have to do with conducts or attitudes exhibited by individuals when searching for information. Igwe (2012) defines information-seeking behaviour as the approach adopted while searching for, collecting, and sourcing information that is relevant to one's

needs, interests or objectives. The sources of information final-year students consult include academic advisors, working with other students, library resources, online databases, etc. (Eke et al., 2019; Ogba, 2013). These behaviours include verbal and non-verbal postures like enthusiasm or anxiety, as the student gestures, wanders, or performs systematic search to find information relevant to his/her academic and career needs (Igwe, 2012; Kolawole & Igwe, 2012).

University libraries in Nigeria have made significant efforts to provide diverse information resources, including print and electronic resources, such as e-books, e-journals, and e-databases, to better serve the information needs of students (Ogunbodede & Oribhabor, 2022). However, due to the access and the differences in preferences as well as their areas of concentration, there are students who are likely to prefer online sources to the physical library resources, especially where the students may feel that the library physical resources are outdated.

Statement of the Problem

Information is an essential resource for final-year students. Many university libraries in Nigeria have provided diverse resources to serve their needs. However, these researchers observed that many final-year students are not optimally exploiting their university library resources. The current study seeks to determine the information needs, seeking behaviour, and the challenges faced by final-year students when using library resources at the University of Africa, Bayelsa State. This is with the view of finding out how the university libraries can improve on their services to enable final-year students to achieve their academic and career goals. These improvements would make it easy for students to gather the comprehensive information they require for their final year projects as well as in their future endeavours.

Objectives of the Study

The precise objectives are to:

- 1) ascertain the information needs of final-year students.
- 2) determine the sources of information consulted by final-year students
- 3) identify the challenges final-year students face while seeking information.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

- 1) What are the information needs of final-year students?
- 2) Which sources of information are consulted by final-year students?
- 3) What challenges do final-year students face while seeking information?

Literature Review

Information needs of final-year students

In 2019, Eke et al., looked at what information first-year students needed at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, in Nigeria, among 5885 participants. The results reveal that final-year students' information needs revolve around course-related information, health-related information, and

job-related information. Similarly, Ogo and Uchendu (2024) focused on the final-year students' information needs in a university in Nigeria. There were 1642 final-year students in the study, as part of the 2022/2023 academic session. The outcomes revealed that last-year students only required detailed information about academic training, studying courses and writing projects or defence, jobs, and business or wealth. In conclusion, both research works established that final-year students require various kinds of information, mainly for academic and career purposes.

Information sources consulted by final-year students

Sambo et al. (2019) studied how University of Ilorin students in their last year gathered information for their final projects. The study confirmed that the respondents' most frequent sources are the Internet, print materials, reports/theses, and online catalogues. In the same vein, Soyemi and Oshineye (2015) also examined how final-year students at Babcock University search for information online. The results showed that the information-seeking behaviours include browsing on the Internet, searching areas of concern, and pinpointing those websites containing the information of interest. The result revealed that most final-year students spend a large amount of time on the web and cite web information sources as the main sources of their academic information. Ogba (2013) assessed how Nigerian final-year law students go about seeking information. The techniques that were used included questionnaires and interview methods. The results indicated that the respondents rely on print textbooks, academic law libraries, search engines, and Google as their major sources of research. These studies demonstrated that the final-year students used a broad range of information, essentially for academic and job-related purposes, using both traditional and electronic sources but preferring Google and other search engines.

Challenges final-year students encounter in accessing and using information

Mahwasane and Mudzielwana (2016) explored the hitches that learners are experiencing in accessing the library in South Africa. They include inadequate knowledge to conduct information search and retrieval, poor user sensitisation, illiteracy in computer literacy and ICT, and other related areas. Closely related, Ogo and Uchendu (2024) discovered that the hitches faced by final-year students searching for information include problems with the library environment, lack of Internet access, handling a large amount of data, lack of time and poor library equipment. But Sambo et al. (2021) pointed out that unpleasant library environments, slow Internet and inadequate computers prevent final-year students from finding information. Research by Okoh & Ijiekhuamhen (2014) revealed that not having computer skills, poor school infrastructure, lack of time, unreliable electricity supply, not being able to search, not being aware of information sources and poor access to the Internet in the school were important reasons for undergraduates' difficulties in seeking information. The studies depict the existing challenges final-year students experience when they use the library resources, including inadequate skills, an uncomfortable environment, and a lack of adequate infrastructure facilities. Solving these

problems might bring substantial improvement in final-year students' information searching activities and academic performance.

Methodology

The researchers used a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 251 final-year students. Questionnaires were given out to collect the needed information. All the people in the population were involved in the study using the total enumeration method. The final-year students were given 201 questionnaires, and 193 were retrieved and used for analysis. Steps were taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Firstly, an effort was made not to include any questions that may elicit personal details of the respondent; therefore, participants' anonymity was preserved. All collected data were stored and made only available to the authors of this paper. The data were analyzed and the findings were presented in a manner that no participant could be singled out. These measures were explained to the participants to reassure them of their privacy and confidentiality while doing the study.

The survey questionnaire was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha and yielded a value of 0.85, showing that the data was very reliable. Reliability for individual constructs was assessed: information needs 0.89, information sources 0.86, while challenges is 0.82. This suggests that all Cronbach's alpha values exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, demonstrating that each construct exhibits good internal consistency reliability. The data were studied by counting each kind of observation and calculating percentages. Responses from the questionnaire were analyzed when measured using a nominal scale and a 4-point Likert scale. A criterion score of 2.5 was chosen on the scale. The criterion score was gotten by calculating: criterion score = $(4 + 3 + 2 + 1)/4 = 2.5$. Cases with a mean score greater than or equal to 2.5 were considered agreed, and those with a mean less than 2.5 were considered disagreed for research questions 1-3.

Results

Table 1: Faculty of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Basic and Applied Sciences	88	46
Social and Management Science	81	42
Arts and Education	24	12
Total	193	100

Table 1 infers that most of the respondents, 88(46%), were in the faculty of Basic and Applied Sciences; 81(42%), were in the faculty of Social and Management Science; and 24(12%), were in the faculty of Arts and Education.

This is represented in the pie chart in Figure 1.

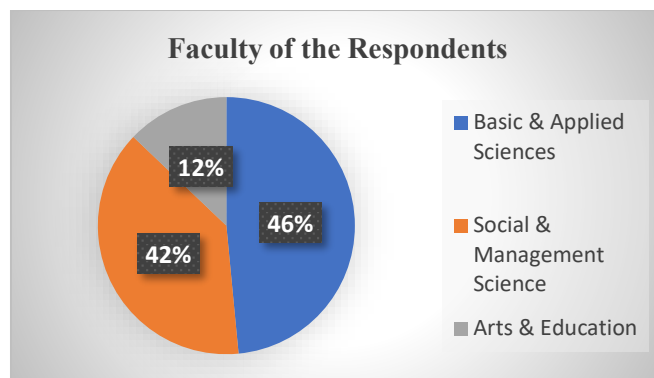
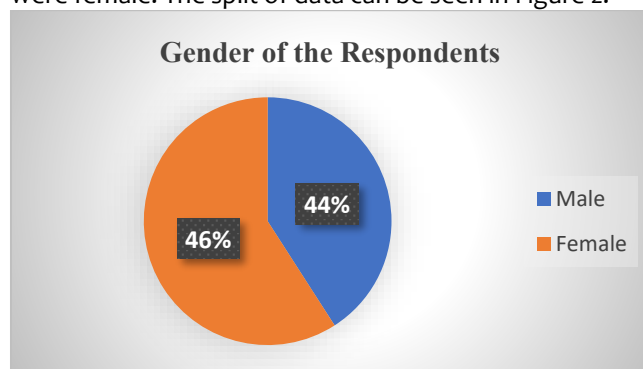


Table 2: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	85	44
Female	108	56
Total	193	100

The numbers in Table 2 show that more people in the sample were female. The split of data can be seen in Figure 2.



Research Question 1: What are the information needs of final-year students?

Table 3: Information Needs of Final-Year Students

S/N	Information Needs	Mean	Remark
1.	Information on project writing	3.6	
2.	Course-related information	3.4	Agree
3.	Exams-related information	3.3	Agree
4.	NYSC-related information	3.3	Agree
5.	Job-related information	3.2	Agree
6.	Health-related information	2.9	Agree
7.	Information on postgraduate studies	2.8	Agree
8.	Current affairs/entertainment information	2.7	Agree
9.	Business information	2.7	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.1	

In Table 3, items 1 to 9 have higher mean scores that are above the criterion mean of 2.5, and the overall (grand) mean of 3.1 is also higher than the criterion mean. This suggests that final-year students have a variety of information needs, which included project writing information, course information, exam information, NYSC information, and job information. This infers that most of the final-year students' concerns are

achieving academic excellence and preparing for future employment.

Research Question 2: What are the information sources consulted by final-year students when seeking information?

Table 4: Information Sources

S/N	Information Sources	Mean	Remark
1.	Internet/digital resources	3.4	Agree
2.	Print resources (textbooks, journals, etc.)	3.3	Agree
3.	Past project works	3.2	Agree
4.	Course adviser	2.9	Agree
5.	Peers	2.8	Agree
6.	Mass media (TV/radio/newspapers)	2.7	Agree
7.	Parents/relatives	2.6	Agree
Grand Mean		2.9	

Table 4 reveals that items 1-7 have mean scores that are above the criterion mean (2.5); more so, the grand mean (3.0) is higher than the criterion mean (2.5). This indicates that final-year students moderately utilized various resources, with Internet and digital resources being the most preferred, followed by printed materials and past project works. This pattern suggests a possible area of interest for the university library in enhancing access to these preferred sources of information.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges faced by final-year students while seeking information?

Table 5: Challenges faced by final-year students

S/N	Challenges	Mean	Remark
1.	Poor Internet connectivity	3.2	Agree
2.	Time constraint	3.1	Agree
3.	Lack of awareness of the library resources	3.0	Agree
4.	Inconsistent power supply	3.0	Agree
5.	Inadequate library information resources	2.8	Agree
6.	Lack of skills to surf the Internet	2.4	Agree
7.	Lack of up-date-information resources	2.4	Agree
8.	Poor library facilities	2.3	Agree
9.	Unfriendly nature of library staff	2.1	Agree
Grand Mean		2.7	

Table 5 shows that items 1-5 have mean scores that are above the criterion mean (2.5), while items 6-9 have mean values that are below the criterion mean (2.5). More so, the grand mean (2.7) is higher than the criterion mean (2.5), indicating that final-year students faced relatively moderate difficulties while using library resources. Some of these difficulties include poor internet connectivity, inadequate time, little or no knowledge of available library resources, inadequate power supply, and insufficient information resources. Addressing these challenges will enhance library services and final-year students' access to information resources.

Discussion of findings

Research question one shows that the majority of the final-year students have diverse information needs, with a strong emphasis on project writing, course-related information, exam-related information, NYSC-related information, and job-related information. This means that final-year students pay attention to information that can enhance their academic performance and help them secure jobs; these priorities comprise project writing, academic coursework, examinations, NYSC, and job openings.

This implies that the university library should address these exact needs and provide more extensive support in their academic work, exams, and career planning, with a view toward improving the final-year students' success and satisfaction. This finding concurs with that of Eke et al. (2019) and Ogo & Uchendu (2024), who also established that course-related and job-related information are the most significant to the final-year students. However, this present study further reveals other information needs of final-year students connected to exams and NYSC-related information that were not stressed or mentioned in other similar studies.

Research question two reveals that final-year students rely on various information sources, with Internet and digital resources and print materials and past project works being the most preferred sources. This finding suggests that final-year students appreciate a mixture of online and physical offline materials. Consequently, the university library should continue to acquire digital resources while at the same time maintaining high-quality print collections and easily retrievable physical copies of past students' project works. This will enable students to have a variety of information sources they require to best meet their varied information needs. This finding is in agreement with that of Sambo et al. (2019), who also revealed that the Internet, printed textbooks/journals, and project reports were the most commonly referred sources by the respondents.

Finally, research question three found that final-year students faced relatively moderate difficulty while using library resources. Some of these difficulties include poor Internet connectivity, inadequate time, little or no knowledge of available library resources, inadequate power supply, and insufficient information resources. This means that infrastructural constraints such as poor internet and inconsistent power supply, as well as a lack of awareness, undermine the chances of final-year students to effectively utilize the library resources. This implies that the university should provide adequate Internet connectivity and alternative sources of power supply, such as solar systems, to the library. There is also a need for the university library to step up their awareness campaigns with students regarding the available resources. Solving these issues will enhance the use of library information resources and foster helpful students' learning processes. The finding is in line with that of Okoh and Ijiekhuamhen (2014), which showed that lack of time, irregular electricity supply, lack of good search skills, and poor Internet

availability were the major factors affecting undergraduates' information-seeking behaviour.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings show that the majority of the final-year students have diverse information needs, with a strong emphasis on information on project writing, course-related information, exam-related information, NYSC-related information, and job-related information. Final-year students depend on various information sources, with Internet and digital resources, print materials, and past project works being the most preferred. Final-year students faced relatively moderate difficulty while using library resources, which include poor internet connectivity, inadequate time, little or no knowledge of available library resources, inadequate power supply, and insufficient information resources.

Recommendations

The authors recommended that:

- 1) The university should improve Internet connectivity and electricity supply.
- 2) The library should enhance awareness campaigns regarding the available library resources.
- 3) The library should also acquire more information resources based on their information needs and their preferred sources, mostly consulted by final-year students. This will complement the final-year students' learning needs and pursuits in making the library a conducive place to run to.

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