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## Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Medical Students, Benue State University, Makurdi

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### **Abstract:**

*This study examined the information needs and seeking behaviour of medical students of Benue State University, Makurdi. Five research questions were formulated to guide the study. The design of the study was descriptive survey. A population of 100 students from the various departments of the school was used. A researcher-developed questionnaire was employed as instrument for data collection and the collected data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. Findings of the study revealed that medical students have information needs relating to knowing job opportunities for medical students; getting information for final year projects; entertainment and to update their lecture notes. Other findings revealed inadequate tables and chairs for reading; unavailability of current sources; not knowing how to use library catalogue; unwillingness of Medical Library staff to assist users in time of difficulties and noise making by some students that visit the library, among others. In view of these findings, it recommended the training of Medical librarian(s) in the field of medicine; provision of current and up-to-date materials; seriousness of medical students with library, and information and communication technology GST course; provision of adequate tables and chairs as well as provision of assistance to medical students by staff of the Medical Library.*

### **1. Introduction**

Information is indisputably one of the necessities of life just like food, shelter, and cloth. This is because it is an indispensable resource that everybody needs on a daily basis to be able to carry out any activity or business. Scientifically, information is processed data. Politically, socially, or otherwise, it is referred to as that which is used for decision-making.

According to Okwilagwe (2000) information is an input, which reduces the level of uncertainty in any decision process. Igbaka and Atinmo (2002), described information as an important tool and a valuable resource required for the realization of any objective or goal set by organizations and individuals. In other words, Okoro and Okoro (2006) maintained that information is an indispensable factor for promoting the development of society, an essential part of a nation's resource being used as the raw material for making policies, for creating knowledge and fuelling the modern organization. Oguntuase and Akinbode (2007) noted that information is central to all human activities, very essential to human survival and the life-blood of any organization.

Lawal, Nkereuwen and Edem (2008) defined it as data used in decision-making, and data include facts, symbols, figures, alphabet etc. In the opinion of Folorunso (2011), information is referred to as an assemblage of data in a comprehensible form capable of communication. This means that information is made up of facts put together in a particular form, which can be communicated or distributed.

It is not an exaggeration to note that information is capable of liberating man from the shackles of ignorance, misconception, economic stagnation, social unrest and political instability. This implies that anybody who lacks this essential resource would wallow continually in ignorance and would be unable to advance in any sphere of human endeavour be it educational, political, social and economic amongst others. Consequently, one needs to be conscious of their information needs and make effort at seeking for relevant, accurate, and timely information in order to satisfy their information needs.

Information needs according to Wilson (2000) are influenced by a variety of factors such as the range of information sources available, the uses to which the information will be put, the background, motivation, professional orientation, and individual characteristics of the user. Other factors are the socio-political, economic, legal and regulatory systems surrounding the user, as well as the consequences of information use. The quality of sources of information available to the user is also important because relevant sources are most like to beget useful information. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), described information need as what an individual ought

to have for whatever reason when an individual has a need for information. To Belkin in Nyam (2014), information need is the state when a person recognizes an anomaly in his state of knowledge and converts this anomalous state of knowledge (ask) into some communicable structures, for example (request).

The idea of a medical school at the Benue State University started way back in 1992 when Reverend Father Moses Orshio Adasu became the governor of Benue State, but this idea materialized in February, 2004 when the then Vice Chancellor of the Benue State University, Professor David Ker negotiated with the University of Illorin for the release of Professor Matthew Araoye to assist in setting up the Medical College. He assumed duty as visiting professor of medicine and was co-opted into membership of the implementation committee. He recruited staff and started the College and the preclinical course. Using his experience of the Collegiate System of the Universities of Lagos, Ibadan and Illorin he produced a draft of the statute and regulations of the Benue State University College of Health Sciences. This was approved by the implementation committee and Senate in July, 2004. Before approving the statute, the Governing Council was dissolved. It took up to 2005 for another to come on board and the controversy about the status of the medical school resurfaced.

Professor Akase Sorkaa and Professor Araoye mounted a relentless battle to educate the Council until it approved the collegiate statute in 2006. The statute was signed into law by Governor George Akume in 2007, thereby enabling the appointment of Professor Matthew A. Araoye as the first provost of the Medical College in 2007. With the provost in place, events began to move logically but slowly owing to lack of funds to complete the essential areas. In January, 2007, Professor Araoye moved the staff and students to occupy the College site and in February, the buildings were commissioned by the then President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (Araoye & Gyoh, 2010).

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Information is very essential in all areas of human endeavour and without it nothing takes place. It is important and useful to everyone irrespective of sex, occupation, level of education or status, among others. This is because information is a vital resource for development in our fast growing world as it's capable of lifting an individual from a state of ignorance, illiteracy and poverty to a state of enlightenment, prosperity and literacy. In education for instance, information is used for teaching, learning and research and that is why lecturers, teachers and students need it to undertake any academic activity. For students generally, and medical students in particular, information is crucial for their success, especially given the delicate nature of their field of study which is connected with saving lives.

It is also a truism that medical students need relevant, accurate and timely information for their studies including class work, assignment, continuous assessment and examination as well as their final year project, among others. However, are the medical students of the Benue State University, Makurdi conscious of their information needs and how do they go about seeking for information in order to satisfy their needs? It is in view of this fact that, this study seeks to explore the information needs and seeking behaviour of medical students of the Benue State University, Makurdi.

## 3. Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to investigate the information needs and seeking behaviour of medical students, Benue State University, Makurdi. The specific objectives of the study are:

- To examine the information needs of medical students in College of Health Sciences, Benue State University;
- To find the sources explored by the medical students to meet their information needs;
- To find out the relevance of the internet as an information source to medical students;
- To identify the problems faced by medical student in seeking information, and
- To suggest ways that could be adopted to overcome the identified problems.

## 4. Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the information needs of medical students in the College of Health Sciences, Benue State University?
- What are the sources explored by the medical students to meet their information needs?
- What is the relevance of the internet as an information source to medical students?
- What are the problems faced by medical student in seeking for information?
- What ways could be adopted to overcome the identified problems?

## 5. Conceptual Clarification

### 5.1. The Concepts of Information and Information Needs

Information has no universally acceptable definition and as such, different scholars have defined it from their viewpoint. Mamman (2000) describes information as a powerful commodity that provides the heart for the development of knowledge, the basis for innovations, the resource for an informed citizenry and becomes the key commodity for the progress of any society. Bates (2002) sees it in terms of tools, processes or knowledge. Ochogwu in Madukoma (2006) notes that information is a basic resource, as fundamental as food and energy, as its access is one of the fundamental human rights. In his view, Bello (2006) maintains that information has always played an important role in human life and as a basic human resource; its need is never a subject of controversy. In their view,

Ifidon and Ahiazu (2005) states that information is structured data that causes a human mind to change its opinion about the current state of real world and contribute to a reinforcement of ideas and opinions.

According to Lawal (2007), information as a term denotes facts or data. He adds that it is needed in all spheres of life to facilitate decision-making and engender progress. The author contends that people need information about new developments and techniques in medicine, agriculture, social life and culture, science and technology, among others, so that they can improve on existing practices and better their lives. Information is a valuable resource required in any society; thus acquiring and using it are critical and important activities (Ozioko & Utor, 2009). To Nwokedi and Adah (2009), it is described as data that have been subjected to some processing functions capable of answering a user's query, be it in recorded, summarized or simply collected to help in decision-making. Hamrefors cited by Opara (2011) observes that information is a cornerstone for long-term and serves as a base for competence development.

Information need according to Case (2002), is a recognition that your knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal that you have. It is also seen as lack of desired commodity (that is information) necessary to deal with a situation as the individual sees it. Information need arises when a person recognizes that something is wrong in his or her state of knowledge and wishes to resolve it (Kuppers, 2004). Bruce (2005) notes that observing, generalizing the concept of information needs is based on the behaviour that it engenders. He contends that information needs is personal, psychological, sometimes inexpressible, vague and unconscious conditions. He states further that there are four levels of information need that an individual passes through before he or she makes formal encounter with an information system or the services of an information professional. These levels according to Bruce (2005) are visceral need, conscious need, formalized need and compromised need.

## 6. Methodology

The design adopted for this study was descriptive survey. The design was considered suitable for the study because it enabled better investigation of the subject under study. According to Nworgu (2006), descriptive survey is one that is aimed at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire; titled "Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Medical Students (INSBMS)". The instrument was based on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) 4; Agree (A) 3; Disagree (D) 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1. The data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The decision rule was 2.5.

## 7. Results

This section of the study deals with presentation, analysis and interpretation of data collected for it.

Information Needs	Mean (x)	SD	Decision
To know job opportunities that exist for medical graduates	3.16	0.58	Agree
To get information for final year projects	3.20	0.72	Agree
Entertainment	3.09	0.72	Agree
To get information to update their lecture notes	2.97	0.81	Agree
Cluster Mean	3.11	0.71	Agree

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Information Needs

Table 1 presents respondents' information needs. From the table, respondents agreed that their information needs include: knowing job opportunities that exist for medical graduates; to get information for final year projects; for entertainment and for getting information to updates their lecture notes. This is shown in the mean ratings ranging from 3.11 to 3.16. The cluster mean of 3.11 with its corresponding standard deviation of 0.71 also indicates the respondents were related in their responses.

Sources of Information	Mean (x)	SD	Decision
Discussion with fellow students	3.34	0.78	Agree
Bibliography compiled by the Medical Library	3.22	0.78	Agree
Consulting knowledgeable persons in the field	3.16	0.74	Agree
Abstracting journals	3.14	1.06	Agree
Indexing journals	3.14	1.06	Agree
Through the Internet	3.11	0.80	Agree
Radio and Television	2.94	1.21	Agree
Library Catalogues	2.81	0.87	Agree
Medical textbooks	2.80	0.88	Agree
Discussion with librarian or reference staff of Medical Library	2.50	1.02	Agree
Cluster Mean	3.02	0.92	Agree

Table 2: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Sources Explored By Medical Students to Meet their Information Needs

Table 2 shows the sources that medical students explore to meet their information needs. The table indicates the sources as discussion with fellow students; bibliography compiled by the Medical Library; consulting knowledgeable persons in the field; abstracting

journals and indexing journals. Others are the internet; radio and television; library catalogues and medical textbooks as well as discussion with librarian or reference staff of the Medical Library. This is reflected in the mean ratings ranging from 2.50 to 3.34. The cluster mean of 3.02 and standard deviation of 0.92 is also a clear indication that the respondents were closely related in their responses.

Relevance of Internet Usage	Mean (x)	SD	Decision
For news update	3.56	0.52	Agree
For medical information	3.38	0.61	Agree
For education	3.22	0.67	Agree
For entertainment (chatting with friends)	3.17	0.84	Agree
For sports update	3.08	0.94	Agree
For e-mail	3.00	0.97	Agree
For browsing	2.84	0.70	Agree
Cluster Mean	3.18	0.75	Agree

Table 3: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Relevance of Internet Usage by Medical Students

Table 3 presents mean rating and standard deviation of respondents on the relevance of internet usage by medical students. From the table, the respondents attested that they make use of the internet for news update; medical information; education and entertainment (chatting with friends). Other uses are for sports update; e-mail and for browsing. This is clearly indicated in the mean ratings ranging from 2.84 to 3.56. The cluster mean of 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.72 means that the respondents were related on their responses.

Problems	Mean (x)	SD	Decision
Inadequate tables and seats for reading	3.44	0.77	Agree
Some of the information materials are outdated	3.36	0.64	Agree
Noise making from students that visit the Medical Library	3.32	0.70	Agree
Unavailability of current sources	3.31	0.66	Agree
Not knowing how to use the library catalogue	3.30	0.85	Agree
Information is scattered in too many sources	3.28	0.60	Agree
Lack of knowledge in using library facilities	3.22	0.80	Agree
Unwillingness of Medical Library staff to assist users in time of difficulties	3.16	0.75	Agree
Inability of staff to open the Medical Library on time	3.06	0.74	Agree
Cluster Mean	3.27	0.72	Agree

Table 4: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Problems Faced by Medical Students when Seeking for Information

Data presented in table 4 shows the mean ratings and standard deviation of respondents on the problems they face when seeking for information. The table indicates that the respondents encounter problems such as inadequate tables and seats for reading; some of the information materials are outdated; noise making from students that visit the Medical Library; unavailability of good materials and not knowing how to use the library catalogue. Others are information is scattered in too many sources; lack of knowledge in using library facilities; unwillingness of Medical Library staff to assist users in time of difficulties and inability of staff to open the Medical Library on time. This is seen from the mean ratings ranging from 3.06 to 3.44. The cluster mean of 3.27 and the corresponding standard deviation of 0.72 are clear reflections that the respondents were related in their responses.

Strategies	Mean (x)	SD	Decision
Augmentation of information materials in the library	3.47	0.66	Agree
Provision of adequate tables and chairs	3.32	0.71	Agree
Rendering of assistance to users on the use of modern information sources like various search engines, e-mail, CD techniques, exposing the students to modern library services and facilities	3.23	0.87	Agree
Retaining the medical reference librarian	3.18	0.90	Agree
Ensuring that students who do not have business in the library do not come into disturb others	3.13	0.75	Agree
Urging the staff to open the library on time	3.12	0.82	Agree
Provision of current books, journals and other information materials for users	3.06	0.81	Agree
Cluster mean	3.22	0.79	Agree

Table 5: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Strategies to Overcome the Identified Problems

Table 5 presents respondents mean ratings and standard deviation on strategies to overcome the problems that medical students face in seeking for information to meet their information needs. From the table, it is obvious that they suggested augmentation of information in the library; provision of adequate tables and chairs; rendering of assistance to users on the use of modern information sources and

retaining of medical reference librarian. Others are ensuring that students who do not have business in the library do not come in to disturb others; urging the staff to open the library on time and provision of current books, journals and other information materials for users. As shown in the table, the mean ratings ranging from 3.06 to 3.46 is a reflection of the fact that the respondents agreed with all the items in the table as suggested strategies that could be adopted to overcome the problems militating against medical students' information seeking behaviour. The cluster mean of 3.22 with the corresponding standard deviation of 0.79 demonstrated that the respondents were related in their responses.

## 8. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are based on the data collected and analysed. In the first finding, the study revealed the information needs of medical students of the Benue State University, Makurdi to include getting information to update their lecture notes; to know job opportunities that exist for medical graduates; for entertainment and to get information for final their year project.

Another finding of the study equally revealed that medical students explore sources such as fellow students; bibliography compiled by the Medical Library; consulting knowledgeable persons in the field; abstracting journals and indexing journals. Others are the internet; radio and television; library catalogues and medical textbooks as well as discussion with librarian or reference staff of the Medical Library in order to meet their information needs.

More so, the study found the relevance of the internet to medical students to include: for news update; medical information; education and entertainment (chatting with friend). Other uses are for sports update; e-mal and for browsing.

On the problems faced by medical students of the Benue State University in seeking for information to meet their needs, the study revealed them as inadequate tables and seats for reading; some of the information materials are outdated; noise making from students that visit the Medical Library; unavailability of current sources and not knowing how to use the library catalogue. Other problems are information is scattered in too many sources; lack of knowledge in using library facilities; unwillingness of Medical Library staff to assist users in time of difficulties and inability of staff to open the Medical Library on time.

Finally, the study suggested augmentation of information in the library; provision of adequate table and chairs; rendering of assistance to users on the use of modern information sources and retaining of medical reference librarian. Others are ensuring that students who do not have business in the library do not come in disturb others; urging the staff to open the library on time and provision of current books, journals and other information materials for users as strategies that could be adopted to ameliorate the problems faced by the medical students in seeking for information.

## 9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Medical library staff, especially reference librarian(s) should undergo training in the field of medicine to be better equipped to provide effective and efficient services to the medical students.
- ii. The Medical Library of the Benue State University should be adequately stocked with more current and up-to-date information materials including journals and other serial publications since they are known for currency and up-to-datedness of information.
- iii. Medical students should take very seriously user education programmes, especially the GST course on library and information and communication technology as this would go a long way in equipping them with the requisite skills needed to explore information in the library using modern facilities.
- iv. Adequate tables and chairs should be provided in the Medical Library to provide enough seating facilities for the medical students and other users.
- v. Members of staff of the Medical Library should as a matter of policy ensure that provide assistance to medical students, especially those who may have difficulties in searching for needed information or using the facilities of the library.

## 10. Conclusion

Knowing the information needs and seeking behaviour of medical students, Benue State University, Makurdi and the ways to be put in place to satisfy them are the right steps in the right direction. This is because these students need relevant, accurate, and timely information to enable them succeed in their academic pursuit and other endeavours. From the foregoing, therefore, it can be concluded that information is sine qua non to the success of medical students and as such must be provided in the right quality and quantity to enable them meet their varied information needs.

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