

INFORMATION NEEDS OF LECTURERS IN TWO PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study identified the information needs of lecturers in Nigerian private universities- Using questionnaire, data was gathered from 106 randomly selected respondents in two universities established by non-government organizations. The paper examined the information needs, and sources of, information available to the lectures, as well as, problems that inhibited their easy access to information. Findings revealed that information in support of teaching and research undertakings constituted the major needs and these were gotten mainly from books and other publications. A total of 48.1% of the respondents obtained their information sources from the library. An insignificant percentage (0.9%) of the participants in this study relied on gossips or grapevine sources for information. The findings further show that "inadequacy of current and relevant materials in the library" (29.2%) is the most serious obstruction to information access. Provision of current serials, especially, journals, incorporation of ICT into the information delivery system of Nigerian private universities and provision of financial grants to enable lecturers procure relevant information sources are some of the recommendations made to improve access to information by lecturers in Nigerian private universities.

Introduction

Before the inauguration of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the proprietorship of universities in Nigeria was the exclusive preserve of Federal and State Governments. This led to the establishment of more than 40 conventional and specialized universities by both tiers of government. The major rationale for the founding of those universities includes, the need to improve mass literacy, quicken scientific and technological researches and develop core manpower for the developmental needs of the country.

The recession in the global economy in the preceding decades severely diminished the financial resources at the disposal of Federal and State.

Governments in Nigeria. However, while income decreased, governmental responsibilities increased and/or expanded exponentially. Expectedly, budgetary allocations for education at all levels, and universities in particular, witnessed steady decline. The aftermath of this untoward development include dysfunctional infrastructure for research, insufficient classroom and office accommodations, brain-drain, industrial disharmony, student gangsterism, instability in the academic calendar and erosion of academic standards.

The problems of Nigerian university system, some of which have been highlighted, did not dissuade the millions of Nigerians who were desirous of university education. On yearly bases, the number of candidates who pass the universities matriculation examination (UME)

continued to increase astronomically. However, majority of these qualified candidates cannot secure admission to the existing universities because of a combination of insufficiency of spaces and some of the problems earlier mentioned. This situation and the need to encourage private participation at all levels of education in Nigeria gave rise to the idea of private universities.

Among the private universities in Nigeria are *Madonna* and *Caritas*. These universities share other similarities: Both are first generation private universities, established by Christian missionary organizations. In addition, both catholic universities are located in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. However, while Madonna University is cited at Okija, which is a few kilometres from Onitsha; Caritas University operates at Amoji-Nike. at the outskirts of Enugu metropolis.

The faculty members, composed largely of lecturers and research fellows, are the academic staff of university and other higher institutions of learning. They, perhaps, more than any other category of staff, contribute to the attainment of the broad objectives of the university, which is usually captured as teaching, research, publication and community service. These teaching staff provides academic guidance to students and extends the frontiers of knowledge through intellectual enquiries. The lecture's calling makes his need for information inevitable. A greater proportion of this information are acquired, processed and disseminated through the academic library which has been described variously as “the heart of the institution..” (Aloh, 1988); “... a place where books and users interact for the transmission of civilization and the cultivation of human beings (Adelabu. 1973) and “...the singular most important resources in the pursuit of the general goals and objectives of the institution of higher learning.” (Nwosu, 2000).

Earlier researches by Bozimo (1983) and Ehikhamenor (1990) have highlighted the information needs of lecturers in government-owned universities in Nigeria. However, the information requirements of such academic staff in the country's nascent private universities have not benefited from a similar investigation. It is this lacuna that the present study seeks to fill. This report therefore, provides a basis for the comparism of the similarities or otherwise of the information needs of private and public universities in the country. The specific information needs of the subjects of this study and the sources, types of publications consulted, and non-print materials used were all covered in this survey. It is also part of the aims of the study to find out the factors that impede access to information by lecturers in Nigerian private universities, as well as. recommend solutions to such problems.

Review of Related Literature

A research on information *need* is in the realm of library user studies. Croman (1981) evaluated user needs and opined that the general objective of research on users is to further the understanding of the process of information transfer. According to Akinmumi (1986). “Any library is in the business of providing services to its user groups, and to be functional, the services so provided should correspond as closely as possible to the needs of the user.” Isah (1995) studied information needs and information seeking behaviour of extension

specialists and technical officers and recommended increased library funding since these libraries are the most widely used sources of vital information for people from different strata of the society. There have been several studies on the information needs of both academics and other professionals. For instance, Edem (1993) carried out a longitudinal survey of information seeking and use habits of some journalists while Otike (1999) investigated the information needs and seeking behaviour of lawyers. The findings of these studies conducted with different experts and in different countries showed that information needs and search strategies are greatly influenced by respondents' nature of work. Jan (1991-1992) also examined the information needs of academic staff of Nigerian non-university technologically based tertiary institutions and concluded that their needs are essentially job-related.

Hewins (1990) study on information needs and utilization revealed that users needs may be determined by the situation in which the person is at a given moment, thus the need could vary as situations changes. Line and Tidmarsh (1996) Surveyed the attitude of users of Southampton University Library and observed that while a particular information source may be adequate for one user at a time, the same may not be adequate for another in the same circumstance and setting. A recent localized comparative study of information requirements, seeking strategies and utilization by educational administrators and medical doctors by Gbadamosi (2005) also confirmed the fact that no two people really seek information the same way hinting that a lot depend on level of education, reading habits and perception of the library.

Scholars have captured the reasons for information need by lecturers and other academic staff. Singh (1981), Ajidahun (1990), Ehikhamanor (1990) and Jam (1991-1992) in separate researches, established that such information needs were job-related, especially teaching and research. Akusu (1987) examined the resources available to satisfy the information requirements of medical laboratory technologists and asserted that information needs depend on areas of specialization insisting that majority of researchers make private arrangements such as subscription to journals and purchase of books to remain abreast of developments in their areas of specialization. Similarly, David (1987) categorized information as strategic, managerial and technical and declared that the best way to find out workers information needs is to separate the information according to the level it is needed. For Graulewsken-Vickery (1999) psychological and sociological factors, especially, behavioural patterns, predispose men to seek and use information. McGarry (1988) explored the changing context of information needs and concluded that what constitutes information needs is decided by people who have identifiable objectives and targets to achieve. Alegbeleye (1989) argued that if one knows the factors which influence the information needs and information seeking patterns, one is likely to be in a better position to design information systems and services to meet users' demands.

Jam (1991-1992) reported that periodicals and journals are the predominant information materials used by academic staff. Bozimo (1983) revealed that most academics in Nigerian universities had urgent needs for library materials, which were not met while Awokoya (1988) catalogued the constraints to effective library and information delivery to academic staff of technological tertiary institution in Nigeria. In another study, Edem and Bassey

(1999) identified several barriers to information search and accessibility to scholars and recommended departmentalization of library services and provision of current information resources in Nigerian tertiary education institutions.

Methodology

This survey took place between June and August, 2005. The major research instrument was a ten-item questionnaire designed to elicit data on the academic rank of respondents, information needs, information search-patterns, information sources, impediment to easy access to information and recommendations on ways of making information more accessible. Since the exact number of lecturers in each of the universities under study was not readily available, 60 copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents in each of the universities using availability sampling technique. In all, 106 respondents (representing 88.3% of the sample), returned copies of the questionnaire in usable form. This consists of 56 respondents from Madonna University and 50 respondents from Caritas University. Findings are presented in frequency tables numbered 1-6.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Academic Rank of Respondent

Madonna University Caritas University

Academic Rank	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Grand Total	Net Percentage
Professor	3	5.3%	2	4%	5	4.8%
Assoc. Prof.	5	9%	2	4%	7	6.7%
Senior Lecturer	8	14.2%	4	8%	12	11.3%
Lecturer I	12	21.5%	14	28%	26	24.6%
Lecturer II	13	23.2%	12	24%	25	23.6%
Asst. Lecturer	10	17.9%	13	26%	23	21.7%
Graduate Asst,	5	9%	3	6%	8	7.6%

Table 1 shows that a total of 5 respondents (4.8%) were of the rank of Professor. Seven (7) respondents (6.7%) were Associate *Professors* or Readers. *Twelve* (12) respondents (11.3%) were Senior Lecturers. *Twenty-six* (26) respondents (24.6%) were of the rank of Lecturer I while 25 respondents (23.6%) were of the rank of Lecturers II. Twenty-three (23) respondents (21.7%) were Assistant Lecturers while 8 respondents (7.6%) were Graduate Assistants.

It is obvious from Table 1 that few professors and senior lecturers took part in this study. The probable reason for this is that there are few of these calibers of faculty members in both universities. The available senior academics are largely retirees occupying highly demanding administrative positions most of who were indisposed to participate in the study. On the other hand, other cadres of lecturers were more in number in both institutions. Many of them, being former peers of the researcher, were easily reachable and thus completed copies of the questionnaire through which data for this study was gathered. Since the distribution of academic rank of respondents tallies with that of an earlier report by Ehikharnenor (1990), it

could mean that academics at the lower rung of the career ladder have greater need for information to expand their knowledge base and publish research papers for promotion. This might, partly, explain the involvement of junior and middle-level cadres of lecturers in studies meant to highlight and address such information needs.

Table 2: Information Needs of lecturers

Madonna University		Caritas University					
Specific Information Needs	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Grand Total	Net Percentage	
Teaching & research materials.	17	30.3%	13	26%	30	28.3%	
Mats, for community service	10	17.9%	8	16%	18	16.9%	
Materials on current affairs and general knowledge	4	7.1%	4	8%	8	7.6%	
Health and social welfare information	12	21.4%	10	20%	22	20.8%	
Information on governmental and political issues	3	5.3%	6	12%	9	8.4%	
Information on business and economic affairs	10	17.9%	9	18%	19	18.9%	

People have varying information needs, most of which depend on the nature of work they do. *Table 2* shows that 30 respondents (28.3%) in the present study needed information for teaching and research responsibilities. Eighteen (18) respondents (16.9%) indicated that they needed information to assist them to render community services. Materials on current affairs and general knowledge were needed by 8 respondents (7.6%). Information on health and social welfare matters was needed by 22 respondents (20.8%). Nine (9) respondents (8.4%) needed information on governmental and political issues. Nineteen (19) respondents (18%) required information on business and economic matters. It is clear from *Table 2* that the major information need of lecturers in the private universities studied has to do with teaching and research activities. This supports the findings made earlier by Singh (1981), Ajidahun (1990), and Jam (1991-1992) who reported that the information needs of academic staff in public universities are job-related, especially teaching, research, publication and community services. It therefore implies that there is no significant difference in the information needs of faculty members in both public and private universities in Nigeria.

Table 3: Sources of Information for Lecturers N. = 106.

Madonna University Caritas University

Sources of Information	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Grand Total	Net %
Library materials	30	53.6%	21	42%	51	48.1%
Internet	16	28.6%	12	24%	28	26.4%
The print media	13	23.2%	12	24%	25	23.6%
Computer	13	23.2%	10	20%	23	21.7%
Electronic media	10	17.9%	13	26%	23	21.7%
Telephone	4	7.1%	6	12%	10	9.4%
Discussion with colleagues	3	5.3%	3	6%	6	5.7%
Realia	2	3.6%	4	8%	6	5.7%
Grapevine/gossip	-	-	1	2%	1	0.9%

The broad sources of information were examined. The findings presented in *Table 3*, reveals that 51 respondents (48.1%) relied on library materials as their sources of information. Interestingly, there was an impressive use of online databases like the Internet as shown by 26.4% of the respondents while twenty-five (25) respondents (23.6%) obtained information from their personal collection of materials. Twenty-three (23) respondents (21.7%) depended on their radio or television (i.e. the electronic media) to satisfy their information needs while an equal number of the lecturers studied (i.e. 23 or 21.7%) used the computer. Ten (10) respondents (9.4%) got needed information through the telephone. Six (6) respondents (5.7%) indicated that they usually consult with their colleagues whenever they need information. Another 6 respondents (5.7%) found realia relevant to their information requirements. However, a negligible number of respondents (1 person or 0.9%) expressed reliance on grapevine sources and gossips. This corroborates earlier findings (Bozimo 1983 and Goldberg 1991) that the library constitutes the major source of information to lecturers and researchers. The likely explanation for this is that lecturers do not buy as many publications and other information sources as they should and thus rely heavily on library materials for preparation of lecture notes and conduct of other researches. They also have preferential borrowing rights and enjoy other current awareness services. Such privileges and services, which are capable of attracting patrons to libraries and other bibliographic institutions, probably, account for the reliance of a large number of respondents on libraries in their information search.

The distribution of non-book materials used by respondents is quite revealing. It indicates that most lecturers in the private universities studied make extensive use of computers and internet, compared to other non-book information sources. This information seeking pattern shows that lecturers in these private universities appreciate the enormous potentials of computers and electronic databases as sources of reliable data for the discharge of their core professional responsibilities. Clearly, the use of computers, and the electronic information superhighway by respondents were on private arrangement because, from observation, none of the two private university libraries studied had these facilities at the time of this survey.

The low utilization of realia may be as a result of insufficient understanding of their; usefulness as information sources. The insignificant number of respondents who sought information through conversation with their colleagues differs sharply from the separate reports of Salasin and Cedar (1985) and Popoola (1996) wherein greater percentage of respondents relied on person-to-person communication. This suggests that most of the lecturers studied do not have confidence in oral sources of information.

Table 4: Types of Print Materials Consulted by Lecturers in Their Institutions' Libraries Madonna University

Types of Publications	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Grand Total	Net %
Monographs Textbooks	13	23.2%	42	24%	25	23.6%
Journals periodicals	17	30.3%	13	26%	30	28.3%
Reference materials	8	14.2%	10	20%	18	16.9%
Newspapers and magazines	11	19.7%	10	20%	21	19.9%
Government publications	5	9%	2	4%	8	7.6%
Projects / dissertations/ theses	2	3.6%	3	6%	5	4.8%

Though there were indications of extensive use of libraries and their resources by respondents, in their information search, it was considered necessary to highlight the level of use of print published sources which are common in many libraries. The emphasis was on the use of these print materials in their institutions libraries. Table 4 shows that journals/periodicals and monographs/textbooks are the major publications needed and consulted by lecturers. Specifically, 30 respondents (28.3%) found journals and periodical, appropriate to their information needs while 25 respondents (23.6%) preferred monographs and textbooks. Eighteen (18) respondents (16.9%) indicated that reference materials were relevant to their information needs. Twenty-one (21) respondents (19.9%) opined that newspapers and magazines were relevant to their needs. Government publications and similar documents were reported to be useful to the information needs of 8 respondents (7.6%). Only 5 respondents (4.8%) found research reports (projects, dissertations and theses) relevant to their needs. The preference of lecturers for journals is not entirely surprising. Journals contain the latest discoveries and research findings in different fields. As a result, academic staff has a greater demand for journals and periodicals to remain abreast of developments in their fields. On the other hand, the low rating of government publications and research reports can also be explained. The institutions are relatively new, do not enjoy depository status and may not have developed a credible policy for the acquisition of government documents. The same reasons are applicable to research reports (projects, dissertations, theses) since the institutions are still in their formative years.

Table 5: Problems Encountered in Information Search*Madonna University Caritas University*

Problems	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Grand Total	Net%
Inadequacy of current and relevant information materials in the library	17	30.3%	14	28%	31	29.2%
Inadequacy of information and communication technology	14	25%	12	24%	26	24.6%
incompetent staff	12	21.4%	10	20%	22	20.8%
Economic/financial constraints	2	3.6%	2	4%	4	3.8%
Shortage reading spaces in the library	10	17.9%	10	20%	20	18.9%
Not aware of where to locate needed information materials	1	1.8%	2	4%	3	2.9%

Table 5. Reveals that the major impediment to easy access to information is inadequacy of current and relevant information sources in the library. Thirty-one (31) respondents (29.2%) were of this opinion. Shortage of information and communication technology (ICT) like photocopiers, telephones, computers, and Internet accessories were identified as a problem encountered in information search by 26 respondents (24.6%). Twenty-two (22) respondents (20.8%) experienced problems caused by incompetent staff. Also, 20 respondents (18.9%) reported that the small reading spaces in libraries affected their search and access to relevant information. Four (4) respondents (3.8%) indicated that economic and financial constraints denied them access to needed information materials while only 3 respondents (2.9%) encountered problems in their information search because they were not aware of where to obtain needed information.

The Result in *Table 5.* Shows that whereas adverse economic situation affects access to information and its sources, inadequacies associated with available ICT compounds this problem. Even the library which is supposed to serve as a receptacle for diverse ranges of information did not fare any better as there were indications of outdated-cum-irrelevant materials, incompetent staff and shortage of reading spaces. It is also necessary to note that the problems which respondents in this study encountered in their information search were not as a result of ignorance of where to locate the needed information materials. This submission, which is based on the paltry 2.9% of the lecturers who were not aware of where to find needed materials, suggest that the problems of information search by respondents had to do with availability and retrieval, rather than unavailability.

Respondents were requested to make recommendations that would help to meet their various information needs. The aggregate of their response is presented in *Table 6*.

Table 6: *Respondents Recommendations on How to Meet their Information Needs.*

Recommendations	Frequency	Percentage
Library should acquire more relevant publications (books, journals etc)	22	20.8%
Library should conduct regular user studies to determine the information needs of lecturers	20	18.9%
Creation of separate sections in library for lecturers and students	17	16%
Involvement of academic staff in selection of library books.	12	U.3%
Provision of information technologies	12	11.3%
Creation of faculty and departmental libraries	10	9.4%
Library should organise periodic displays and current awareness programmes	7	6.7%
Regular publication of campus magazines and bulletins	4	3.8%
Faster issuance of memos, circulars and other official notices.	2	1.9%
Total	106	100%

Table 6 shows that 20.8% of the respondents recommended that the libraries should acquire relevant publications in order to help them meet their information needs. Only 1.9% of the respondents recommended that quick release of official notices (memoranda and circulars) would be helpful in meeting their information needs. Other recommendations by respondents in their order of ranking are:

- Conduct of regular user studies to determine information needs of lecturers (18.9%);
- Creation of separate sections in the library for lecturers and students (16%);
- Involvement of academic staff in book selection (11.3%);
- Provision of information technologies (11.3%);
- Creation of faculty and departmental libraries (9.4%);
- Adequate publicity of library resources and services through exhibitions, display, and other current awareness programs (6.7%).
- Regular publication of campus magazines and bulletins (3.8%)

Conclusion

The following conclusions are drawn from the findings of this study: Lecturers have diverse information needs which make them consult different information sources. Monographs, journals and periodicals are the major publications consulted by lecturers. These publications are supposed to be readily available in libraries In order to assist lecturers in their core functions identified as of teaching, research and community service. Compared to result of earlier surveys, including Ehikhamenor (1990), Ajidahun (1990) and Jam (1991-1992), the present study shows that there is no major dissimilarity between the information needs of

lecturers in public and private universities in Nigeria. Though the emergent of ICT is supposed to meet a wide range of information needs, it is unlikely that the subject of this study made extensive use of these ICT in their information search considering that its inadequacy ranked second in the list of problems encountered in information search. It is evident that access to required information by lecturer is still fraught with problems.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are intended to bring the necessary improvement to the prevailing unsatisfactory situation in the supply of information to lecturers in the universities studied:

Since lecturers and other academic staff are voracious users of journals, the acquisition of these materials by different libraries should be increased in order to keep researchers well informed of developments in their fields. Newly published monograph, including core reference materials, should also be acquired to augment the journal holdings. In doing this, libraries should draw a precise acquisition policy. This policy should make room for inputs from lecturers and other users. Participation of library users in book selection would facilitate the acquisition of relevant materials and enhance user satisfaction.

Management of libraries should mount periodic user education programmes designed for lecturers. These would imbue such academics with the competence or skills to navigate the library and retrieve needed information effortlessly. Additionally, faculty and departmental libraries should be created to decongest the main or central libraries in tertiary institutions. Separate sections in these libraries could be reserved for the exclusive use of lecturers.

Financial grants should be made available to lecturers by their employers and philanthropist. Such assistance would avail the recipients the required economic empowerment for the purchase of information materials needed for their teaching and research endeavours.

Private universities' libraries should intensify the provision of current awareness services (CAS), which are targeted at supplying the information needs of lecturers. These CAS should be built around displays, exhibitions, abstracting and indexing services. More information and communication technologies (ICTs) like computers, internet, photocopiers, and telephone should be incorporated into the information delivery system of private universities in Nigeria.

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