

## ***Students' Characteristics and their Information Seeking Behaviours in the University of Calabar, Nigeria***

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### **Abstract**

*The study adopted survey design to investigate students' characteristics and their information seeking behaviours in the University of Calabar. It was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The population of the study was 3,312 registered users of University of Calabar library in the 2019/2020 academic session. A sample of 200 respondents drawn through accidental sampling technique was used. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire constructed by the researchers tagged "Students' Information Seeking Behaviours Questionnaire" (SISBQ). The instrument was subjected to face validity. One-way analysis of variance was used to analyse the data, and the hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The results indicated, among others, that students' internet background knowledge, and their academic discipline have significant influence on their information seeking behaviours. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that the University administration should organize training and retraining programmes for academic staff who will encourage students to use different channels of information seeking, and these channels should be made available to them.*

**Keywords:** information, seeking, behaviours, students, characteristics

### **Introduction**

Man has always search, and will perhaps continue to search for facts yet unknown to him, and for answers to questions yet unanswered. This search has followed different forms and approaches through the ages, which have undergone series of changes from the earliest time to the present day. It has gone through the stage of haphazardness to a stage of systematized enquiry, and from the stage of mere speculation to that characterized by empiricism. The present time is an era where information is the driving force among other activities. Information is a key factor in the world and economic markets, and those who make seeking information their business are among the fastest growing employment sector.

Akin-Fakorede (2013) argued that information is indispensably an ingredient for social, economic, industrial, political and technological advancement, as it is apparent in every facet of human endeavour that no meaningful and enduring development can be achieved

without it. The author maintained that information is a stimulus and responding to it prompts people to act the way they do. It was further stressed that information is not only an instrument for change, growth and development, but also data meant for answering or meeting users' queries and needs. Information is an important tool and a valuable resource required for the realization of any objective or goal set by individuals. Therefore acquiring and utilizing information are critical and important activities (Igbeka & Atinmo, 2002).

Information is all published and unpublished knowledge from sources to meet human needs for decision making and meaningful existence. However, information seeking behaviour, according to Uhegbu (2007), is the way an information user conducts himself or acts while looking for, receiving or acquiring information. The utterance, gesture, anger, anxiety, eagerness, reluctance, zeal or any other attribute displayed by an information user in his/her efforts to purchase, acquire or receive news, data, stories or anything that may inform or misinform his/her knowledge or understanding of something constitute seeking behaviour.

It is generally believed that as humans differ in faces so are their behaviours in information seeking. Various variables such as age, gender, location, religion, culture, exposure and enlightenment influence one's information seeking behaviour. Other factors such as source of information content, medium and language of communication, time and nature of information equally influence one's behaviour in information seeking (Vickey & Vickery, 1987 as cited in Uhegbu (2007). For instance, the way a university lecturer behaves or reacts while looking for information in the library will be quite different from how an undergraduate student does. The lecturer may act with great sense of maturity and equanimity in his/her search from books, journals and magazines by gently flipping through the pages and taking down notes. He may also ask any staff of the library, in time of confusion, or consult the catalogue cards.

Internet background knowledge is very important in students' information seeking behaviours. Nuhu (2013) studied students' knowledge in the use of ICT resources to study history in Kaduna State University. Data were collected with questionnaire from 85 students. The data were analyzed using percentage. The result showed that students are capable of using ICT resources and have knowledge on what to use and how to use ICT.

Damar et al. (2013) appraised the availability and use of information communication technology among geography teachers in Jos South, Plateau state. Data were collected with a structured teachers' questionnaire on teachers' computer literacy and internet operations. The sample was 50 teachers drawn through simple random sampling technique from all the schools. The data collected was analyzed using percentage and chi-square statistics to answer the research questions and test the hypothesis respectively. The findings revealed that majority of the teachers lacked computer knowledge and could not browse the internet; as such, they were unable to search for internet resources. It was also revealed that only 12% of the selected secondary schools had computers with internet connectivity.

Iroriterye-Adiekpovu (2013) studied secondary school teachers' skills and knowledge in teaching through interactive white board (IWB) in Ika South Local Government Area of Delta state, Nigeria. Data was collected, with questionnaire, from 100 teachers drawn through simple balloting technique without replacement and the data was analyzed using

simple percentage. The result revealed that teachers' skills and knowledge in teaching through interactive white board (IWB) in the research area was generally low.

To Ali (2009), it is believed that students' academic discipline can influence students' information seeking behaviours and graduate students' research skills application. The researcher then noted that students in sciences, educational measurement and evaluation, research and statistics could carry research successfully than those from other academic disciplines. But some other researchers have contrary views and they seem to oppose this idea. Idaka and Akubairo (2013) conducted a study on influence of area of study on students' exposure to technology strategies in Cross River State University of Technology, Cross River State, Nigeria. Data was collected from a sample of randomly selected 624 students. A questionnaire was the instrument for data collection, with ANOVA used in statistical analysis. The result indicated that academic discipline of students does not affect their lecturers' use of technology-based teaching strategies.

More so, Awoleye and Syanbola (2006) studied science and non-science based students and their level of internet usage, with 300 students drawn through simple random sampling, and using simple percentage for the analysis of data. The aim was to investigate the influence of students' academic discipline on the use of multi-literacy platforms for research among graduate students in Universities in South-South Nigeria. The study revealed that students in science based courses seem to have sourced information from multi-literacy platform, than those from non-science based courses.

Also Ojini et al. (2023) conducted a study on assessment of learning disabilities and perception of self and school environment in public schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Their findings indicated that learning disabilities significantly influences learning outcomes in some academic discipline, as most of the information seeking channels are not easy for some students to use due to some disabilities which affect them in one way or other. Ali (2009) studied students' academic discipline and application of research skills among graduate students in universities in south-south, Nigeria. Data was collected with evaluation checklist for graduate students' application of research skills from 210 graduate theses (110 theses and 100 dissertations) drawn through stratified and simple random sampling techniques from four faculties (science, education arts, social science and management science) of the universities. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the influence of students' area of specialization on the application of the research skills. The result of the study shows that graduate students' academic discipline influences their application of the research skills. Also Oqua and Ugbe (2022) conducted a study on gender and age difference of prospective university students' attitude towards computer-based testing (CBT) in the University of Calabar, Nigeria. Their result revealed that age influences information seeking and performance in CBT in the University of Calabar.

The findings of the present study will improve the performance of students in information seeking in their studies. Other groups that will benefit from the findings of the study are administrators of schools, funding agencies, policymakers, the society and government. The study will expose the students to better, quicker and easy method of seeking information and also encourage them to develop skills that will make information seeking easy and faster than the traditional method of using only library. The school administrators

will equally benefit from this study in that it will help them to discover various information seeking channels, which should be made available for study; and students' characteristics that seek information more and what can be done to make more information available that will meet their information seeking needs.

### **Purpose of the study**

The main purpose of this study was to determine students' characteristic and their information seeking behaviour in the University of Calabar. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the influence of students' internet background knowledge on information seeking behaviour in the University of Calabar.
2. Determine the influence of students' area of study on their information seeking behaviour in the University of Calabar.

### **Research questions**

The following research question were designed to guide the study:

1. To what extent does students' internet background knowledge influence their information seeking behaviour in the University of Calabar?
2. How does students' area of study influence their information seeking behaviour in the University of Calabar?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

**Ho1:** Students' internet background knowledge has no significant influence on their information seeking behaviour in the University of Calabar.

**Ho2:** There is no significant influence of students' academic discipline on their information seeking behaviour in the University of Calabar.

### **Methodology**

The research design employed in this study was survey design, because it involved collection of data to accurately and objectively describe existing phenomena, which is information seeking behaviours of University of Calabar students (Isangedighi et al., 2004). The area of this study is the University of Calabar; it is located in Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, Nigeria. The population used for this study is 3,312 registered undergraduate users of the University of Calabar library in 2019/2020 academic session which comprised 1698 males and 1614 females. Accidental sampling technique was adopted to sample 200 respondents.

Instrument used in data collection was a structured questionnaire tagged "Student Information Seeking Behaviours Questionnaire" (SISBQ). The SISBQ was divided into two sections; section 'A' measured demographic information of respondents which was on their department, year of study and age. While section 'B' was made up of five items each to measure their internet background knowledge and their academic discipline on information seeking behaviours. These items were measured on four point scale, ranging from: very often (VO), Often (O), Sometimes (ST) and Never (N). A total of thirteen items were used for data collection. The instrument was validated through face validity. Validity refers to the extent to which a measuring instrument measures what it intended to measure (Joshua, 2005). The reliability was conducted through test re-test and the reliability

estimate established through Pearson Product Moment Correlation; the coefficients ranged between .75 and .87.

### **Presentation of results**

**Ho1:** Students’ internet background knowledge has no significant influence on their information seeking behaviour in the University of Calabar.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for statistical analysis. Summary of the data analysis is presented in table 1

**Table 1:** Descriptive analysis and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on students’ internet background knowledge on information seeking behaviour

<b>Internet Background knowledge</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>		
High Background Knowledge	81	5.85	1.17		
Low Background Knowledge	74	6.17	1.85		
No Background Knowledge	45	8.91	2.39		
Total	200	5.99	2.14		
<b>Sources of variation</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P-value</b>
Between group	1463.074	3	487.91		
Within group	5533.246	197	6.951	70.158	.000
Total	6996.320	199			

$F_{crit.2, 197} = 2.62$

The result as presented in table 1 indicates the mean and standard deviation for each of the variables; it also indicates a calculated f-ratio of 70.158 which is greater than the critical f-ratio of 2.62 at the 0.05 level of significance. The p-value of .000 is also less than the chosen alpha of 0.05. This means that students’ internet background knowledge has significant influence on their information seeking behaviours. With this, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that students’ internet background knowledge significantly influences their information seeking behaviours in the University of Calabar.

**Ho2:** There is no significant influence of students’ academic discipline on their information seeking behaviour in the University of Calabar.

This hypothesis was tested using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The summary of the analysis is presented in table 2 which shows the mean and standard deviation for each of the variables. It also shows a calculated f-ratio of 68.273 which is greater than the critical f-ratio of 2.62 at the 0.05 level of significance; and a p-value of .000 which is less than the chosen alpha of .05. This means that students’ academic discipline has significant influence on their information seeking behaviours in the University of Calabar. From this analysis, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of students’ academic discipline on their information seeking behaviours in the University of Calabar was rejected. In other words, there is a significant difference between Library and Information Science students of the Faculty of Education, Mathematics students of the Faculty of Sciences, Accounting students of the Faculty of Management Sciences, and Department of History and International Studies’ students of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, in their information seeking behaviours.

**Table 2:** Descriptive analysis and analysis of variance of students' academic discipline and information seeking behaviours

N = 200

<b>Academic discipline</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>		
Library and information science	50	6.74	2.67		
Mathematics	50	8.86	2.58		
Accounting	50	8.17	2.83		
History and international studies	50	10.57	3.10		
<b>Total</b>	200	8.67	3.10		
<b>Sources of variation</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P-value</b>
Between group	1574.959	2	524.986		
Within group	6120.890	197	7.690	68.273	.000
Total	7695.849	199			

Fcrit.2, 197 = 2.62

### Discussion of the findings

The first hypothesis postulated that students' internet background knowledge has no significant influence on their information seeking behaviours in the University of Calabar. The finding showed that students' internet background knowledge influences their information seeking behaviours. This implies that internet background knowledge has significant influence in students' information seeking behaviours in the University of Calabar. Many students that have good background knowledge in the use of internet can seek information more than those with no internet background knowledge. This finding is in agreement with Nuhu (2013) who discovered that students' background knowledge influences their use of ICT resources to study history. Also in line with the study is Damar et al. (2013) who found that majority of teachers lack computer knowledge and could not browse the internet; as such, they were unable to search for internet resources which influenced their information seeking behaviours.

The second hypothesis indicated that there is no significant influence of students' academic discipline on their information seeking behaviours. The students' academic discipline considered include Library and Information Science, Mathematics, Accounting and History and International Studies. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test this hypothesis. The results of the analysis showed that students' academic discipline has significant influence on their information seeking behaviours. The study revealed that out of the four academic disciplines (Departments), there are significant differences that exist between them. This finding is in line with the findings of Ali (2009), who found out that difference exists between Science, Education, Social Science and Management Science faculties on the application of research skills, in favour of Education faculty students, while Science and Management faculties' application of research skill were low.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that information seeking behaviours of university students is influenced by various variables which have been investigated in the study which means that students' internet background knowledge, and students' academic discipline have significant influence on their information seeking behaviours in the University of Calabar.

## **Recommendations**

On the basis of the finding of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. University administrators should make free internet access available for both lecturers and students.
2. Training and retraining programmes should be organized for academic staff and students on different dimensions of information seeking behaviours.
3. Seminars and workshop should be organized on regular basis to highlight various means of information seeking in the university.
4. Librarians should encourage students to register and use the library for their different information needs.

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