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Undergraduate Students' Information Seeking Behaviour: Implications for Quality in Higher Education in Saurashtra

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Abstract: ***The major purpose of the study was to examine the information seeking behaviour of undergraduate students in the University of Saurashtra. Specifically, the study made effort to determine the sources consulted and the general pattern of information gathering system by the students: the impact of students' gender, level of study and course of study on the students' information seeking behaviour. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and data was collected using a questionnaire administered to two thousand respondents randomly selected from six faculties in the University of Saurashtra. Major findings from the study include are: first, academic information was rated as the predominant information required by the students, while the Internet was rated the most crucial source of most of the academic information required. It was also found that gender, level of study and course of study significantly influence students' information seeking behaviour (F = 511.8, level of signification is .05). However, among the factors, the students' level of study contributed more to the observed variation in information seeking pattern, followed by course of study, while gender had the least influence. The sample was taken in two departments from each of the faculty in the University. This is a typical representation of the population of the undergraduate students of the University of Saurashtra hence; the findings could be generalized for the whole undergraduate students of the University. The paper is a product of recent survey carried out by the authors; hence the findings reported here are original and reflect the current views and practices of information seeking behaviour of University of Saurashtra Undergraduates.***

Key Word: Information, Internet, Quality, Higher Education, Information Seeking Behaviour, Saurashtra University, Saurashtra region.

I. INTRODUCTION

The higher education constituency is growing at a tremendous pace. Higher education institutions are today recognised by national governments (UGC) and donors as key agents for social and economic development in view of their inherent capacity to foster knowledge creation, processing and dissemination. Each country tries to improve in the quality of the higher education programmes. However, the developing countries are faced with more challenges in providing quality higher education programme than their counterparts in the developed and developing region.

Many a times when the issue of quality in education, more specifically, quality in higher education is being discussed in India, focus have always been on the improvement of resources and facilities and quality of teaching and research. In most of the previous studies on quality in higher education, little or no attention has been paid to the way students in higher institutions organise their learning and its implications for quality. All the interventions, focus has been on infrastructural improvements and at best capacity building for staff by the government and UGC. In none of these interventions was the students' learning behaviour examined. What all these interventions assumed was that improvement in facilities and teacher quality will automatically result into improved academic achievement of the students. In Gujarat KCG is started innovative training for the teacher.

However, this assumption may seem too simplistic because it is also plausible to argue that even when there are good facilities and quality teachers, students' achievement may still be hampered due to some students factors, principal among which is the way they seek and organise academic information. Hence, the way students organise their learning and search for academic information could be considered very crucial to their overall performance at the end of the day. This situation gets more chaotic, especially when students are given assignments and presentations to make. They need to search for information on their own, consequently it is expected that they consult appropriate sources for academic information. Inspite of the fact that institutions of higher learning in Saurashtra region are generally aware of the impact, if not indispensability of ICT on teaching, learning and research, ICT is still rarely utilized to enrich teaching and learning activities in many universities because of the absence of connectivity in the institutions. Another dimension, even when the connectivity is available, the level of accessibility and utilization is still poorly low. In some institutions, students' access is still generally poor, while only the teachers and support staff use the ICT facilities.

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II. THE PROBLEMS OF THE STUDY

This study examined the information seeking behaviour of undergraduate students in the University of Saurashtra. Precisely, the focus was on obtaining information on the nature of academic information needed by the students, the sources consulted and the general pattern of information gathering system by the students. Furthermore, the study examined the influence of students' gender, level of study and course of study on the pattern of information seeking by the students.

Specifically, the following research questions were addressed in the study:

- ✓ What is the predominant information required by the students?
- ✓ What are the major sources of obtaining academic information in the University?
- ✓ Which are the predominant sources consulted by the students?
- ✓ Will students' gender, course of study, and level of study have any influence on their information seeking behaviour?
- ✓ Do students' get all the information required from the identified sources?
- ✓ How will students rate the general availability and access to information in the University?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of several variables that previous researchers have done relevant to undergraduate students information seeking behaviour and review of some model form the theoretical foundation of this study.

1. The Concept of Information:

"Information is a data value in planning, decision making and evaluation of any programme" – Define by Uttor. He goes further to say that it is a data that have been subjected to some processing functions capable of answering user's query be it recorded, summarized, or simply collected that would help decision making.

2. Behaviour of Information:

Some defined the term based on the general model of information behaviour developed by Wilson at least three elements:

- ✓ An information need and its drives, i.e. the factors that give rise to an individual's perception of need;
- ✓ The factors that affect the individuals response to the perception of need; and,
- ✓ Where he posited that a general model of information behaviour needs to include the processes or actions involved in that response.

The element according to Taylor are: the assumptions, formerly learned or not, made by a defined set of people concerning the nature of their work; the kinds and structure of the problems deemed important and typical by this set of people; the constraints and opportunities of typical environments within which any group or sub-group of this set of people operates and work; and the conscious perhaps unconscious, assumptions made as to what constitutes a solution, or better said, a resolution of problems, and what makes information useful and valuable in their contexts.

The concept Taylor gave are:

Information Needs: This is understand in information science as stemming from a vague awareness of something missing and as culminating in locating information that contributes to understanding and meaning (Kuhlthau, 1993)

Information Seeking: Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2004) described information seeking as a process that requires an information seekers, or what might be called ''personal information structures' 'such as a person's cognitive abilities, his or her knowledge, skills in relation to the problem or task domain, knowledge and skills specific to a system and knowledge and skills regarding information seeking.

Information Seeking Behaviour: This can be described as an individual's way and manner of gathering and sourcing for information for personal use, knowledge updating and development. Faire-Wessels (1990:361 in Kakai et al, 2004) referred to it as the way people search for and utilize information. Kakai etal. (2004) observed that, often students' information seeking behaviour involves active or purpose full information as a result of the need to complete course assignment, prepare for class discussions seminars, workshops, conferences, or write final year research papers. Since this study is conducted in a learning context from students' perspectives, some relevant models are considered: The Information Search Process Model and Another theory of interest relevant to this present research is Limberg model.

Gender and Information Seeking Behaviour: Gender is understood as a social phenomenon with a fundamental social and structural ordering of men and women in the society. In this relation, men are generally given the preferential right of interpretation, leading to an uneven distribution of resources.

Subject Specialization and Information Seeking Behaviour: However, similar information-seeking pattern could also be expected because undergraduate majors are socialized and indoctrinated into the research process of their academic disciplines

through course assignments and lecturers. It could be expected that undergraduate students' information-seeking behaviour would differ from faculty and graduate students because their information seeking skills are not as well developed.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Survey study is essential. Two thousand samples of undergraduate students randomly selected from across the six faculties in the University of Saurashtra constituted the sample for the study. Two departments were selected from each faculty, yielding a total of twelve departments, and from each of these departments the lists of students were obtained and using a proportional to size sampling technique, the sample size of 2000 was generated.

A questionnaire tagged "Undergraduate Students' Academic Information Seeking Behaviour Scale (USAISBS) was used to collect data for the study. Examples of items contained in the questionnaire are:

1. Which of the following do you use last to research a problem? :
   (a) The library. (b) The Internet. (c) The books etc.

2. Which of the following do you use to obtain information for your academic work?
   (a) The library. (b) The Internet. (c) Journals

The questionnaire had a total of twenty items and was validated using both internal and external validity procedures, with a reliability coefficient of 0.92 using the coronach alpha. The questionnaires were administered to the sample in their respective classrooms to reduce the mortality rate. On the whole, two thousand completed cases were used for data analysis. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages, also Multiple Regression were employed to analyse data across and within groups.

V. FINDINGS

The data analyses are as follows: (Questions wise)

1. What is the predominant information required by the students?

Table 1

Required Information	Frequency	Percentage
General Health Information	225	11.25
Information for personal Development.	250	12.50
Academic Information	1282	64.10
Employment Information	186	09.30
Global Information	057	02.85
Total	2000	100

Source: Primary data

In above table, the predominant information required by students is academic information. This is confirmed with 1282 respondents' students 64.10%. Other required information by the students but which may not be as vital as academic information is: information for personal development; health information; employment information and global information.

2. What are the major sources of obtaining academic information in the University?

Sources of Information	Respondents	Percentage	Rank
Lecture Notes & Handout	312	15.60	02
Library	129	06.40	03
Internet	1089	54.40	01
Consulting and photocopy colleagues notes	50	02.50	08
University Bookshop	29	01.40	10
Textbooks	97	04.90	04
Thesis/Dissertations	85	04.30	05
Newspaper	79	04.00	06
CD-ROMs Database	42	02.10	09
Print Journals	20	01.00	11
Electronic Resources	68	03.40	07
Total	2000	100	

Source: Primary data

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The respondent results in table above show the eleven major sources of obtaining information by the students.

3. Which are the predominant sources consulted by the students?

The above Table provide respondents answer to this question. The result as reveals from the table show Internet as the most consulted source by the students. This is confirmed by the overwhelming majority of the participants 1089 (54.4%). Next to it is the Students Lecture Notes and Handouts with 312 (15.6%). School Library was rated as the third source of information most consulted by the students. Other sources indicated are: Textbooks 97 (4.3%); Newspaper 79 (4%); Electronic Resources 68 (3.4%); Consulting/Photocopying of Colleagues Notes 50 (2.5%); CD-ROMs Database 42 (2.1%) and Print Journal 20 (1%).

4. Will students' gender, course of study, and level of study have any influence on their information seeking behaviour?

Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis on the Influence of Gender, Course of Study, and Level of Study on Information Seeking.

Standard error of the estimate = 8.500
Multiple R adjusted = 0.6237
R2 (adjusted) = 0.522

Source of variation	Sums of Squares	df	Mean Square	F.Obs.
Regression	9443.70	3	4721.9	511.8
Residual	18,426.27	1996	9.227	
Total	127869.97	1999		

Source: Primary data

Table above provides a summary of the results of the multiple regression analysis for the influence of gender, course of study and level of study on the information seeking behaviour of the participants. The result reveals that all these variables significantly influence students' information seeking behaviour. This is because all the factors jointly exert 52% influence on student information seeking pattern.

Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations among the variables:

Variables	No	Mean	S.D.	Info. Seeking	Gender	Course of Study	Level of Study
Info. Seeking	1999	50.86	11.6	1.0000			
Gender	1999	20.62	05.10	.2122	1.0000		
Course of Study	1999	28.14	07.90	.3416	-.2011	1.0000	
Level of Study	1999	30.07	08.40	.3911	-.1076	-.2600	1.0000

*Source: Primary data [N= 1999, correlation greater than .2 are significant at **P<.001.]*

To determine the extent to which each of the three factors (variables) influenced the information seeking of the students, the test of the significance of the estimated parameters in the regression model was carried out and findings presented in table below.

Relative Extent of influence of the factors on Information Seeking:

Model	B	Standard error	Beta	T- Value	P
Content	25.623	8.327		8.71	<.001
Gender	.063	.081	.116	3.22	<.001
Course of study	.119	.126	.141	3.68	<.001
Level of Study	.235	.221	.337	4.91	<.001

Source: Primary data

The Table above shows that each of the factors had a significant influence on students' information seeking behaviour. Level of study had the most significant influence (Beta = .337; t = 4.91; P< .001). Course of study is the next with (Beta = .141; t = 3.68, P <.001) It can be infer from these results as well that differences exists in the information seeking behaviour of the participants based on gender, course of study and level of study. This is shown by the variation in the Value of T obtain on each of them.

5. Do students get all the information required from the identified sources?

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Getting Required Information from Identified sources:

Information	**YES (%)**	**NO (%)**
I get all the information I need from the sources identified	1235(61.8)	765(38.2)
All the sources identified are very rich because I always get what I want from them at once.	1468(73.4)	532(26.6)

. *Source: Primary data*

Table above reveals that a majority of the participants confirmed that they get the required information from the identified sources. To get more detail on this, participants were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with getting required information from these identified sources. The next table contain the detail.

Level of Satisfaction of Information Obtained:

Response	Respondents	%
Very Satisfied	1200	60.00
Satisfied	426	21.30
Less Satisfied	300	15.00
Dissatisfied	74	03.70
TOTAL	2000	100

. *Source: Primary data*

Table above gave a complementary result to what obtain in table 6. The results confirm that 1200 participants (60%) who constitute the majority indicated they are very satisfied with all the information they are getting from the identified sources. Furthermore, 426(21.3%) indicated they were satisfied while 300 (15% and 74 (3.7 %) indicated less satisfied and dissatisfied respectively.

6. How will students rate the general availability and access to information in the university?

Rating of Accessibility of Information in the University:

Level of Accessibility	Respondent	%
Highly Accessible	918	45.90
Accessible	515	25.70
Slightly Accessible	374	18.70
Inaccessible	193	09.70
TOTAL	2000	100

Source: Primary data

Table above indicates the participants' rating of the accessibility to information in the University. The result show that 918 (45.9%) indicated the information were highly accessible; 515 (25.7%) indicated the information were accessible and 374 (18.7%) indicated the information in the University were slightly accessible. To infer from these result, it is generally clear that information is generally accessible to students in the University.

VI. INTERPRETATION AND EVALUATION

The challenges facing most district institutions in Saurashtra region is the provision of infrastructural facilities, especially academic support facilities such as the Internet connectivity. However, beyond the problem of facilities is the way students organise their own learning, how they sourced for the academic information needed for them to excel. In addressing the issue of quality in Saurashtra region higher education institutions, therefore, a more holistic approach needed to be adopted, rather than the isolationist, fragmented tendencies. The students who are the direct beneficiaries and users of these facilities must be factored into the quality issues. Hence, this study provides some useful insights into the way students organise their own learning and how this could help in promoting quality in higher education in the continent.

The information gathering could be a challenging task to the tertiary institutions students in Saurashtra region. These students are loaded with many assignments and class presentations which required they source for information on their own in an environment that seem academically unfriendly, in terms of limited sources. It is striking to note that students in this particular University have access to the Internet facilities, and they utilize same for their learning. This seemingly growing dependence on the Internet by undergraduate students in a Saurashtra university therefore calls for urgent actions in the provision of the facilities. It is however strange to find out that the students rated the University library as the third most consulted sources, after Internet and Instructors lecture notes.

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More importantly, the findings with regard to Internet usage provide a big challenge to Africa universities. If quality in higher education is to be attained in Africa, a more radical and positive approach to the provision of Internet facilities in our tertiary institutions must be adopted. Presently, even in those universities where Internet facilities are available, there is still a limitation in terms of access to the students.

The study further determined the interactive influence of gender, course of study and level of study on the information seeking behaviour of students. Findings from the study show that whereas all these three factors significantly influenced the way students search for academic information, however, the level of study of students contributed most to the observed significance. One may postulate that the higher the students go on the academic ladder, the more academic information they required to tackle the various challenges. At a more higher stage, students tends to be given opportunities to organise their own learning, more assignments and projects are given that will require them to search for information. More specifically, those thesis and projects will require them to surf the Internet more frequently. Hence, it is gratifying to note that the level of study is a key factor in information seeking behaviour of higher institution students.

On the level of accessibility of information, our sample indicated that academic information is accessible and they are satisfied with the information facilities provided by the university. Positive as this may seem, this findings could not hold for a majority of tertiary institutions in Saurashtra. As pointed out earlier on, the University of Saurashtra, where this study was carried out has invested a lot into information technology for teaching and learning, unlike most comparable institutions in Saurashtra region. It should be stressed to that even within the University of Saurashtra, where the Internet facilities are available, as large as 38.2% of the students indicated that they could not get all the information required for their academic work. Also about 28.4% of the students indicated that they were not satisfied by the level of information they are getting from the internet services.

While it may be plausible to argue that a majority of the sample indicated positive responses on most of the parameters examined, it may be dangerous to dismiss the percentage that are not getting access. It therefore seem that more facilities are still needed, especially, the provision of more computers for students' use. The finding in this study has therefore reinforced the earlier observation; hence the urgent need to address this inadequacy.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The issue of quality in higher education in Saurashtra region has become more paramount now. In tackling the problem of quality therefore, it is imperative that the provision of information technology should be the nucleus of the strategies for improving quality. Students in tertiary institutions need information for their academic activities and this cannot be taken for granted. A well articulated and sustained effort is required to provide ICT facilities in Saurashtra University and make the same more accessible to the students.

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