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Information Needs and Use of Non-Academic Staff in University of Africa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the information needs and use of non-academic staff in University of Africa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The researchers adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of 100 non-academic staff out of which 57 were randomly selected. Four (4) research questions guided this study. Data was collected using the questionnaire. Data was analyzed with descriptive statistics such as frequency count and simple percentage. The findings revealed that non-academic staff had diverse information needs based on their work roles and they consult multiple information sources to meet their information needs. Regarding the purpose for using information, it was established that they sought information mainly for decision making, job performance and for general awareness/updating knowledge. Inadequate information retrieval skills, poor time management, lack of awareness about information resources in the library etc were some of the challenges encountered by the non-academic staff during information seeking and use. Based on the findings, the researchers wish to recommend that since universities have significant number of non-teaching staff, the library should provide regular training program on information literacy skills, provide awareness services and encourage them to make regular use of the multiple information sources available in the library. Libraries should also provide services targeted at this growing and influential component of staff.

Keywords: Non-Academic Staff, Information Needs, Information Use, University Libraries

1.1. Introduction

Information has been widely recognized as an important tool used in the realization of any objective or goal set by individuals, thus it remains the lifeblood of any individual or organization. To succeed in this current era, one needs a wide range of information, no matter how educated a person is. Information is defined as processed data capable of answering users query and help in decision making. Good and quality information can improve decision making, enhance efficiency and allow organizations to gain competitive advantages. Aguolu (1998) believes that effective use of information will enable people in making the right decisions and performing their duties effectively and efficiently. Therefore, to function properly in a rapidly changing academic environment, non-academic staff needs to interact and use variety of information resources regularly. Non-academic staff needs high quality information to help them manage their institution processes, make effective decisions, help to achieve organizational objectives and improve performance (Al-mamary et al., 2014).

According to Smerek and Peterson (2007), non-academic staff members are key components in any academic community, responsible for the day-to-day operations, management, and planning of the university. They provide the required enabling environment for effective teaching and learning and are also responsible for the smooth running of the institutions. The non-academic staff performs mainly administrative, as well as technical duties. Many of these non-teaching staff work in information-intensive positions and have significant influence on campus (Bradley, 2009). Some play a major role in advising students on information and other needs, while others are high-level administrators who make significant decisions that affect the direction of the institution as a whole and, by extension, the library. Hence, the non-academic staff of a university is the support system through which the success of the academicians and students in a university relies upon (Adejare et al., 2020).

Information needs simply means the piece of information needed by a person or group of persons in order to satisfy a need. Ogbomo (2010) defined information needs as comprehensive information which makes it possible for the user to make proper judgment on any related problem facing him or her at a particular time. Wilson (2000) stated that information needs are determined by a number of factors such as the types of information sources available, purposes of the information, the background, motivation, professional orientation and individual

characteristics of the user. There must be a need that would provoke an individual to engage in information seeking. Information need is that inborn desire that stimulate a person which will lead him/her to search for information. Non-academic staff has a lot of information needs which provoked their demand for information. Hayes (1990) noted that non-faculty members are responsible for an increasingly wide range of activities requiring information on topics as diverse as health and safety regulations, energy efficiency, handicapped access, counseling, fund-raising, financial services, building maintenance, and personnel management.

Information needs and information use are closely related. Information use on the other hand is concerned with understanding what information sources people choose and the ways in which people apply information to make sense of their lives and situations (Encyclopedia.com, 2020). Wilson (2000) considers information use to include people's physical and mental acts to incorporate information into their existing base of knowledge. Use of information is conceived as the final stage of a process that begins with recognition of an information need. Once the need has been identified, people search for information to meet that need, and then they apply or use the information that is found. The uses to which people put information depend on such factors as their existing knowledge, their affective state (i.e., mood and motivation), their intellectual abilities, and their existing skills (e.g., literacy) or physical disabilities. The information needs determines or influences the sources of information they will likely consult and use. The availability of information sources also largely influenced their information sources to be used. Information source selection is largely determined by accessibility and ease of use (Jorosi, 2006). People in all situations tend to use information sources that are convenient, that have been found to be useful in past experience, and that are believed to be trustworthy. Non-academic staff consults different sources of information which include online sources (internet, social media, etc.), print materials (books, journals, etc.), policy papers and subordinates in the office.

Jorosi (2006) and Aguolu (1998) indicated that ''non-academic staff uses information for decisions making and it helps in performing their duties effectively and efficiently''. They also use information in their possession to contribute meaningfully during group discussion and pass information to their co-workers that would help them to perform their work effectively. Non-teaching staff may also use information carry out research, recreation, education, to acquire a skill, to generate ideas, to reduce uncertainty, to increase awareness, to enhance their

interpersonal skills etc. Through the use of information, 'senior non-academic staff members are able to reactively and pro-actively adapt their institutions to environmental changes in order to survive and prosper' (Jorosi, 2006). 'Without quality information, top managers in academic institutions would simply not function effectively and this would lead to corporate decline and failure' (Starbuck, et al., 1978). The non-academic department in a university system consists of works, bursary, registry, student's affairs, medical personnel, exams and records, ICT unit, security personnel among others. Why faculty supports the students academically and in research, the non-academic staff makes equally important contributions towards the success of students through many critical and support and operational services. They guide the students through admission and registration processes, orient them, provide them with accommodation and they are usually the point of contact for numerous students who need assistance in one form or another.

However, despite the important roles played by this set of staff in the academic community, it is surprising to notice that this set of staff has been underserved by the libraries in their various institutions because they focus more on the students and faculty members information needs (Bradley, 2009). It has also been observed by the researchers that little or nothing is known about their information needs, because most literature on information needs in academic institutions has focused very heavily on the information needs of students and faculty members. Thus, somewhat marginalizing the needs of other individuals who also are key participants in the daily functioning of these institutions and this is the gap the current study intends to fill. Non-academic staff information needs is vital because they contribute in achieving the objectives of the university. Therefore a study of the information needs and use of non-faculty member will enable the library management to provide the necessary resources in order to meet their needs. It is this note that this study examined the information needs and information use of non-academic staff in the University of Africa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Non-academic staff needs constant information because they are very important group of people in the academic community. They are responsible for the smooth running of the institution and they carry out several managerial activities within the university. They provide services to staff and students and therefore need adequate information in order to perform their job effectively

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and efficiently. However, despite the important roles played by this set of staff in the university community, it has been observed that there is little or no literature on the information needs and use of non-faculty members and they have been underserved by their respective libraries. Academic librarians and researchers have devoted considerable attention to the information needs of students and faculty members. It is important for academic libraries to determine the current and future needs of non-faculty members and probably the challenges they encounter in the use of information in developing strategic plans. This will enable them have easy and uninterrupted access to their preferred sources of information to effectively carry out their duties. To this end, this study examined the information needs and use of non-academic staff in the University of Africa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the information needs and use of non-academic staff in University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- To ascertain the information needs of non-academic staff
- To identify the information sources used by non-faculty members
- To determine the purpose for which they use information
- To examine the challenges encountered by non-academic staff during information seeking and use

1.4. Research Questions

The following questions guide the study:

- What are the information needs of non-academic staff?
- What are the information sources used by non-faculty members?
- For what purpose do they use information?
- What are the challenges encountered by non-academic staff during information seeking and use?

Literature Review

Every human being no matter his/her level of education, sophistication, affluence and location needs and selects information, which he applies to the solution of a problem or a satisfaction of a need. Information has become the most essential element that contributes enormously towards the development of any country. Organizations and other corporate bodies survive because of the large amount of information that is made available to them. The non-academic staff plays complementary roles by providing services to support academic staff members who are primarily involved in teaching, research and community services (Opeke and Madukoma, 2013). As a result, relevant information is therefore needed by this category of staff for effective delivery of services. Information can be described as data that have been subjected to some processing functions capable of answering users query and also help in decision making. KOC University Library Glossary (2014) defined information as data presented in readily comprehensible form, to which meaning has been attributed within a context for its use.

Ikoja-odongo and Mostert (2006) confirmed that information need is a requirement that drives people to seek and use information. Thus, information needs stimulates from a lack in knowledge data or inadequacy to satisfy a goal or objective. Information need in today's society cannot be overemphasized as there is a little possibility of taking wise decision without information. Wilkins and Leckie (1997) stated that non-academic staff can only achieve efficiency and meet their work-related information needs through regular use of information. Kumar and Kaur (2005) stated that 'adequate use of information would enhance human productivity and eradicate inefficiency among individuals and in organizations'. According to Hwang et al., (2010), employees' use of information motivates and influences job performance. Many senior non-academic staff are subject to threat of competition rendering from external and internal environment. This is the reason they should utilize information of various sources to be more equipped as information use provide increase in quality of work, increase in quantity of work, reduced need for close supervision, confident, flexible staff with low turnover, high staff morale and, job satisfaction among others.

A review of the literature indicates that there have been only a few studies to date that have considered the information needs and use of non-academic staff. Bradley (2009) carried out a

study on academic libraries and the information needs, skills, and behaviors of non-teaching university staff at the University of Regina, Canada. This study confirms that non-teaching university staff has significant information needs and are receptive to library help in meeting these needs. Sprague (1994) conducted a survey of a sample of non-academic staff at Ohio State University. The findings revealed that interpersonal contacts were the most frequent sources of information for the non-faculty members. However, job-specific print materials also were extremely important. The study also found that only 36 percent of respondents used the library in relation to their work. Madukoma and Opeke (2013) investigated the information needs and seeking behaviour of senior non-academic staff in Nigerian universities. The study established among others, that senior non-academic staff had varied information needs based on their work roles and that they sought information mainly for decision making, and availability of information source largely influenced their information source selection. The study also found that senior non-academic staff in Nigerian universities contacts their subordinates first in the office when seeking information on a crucial issue, while task complexity motivated them to seek information.

Non-faculty members usually interact with different sources of information in search of the most credible, reliable, and dependable information. Opeke and Madukoma (2013) conducted a study on information use and job performance of senior non-academic staff in Nigerian universities. The study established among others that information sources used by the non-teaching staff in Nigerian universities were mostly online electronic sources (Internet, eBooks/e-Journals and e-Databases), printed sources (textbooks/journals), policy papers and subordinates in the office. Other sources of information used by them include peers, direct supervisors, coworkers, conference reports, television, radio, friends, subject experts and colleagues. On the other hand, Bystrom (2006) argued that when a task is perceived to be more complex, people tend to rely on experts as a source of information. Apparently, instant access to information from multiple sources facilitates information utilization for improved productivity and decision making of senior non-academic staff. It is important that non-academic staff access and use information from these sources in order to be effective in their jobs.

Getting access to timely and accurate information can create difficulties for anyone, including non-faculty members. Madukoma and Opeke (2013) stated that inadequate information retrieval skills, inadequate time to seek information and lack of awareness about where to obtain information were the major challenges non-academic faced in the course of seeking information to perform their works. Other challenges includes slow internet speed, irregular power supply, difficulty in locating desired information resources, lack of awareness and supposed lack of relevance of the resources. Non-academic staff information needs is vital because they contribute in achieving the objectives of the university. As a result, academic library must find ways to better serve the non-faculty members in their various institutions of higher learning, as the information needs of this user group have greatly expanded in recent years. Therefore a study of the information needs and use of non-faculty members will enable the library management to provide the necessary resources in order to meet their needs.

Methodology

The study employed the descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of one hundred non-faculty members in University of Africa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Simple random sampling was used to select fifty seven (57) respondents for the study. The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researchers and the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency count and simple percentage. The results are presented below.

Results

The findings of the study are presented in the following tables with explanations.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Department of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Registry	21	36
Bursary	11	19
Works	9	16
ICT	6	11
Internal Audit	5	9
Library	3	5
Legal Unit	2	4
Total	**57**	**100**

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents 21(36%) work in the registry, followed by bursary with 11(19%) while 9(16%) are from works department. This implies that majority of the non-academic staff under study work in the registry.

Table 2: Gender of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	32	56
Female	25	44
Total	**57**	**100**

Table 2 show that 32(56%) of the respondents are male while 25(44%) are female. This implies that majority of the non-academic staff under study were male.

Table 3: Age of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
21-30	18	32
31-40	26	45
41-50	11	19
51 and above	2	4
Total	**57**	**100**

From table 3, it revealed that 26(45%) of the respondents were within the age bracket of 31-40years, 18(32%) were within the age bracket of 21-30years, 11(19%) were within the age bracket of 41-50years whereas 2(4%) were 51years and above. This implies that majority of the non-academic staff were within the age bracket of 31-40years.

Table 4: Academic Qualifications of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
HND	5	9
B.Sc/B.Ed/B.A	33	58
M.Sc	19	33
Total	**57**	**100**

Table 1 show that majority of the respondents 33(58%) were B.Sc/B.Ed/B.A holders, 19(33%) were M.Sc holders while 5(9%) were HND Holders. This implies that majority of respondents under study were B.Sc/B.Ed/B.A holders.

Research Question 1: What are the information needs of non-academic staff?

Table 5: Information Needs of Non-Academic Staff

Information Needs	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
Managerial/administrative information	28(49%)	21(37%)	8(14%)	-	3.4	0.72
Technical information	18(32%)	31(54%)	8(14%)	-	3.2	0.65
Financial information	21(37%)	28(49%)	5(9%)	3(5%)	3.2	0.80
Marketing information	16(28%)	25(44%)	14(25%)	2(3%)	2.9	0.80
Training and development information	31(54%)	17(30%)	9(16%)	-	3.4	0.75
Information on self and professional development	38(67%)	19(33%)	-	-	3.7	0.47
Personal health/social welfare information	23(40%)	21(37%)	10(18%)	3(5%)	3.1	0.97
Current affairs	22(39%)	35(61%)	-	-	3.4	0.49
Information on fashion and designs	10(17%)	17(30%)	30(53%)	-	2.7	0.76
Info. on political issues	11(19%)	33(58%)	11(19%)	2(4%)	2.9	0.72
Info. on business and economic affairs	17(30%)	28(49%)	12(21%)	-	3.1	0.71
Job related information	28(49%)	25(43%)	5(8%)	-	3.5	0.66
Legal information	17(30%)	30(53%)	10(17%)	-	3.1	0.68
Grand Mean					**3.2**	**0.70**

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree

Table 5 revealed the information needs of non-academic staff. All the items listed in table 5 have mean values that are above the criterion mean of 2.5, more so, the grand mean (3.2) is greater than the criterion mean (2.5), and this shows that non-academic staff has diverse information

needs. Most notable among the information needs of non-academic staff is information on self and professional development and job related information with mean values of 3.7 and 3.5 respectively.

Research Question 2: What are the information sources used by non-faculty members?

Table 6: Information Sources Used by Non-Faculty Members

Information Sources Used by Non-Teaching Staff	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
Library	13(23%)	29(51%)	10(17%)	5(9%)	2.9	0.86
Online resources	30(53%)	19(33%)	8(14%)	-	3.4	0.72
E-resources(e-books/e-journals/online databases)	20(35%)	30(53%)	7(12%)	-	3.2	0.65
Print resources (textbooks/journals/reference books)	17(30%)	30(53%)	10(17%)	-	3.1	0.68
TV/radio	20(35%)	25(44%)	12(21%)	-	3.1	0.74
Newspapers	13(23%)	28(49%)	16(28%)	-	2.9	0.71
Conference/seminars/workshops	28(49%)	29(51%)	-	-	3.5	0.50
Policy papers	14(25%)	31(54%)	12(21%)	-	3.0	0.68
Colleagues	15(26%)	33(58%)	5(9%)	4(7%)	3.0	0.66
Grand Mean					**3.1**	**0.68**

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree

Table 6 shows the information sources used by non-academic staff. All the items listed in table 6 have mean values that are above the criterion mean of 2.5, more so, the grand mean (3.1) is greater than the criterion mean (2.5), and this shows that non-academic staff consult various sources of information in order to meet their information needs. Most notable among the information sources includes conferences/seminars/workshops, online resources and e-books/e-journals/e-databases.

Research Question 3: For what purpose do non-teaching staff use information?

Table 7: Purpose for Using Information

Purpose for Using Information	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
For decision making	36(63%)	21(37%)	-	-	3.6	0.48
For job performance	33(57%)	24(43%)	-	-	3.6	0.49
For research/ examination	15(26%)	29(51%)	13(23%)	-	3.0	0.70
For recreation	14(25%)	23(40%)	20(35%)	-	2.9	0.77
General awareness/updating knowledge	26(46%)	31(54%)	-	-	3.5	0.50
Grand Mean					**3.2**	**0.58**

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree

Table 7 revealed the purpose for which non-academic staff uses information. Table 7 therefore shows that all the items listed have mean values that are above the criterion mean of 2.5, more so, the grand mean (3.2) is greater than the criterion mean (2.5), as a result, all the items in table 7 are the purposes for which non-academic staff uses information. Most notable among the purposes for using information by non-academic staff are for decision making, for job performance and for general awareness/updating knowledge.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges encountered by non-teaching staff during information seeking and use?

Table 8: Challenges to Information Seeking and Use

Challenges to Information Seeking and Use	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
Inadequate information retrieval skills	14(25%)	26(46%)	17(30%)	-	2.9	0.74
Poor time management	14(25%)	21(37%)	15(26%)	7(12%)	2.9	0.98
Lack of awareness about information resources in the library	12(21%)	31(54%)	14(25%)	-	2.9	0.81
Poor internet connection	14(25%)	23(40%)	9(16%)	11(19%)	2.7	1.05
Lack of ICT facilities in my office	12(21%)	16(28%)	20(35%)	9(16%)	2.7	1.01
Information is scattered in too many sources	10(18%)	24(42%)	15(26%)	8(14%)	2.6	0.93
Lack of up-to-date information resources	11(19%)	22(39%)	18(31%)	6(11%)	2.7	0.91
Grand Mean					**2.7**	**0.91**

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree

Table 8 shows the respondents responses on the challenges encountered during information seeking and use. All the items in table 8 have mean values that are above the criterion mean of 2.5, more so, the grand mean (2.7) is greater than the criterion mean (2.5), this shows that all the items in the table 8 are the challenges encountered during information seeking and use. Most notable among the challenges are inadequate information retrieval skills, poor time management and lack of awareness about information resources in the library with mean values of 2.9 each.

Discussion

The study shows that non-academic staff have diverse information needs which includes information on self and professional development, job related information managerial/administrative information, training and development information, current affairs among others. This is therefore in conformity with the findings of Madukoma and Opeke (2013) who also found that non-academic staff has diverse information needs. The findings also discovered that the respondents use various sources of information to meet their needs. This is in agreement with the findings of Agarwal et al., (2011) who also established that 'non-academic staff' gets information from multiple sources. On the purpose for using information, the study

observed that non-academic staff uses information for different purposes which includes: for decision making, for job performance, general awareness/updating of knowledge among others. This is therefore in conformity with the findings of Al-mamary et al., (2014). All the respondents indicated that inadequate information retrieval skills, poor time management and lack of awareness about information resources in the library etc were the challenges to information seeking and use. This is in agreement with the findings of Madukoma and Opeke (2013).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Non-academic staff are important members of any academic community and as a result the library should provide the necessary resources in order to meet their information needs. This study confirmed that non-teaching university staff has diverse information needs and they consult multiple sources of information to meet these needs. Inadequate information retrieval skills, poor time management, lack of awareness about information resources in the library etc are some of the challenges encountered by the non-academic staff during information seeking and use. The researchers wish to recommend that since universities have significant number of non-teaching staff, the library should provide adequate training on information literacy skills, provide awareness on information resources available in the library and encourage them to make regular use of the multiple information sources. Libraries should also provide services targeted at this growing and influential component of staff.

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