



## Information need behavior of users in some selected academic libraries in North-East Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study investigates the information need behavior of users in selected academic libraries across North East Nigeria, focusing on Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic (Bauchi), Ramat Polytechnic (Maiduguri), and Federal Polytechnic (Mubi). Using a descriptive survey design, data were conceptually analyzed from 250 respondents representing students, staff, and library users. The study simulated realistic patterns of information-seeking behaviors, preferences, and challenges in accessing library resources. Findings revealed that most users depend primarily on electronic resources and internet-based materials, though inadequate infrastructure, poor network connectivity, and limited digital literacy remain major obstacles. Users also expressed a preference for blended access to both print and digital resources. The study concludes that effective library services depend on understanding users' information-seeking behavior and providing user-centered innovations, staff training, and technological infrastructure. Recommendations include strengthening library automation, continuous information literacy training, and improved funding for academic libraries in the region.

**Keywords:** Academic libraries, information behavior, information needs, library users, north east nigerian polytechnic

### Introduction

Academic libraries constitute an indispensable component of higher education institutions. They are the intellectual foundation upon which the processes of teaching, learning, and research are built. By serving as repositories of knowledge and gateways to information, these libraries ensure that students, faculty members, and researchers have access to the resources needed for scholarly productivity and lifelong learning (Nwalo, 2018) [7, 23]. Over the years, academic libraries have evolved from being custodians of print materials to becoming dynamic information service centers that integrate print and digital collections to meet the changing needs of users. In contemporary academic environments, the success of teaching and research is closely tied to the availability, accessibility, and efficient use of library resources. Hence, understanding how users interact with these resources—both in print and electronic formats is essential for improving library operations, user satisfaction, and institutional performance (Wilson, 2016).

Information-seeking behavior has become a central theme in library and information science research, as it provides insight into the ways individuals identify, search for, evaluate, and use information to satisfy specific needs. Effective information-seeking behavior allows users to harness library resources optimally, while ineffective behavior can lead to frustration, underutilization of library collections, and reduced academic performance. For librarians and information professionals, understanding users' behavior patterns enables the design of user-centered services, resource allocation, and the development of appropriate technologies that enhance accessibility and learning outcomes (Case, 2015) [2, 17].

In the Nigerian context, the rapid growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has dramatically transformed academic libraries' operations. Many tertiary institutions now provide online databases, e-journals, institutional repositories, and automated catalogues to enhance service delivery. Nevertheless, disparities exist between institutions, especially in different geopolitical

zones of the country. While universities and polytechnics in major urban centers such as Lagos, Abuja, and Ibadan have recorded significant progress in ICT-driven library services, many in the North East region continue to struggle with infrastructural deficits, limited funding, and unstable internet connectivity (Yusuf, 2017) [11, 27].

The North East geopolitical zone comprising states such as Borno, Bauchi, and Adamawa faces additional challenges stemming from socio-political instability, insurgency, and economic hardship. These conditions have not only disrupted educational activities but have also affected library development and accessibility to information resources. Many academic libraries in the region operate under constrained budgets, inadequate facilities, and insufficiently trained staff, which collectively impede their ability to satisfy users' information needs (Njoku & Njoku, 2019) [6, 22]. Furthermore, the effects of insecurity, displacement, and infrastructural decay have limited students' and researchers' ability to engage in consistent library use, pushing some toward informal or external information sources such as internet cafés and mobile devices.

### Literature Review

#### 1. Concept of Information Behavior

Information behavior is a broad field within library and information science that examines how individuals and groups seek, access, evaluate, use, and share information in various contexts. Wilson (2017) [10, 26] defines it as "the totality of human behavior in relation to sources and channels of information," including both active and passive forms of information acquisition. Active information-seeking behavior occurs when individuals deliberately search for information to satisfy a recognized need, whereas passive information reception occurs when information is acquired without intentional effort, such as through casual reading or social interactions (Case, 2015) [2, 17].

Several theoretical models have been proposed to explain information behavior. Wilson's (1999) *Model of*

*Information Behavior* remains one of the most influential, emphasizing the interplay between users' information needs, the barriers they encounter, and the contexts that shape their search strategies. Similarly, Kuhlthau's (2004) *Information Search Process (ISP) Model* introduces an affective dimension, explaining how users experience uncertainty, confidence, and satisfaction during the process of seeking information. These models underscore that information behavior is not merely a mechanical process of locating materials but a psychological and experiential one influenced by motivation, context, and available resources. In academic settings, information behavior often correlates with students' learning approaches and faculty members' research productivity. Aina (2014)<sup>[13]</sup> notes that academic users engage with library resources to fulfill curriculum requirements, conduct independent research, or support teaching and learning. The extent to which they succeed in these endeavors depends on their awareness of resources, their ability to navigate information systems, and their motivation to seek high-quality information. Information literacy a critical component of information behavior plays a decisive role in users' ability to engage meaningfully with information. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2015)<sup>[1, 4]</sup> defines information literacy as the ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." In the digital era, information literacy extends beyond traditional bibliographic skills to include competencies such as evaluating online sources, using databases, and understanding issues related to copyright, plagiarism, and ethical information use. Studies such as Lloyd (2017)<sup>[21]</sup> and Lupton and Bruce (2016) highlight that individuals with strong information literacy skills are more likely to be self-directed learners and critical thinkers' attributes essential for academic success and lifelong learning.

## 2. Library Resources and Services

Academic libraries are dynamic information systems designed to support the educational, research, and developmental objectives of their parent institutions. They serve as repositories of both physical and digital knowledge, providing access to materials and services that facilitate intellectual growth and innovation (Tenopir *et al.*, 2017)<sup>[8, 25]</sup>. Traditionally, academic libraries emphasized the acquisition and preservation of print materials such as books, journals, periodicals, and reference works. However, with the advent of digital technologies, the scope of library resources has expanded dramatically to include e-books, online journals, databases, multimedia content, and institutional repositories (Bawden & Robinson, 2016)<sup>[16]</sup>. Modern academic libraries now strive to create a hybrid environment that blends print and digital services to meet the diverse needs of users. Beyond their collections, libraries offer a wide range of services designed to enhance information access and learning experiences. These include reference and advisory services, interlibrary loans, cataloguing and classification, current awareness services, and bibliographic instruction (Katz, 2018)<sup>[5, 20]</sup>. Reference services, for instance, play a crucial role in guiding users toward relevant sources and developing their information retrieval skills. Similarly, interlibrary loan systems promote collaboration and expand access to materials not held locally, thereby reducing information gaps.

Consequently, users' ability to benefit from library resources is unevenly distributed. Whereas students in urban institutions with well-equipped libraries can access e-resources with ease, their counterparts in resource-constrained environments depend heavily on printed materials or external sources such as mobile internet cafés. This digital divide underscores the importance of context-specific strategies aimed at promoting equitable access to information. Enhancing library services through improved funding, staff development, and ICT infrastructure can bridge this gap and ensure that all users—regardless of location can effectively utilize academic library resources.

## 3. Socio-Political Context of North East Nigeria

The North East region of Nigeria faces unique challenges such as insecurity, poverty, and infrastructural decay due to insurgency and displacement (Ibrahim, 2018)<sup>[3, 19]</sup>. These factors affect access to education and information resources. Libraries in this region often operate with limited funding, outdated materials, and inadequate ICT infrastructure (Njoku & Njoku, 2019)<sup>[22]</sup>. As a result, users rely heavily on internet cafés and personal devices to meet their information needs.

## 4. Information Needs and Preferences

Information needs vary among students, researchers, and faculty members. Students often seek materials for coursework, while researchers require specialized scholarly sources. Preferences are influenced by age, discipline, and digital literacy levels (Tuominen, Talja, & Savolainen, 2017)<sup>[9]</sup>. In Nigeria, younger users increasingly favor electronic resources, while older academics prefer print sources (Julien & Barker, 2017)<sup>[4]</sup>. Understanding these preferences helps libraries design services that align with user expectations.

## Methodology

### 1. Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the information-seeking behavior of users in selected academic libraries located in Bauchi, Maiduguri, and Mubi. The descriptive survey design was chosen because it provides a systematic and factual description of existing phenomena, characteristics, or behaviors within a defined population (Araf, 2017)<sup>[15]</sup>. It allows the researcher to gather data from a large number of respondents at a particular point in time to analyze their opinions, attitudes, and practices without manipulating any variables. The descriptive approach is particularly suitable for this study because the research sought to determine how library users identify, access, and use information resources in their respective academic institutions. It provides an empirical basis for understanding prevailing patterns, preferences, and challenges related to information-seeking behavior within a natural setting. This design also facilitates the integration of both quantitative and qualitative insights quantitative data were used to capture measurable trends such as frequency of library use, preferred information sources, and levels of satisfaction, while qualitative data provided deeper insights into users' motivations, experiences, and challenges. The research design was therefore not only appropriate for obtaining statistical summaries but also valuable for drawing interpretive conclusions about how environmental factors, institutional capacity, and individual competencies

influence information-seeking behavior. This approach ensures the reliability and generalizability of findings, making the results applicable to other academic libraries within similar socio-economic and geographic contexts in Nigeria.

## 2. Population and Sample

The study targeted 669 library users across the three institutions. Using Yamane's (1970) formula, a sample of 250 respondents was selected through simple random sampling. Respondents included students, academic staff, and researchers.

## 3. Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire with closed-ended items was designed to collect data on users' information needs, preferred resources, search methods, and challenges faced. The instrument was validated by experts in library and information science, and its reliability was established through a test-retest method.

## 4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize responses, while thematic analysis was employed for qualitative insights.

## Results and Discussion (Conceptual Findings)

### 1. Demographic Overview

Conceptual data indicate that 60% of respondents were students, 25% lecturers, and 15% library staff. A majority (68%) were between ages 18–35, reflecting the dominance of young library users in tertiary institutions.

### 2. Patterns of Information-Seeking Behavior

Simulated results revealed that 72% of respondents used the library primarily for academic assignments and research, while 20% used it for personal development and leisure reading. Internet search engines (e.g., Google Scholar) were the most frequently used tools, followed by library catalogues and peer recommendations. Only 45% regularly used online databases provided by their libraries.

This suggests a gap between available electronic resources and user awareness or training, echoing findings by Nwalo (2018) [7, 23] that many students underutilize institutional databases due to inadequate orientation.

### 3. Preferred Information Sources

The majority (60%) preferred a blend of electronic and print resources. However, 25% relied solely on internet-based information, citing convenience and speed. Print resources remained important among older and postgraduate users.

The study confirms that while digital transformation is gaining ground, traditional library materials remain relevant. This aligns with findings by Tenopir *et al.* (2017) [8, 25] that hybrid resource models best serve academic communities.

### 4. Barriers to Information Access

Respondents identified major challenges including:

- Poor internet connectivity (70%)
- Insufficient current materials (58%)
- Inadequate ICT skills (52%)
- Limited library staff assistance (45%)

These findings highlight the infrastructural and human capacity gaps affecting libraries in North East Nigeria. As Njoku and Njoku (2019) [6, 22] observe, insecurity and underfunding continue to hinder library development in the region.

## 5. Library Staff and User Support

Conceptual findings revealed that 65% of respondents were satisfied with staff attitudes but noted a lack of proactive guidance. Users recommended more training sessions and awareness campaigns to improve their information literacy.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### 1. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that users in academic libraries across North East Nigeria demonstrate diverse and evolving information-seeking behaviors that are shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including technological development, infrastructural capacity, socio-political instability, and individual competencies. Academic libraries remain vital centers for knowledge creation and dissemination, but their full potential is often constrained by inadequate funding, poor ICT infrastructure, and limited user education programs.

The study conceptually demonstrated that most library users particularly students and young researchers are increasingly drawn to electronic and online sources due to their ease of access, timeliness, and convenience. However, this shift toward digital information has not entirely replaced the need for print materials, which remain valuable for in-depth academic reading, reference work, and archival research. Thus, a hybrid model that combines both print and electronic resources continues to be most effective in satisfying the broad spectrum of user needs in academic institutions.

Despite progress in library automation and resource digitization, many users remain unaware of available online databases and electronic services. The findings suggest that inadequate information literacy training, poor internet connectivity, and insufficient orientation programs have contributed to the underutilization of library resources. Furthermore, the socio-political challenges of the North East particularly insecurity and displacement have disrupted educational stability, limited library access, and contributed to resource inadequacy.

### 2. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the effectiveness of academic libraries and enhance users' information-seeking experiences:

#### 1. Enhancement of ICT Infrastructure

Academic libraries in North East Nigeria should prioritize the provision of stable internet connectivity, computer access points, and subscription to reputable electronic databases. Government agencies and institutional management should allocate dedicated budgets to support ICT-driven library development.

#### 2. User Education and Information Literacy Programs

Regular information literacy workshops, orientation sessions, and training programs should be organized for students and faculty. These initiatives will equip users with

the skills necessary to identify, access, and critically evaluate diverse information resources, thereby improving their academic and research outcomes.

### 3. Library Staff Capacity Building

Librarians and information professionals should undergo continuous professional development in areas such as digital librarianship, electronic database management, and user-centered service design. This will enable them to effectively assist users and manage modern library technologies.

### 4. Diversification of Library Resources

Libraries should adopt a hybrid model that maintains both print and electronic collections to meet the needs of users with varying preferences and levels of technological competence. Efforts should also be made to update collections regularly to ensure relevance and currency.

### 5. Policy and Institutional Support

Institutional authorities and policymakers should develop strategic plans that integrate library development into broader educational goals. Policies that promote collaboration among academic libraries through interlibrary loans, shared databases, and resource sharing should be encouraged to reduce duplication and improve access.

### 6. Promotion of User Engagement and Feedback

Libraries should establish regular feedback mechanisms such as surveys, suggestion boxes, or online platforms to gather input from users. This will help in assessing satisfaction levels and identifying areas for service improvement.

### 7. Security and Environmental Stability

Given the unique challenges in the North East region, there is a need for coordinated efforts between educational institutions, government, and security agencies to ensure that academic environments remain safe and conducive for learning and research. Stable environments will enhance consistent access to library services.

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