

Examining Information Seeking Behaviour among Students in Selected Senior High Schools in Greater Accra Region, Ghana

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Abstract - This study attempted to explore information-seeking behaviours among selected senior high school students in Accra Metro in the Greater Accra Region. Among other things, the study probed into the sources of information, how they evaluate information sources, how they affect their academic lives and other relevant issues. The study used a quantitative research design to collect data. Specifically, a cross-sectional survey was used to collect data by administering a questionnaire to the study participants. A sample size of one hundred and twenty (120) students was selected. The sampling technique used to select participants was convenience sampling. The data were analysed through Friedman's test. Findings show that the traditional source remains a dominant source of academic information seeking among the students. Majority of the respondents mainly depend on their teachers and the materials provided by their teachers for academic information. Libraries constituted the least preferred source of seeking academic information. However, the students demonstrate a strong sense of resilience in their information-seeking behaviour. The findings from the study make several contributions to both literature and practice. Among others, the study probes into the sources of information, how they evaluate information sources to understand how information-seeking behaviours affect their academic lives. Again, the findings from the study also contribute to building the literature on information seeking in general and for academic purposes in particular, especially among adolescents.

Keywords: Information, Seeking, Behaviours, Secondary School Library, Students, Greater Accra

I. INTRODUCTION

In the current dispensation of advance technological innovations, information has become a key resource that individuals can leverage for their personal, academic and career advancement. Technological advancement has provided several avenues where students can search for information from, especially for their academic work. Information seeking behaviour has been defined as the way, and manner people search for and utilise the information for their pre-determined purposes (Case, 2012). The term information-seeking behaviour is attributed to Wilson, who coined the term in his 1981 paper (Whitmire, 2002). The importance of the term 'information-seeking behaviour' lies in the fact that 'information needs' is an important term in research because 'need' cannot be explicitly observed while it can be easily observed how people acted (Whitmire, 2002).

Since Wilson (1981) research in the field of knowledge search has gradually increased to link behaviours to underlying needs, thus, Wilson (2000) described the knowledge behaviour as the sum of all human activities to information sources and networks, including active and passive searches for information and the use of information. He defines the information-seeking behaviour as a purposeful quest for information out of a desire for some purpose.

At the turn of the 21st century, technological advancement led to an overwhelming increase in sources of information. The sporadic increase in information sources has also caused a change in the information-seeking behaviours of individuals (Weiler, 2005). Among students, for instance, information-seeking behaviours have changed dramatically from days of depending only on library books to a digital source of information on the go (Whitmire, 2002). This diverse information source also comes with information overload, which if not managed properly, can be counterproductive (Belkin, 1993). In relation to students, information overload is a situation where students are exposed to too much information in a way that impedes their academic performance mainly due to inadequate information interfering with useful information (Blair, 2003).

The problem of negative consequences of information overload is found to be very severe among adolescents, especially those in high school. Per the stage of their development, adolescents become curious by nature and so are easily consumed by information sources which affect their lives negatively, especially their academic life. It is, therefore important that information-seeking behaviours among adolescents are investigated and understood to provide the right help (Case, 2012). For adolescents in senior high schools in Ghana, wrong information-seeking behaviours can be very detrimental. This is because apart from negatively affecting their daily life, wrong information-seeking behaviour can affect their academic performance negatively, which can cut short their career plans (Gordon & Steele, 2015).

In Ghana, passing final year examination at senior high school level (i.e., West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination, WASSCE) is the main route to any

tertiary education (Egbenya, Halm, & Egbenya, 2016). Therefore, if such students fail, the cost becomes too much to bear by the student him/herself and the family as a whole. Therefore, something needs to be done fast to ensure that students in senior high schools cultivate the right information-seeking behaviours.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the information-seeking behaviours among students in two (2) selected senior high schools in Accra metro in the Greater Accra region. Among other things, the study probed into the sources of information, how they evaluate information sources, how they affect their academic lives and other relevant issues. The current study, therefore, contributes to addressing the research gap on the subject as there are only a few [e.g. Quaye, 2013; Sarfo & Ansong-Gyimah, 2011] which have either examined only access and use of ICT or health information seeking among adolescents. The current study, therefore, focused on academic information-seeking behaviours among high school students.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to investigate the information-seeking behaviours among students in two (2) selected senior high schools in Accra metro in the Greater Accra region. The specific objectives are;

1. To assess the various people the students consult when they are seeking for information.
2. To examine the various sources that the students consult when they are seeking information.
3. To assess the difficulties senior high school students face when searching for information from certain sources and people.
4. To examine the various strategies that the students use in searching for information.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study will be backed by using Foster's (2004) nonlinear model of information seeking as a framework for examining information-seeking behaviours among high school students in Ghana. The model was developed from findings from different interdisciplinary studies on information-seeking behaviours from different scholars in the field of information seeking research and practice. The model proposes that individuals' information-seeking behaviours are made up of different processes and levels that interact in a very dynamic and nonlinear manner.

The model further assumes that information-seeking behaviours are largely made up of different components that include: an approach to information seeking, the content of information sought, practices associated with information seeking, knowledge about information seeking, strategies for searching information, the scope of information search and outcome of information seeking. These components

form the model will be utilised to research academic information seeking among high school students in Ghana.

A. Review of Related Studies

Several empirical studies have been conducted into information-seeking behaviours in general and in relation to academic in particular. Majority of the studies examining information seeking for academic purposes have been conducted outside Ghana in places such as USA (Chung & Neuman, 2007), Indonesia (Sugihartati & Harisanty, 2014), Latvia (Moskina, 2013), Canada (Julien & Barker, 2009) etc. This sub-section provides a review of the related studies that have been conducted with regards to information-seeking behaviours in students.

B. Students' Approaches and Strategies for Searching Academic Information

The literature has mostly shown that information-seeking behaviour, especially among high school students, are influenced by several factors. For example, Sugihartati & Harisanty (2014) examined information-seeking models among senior high school students in Indonesia and reported that the students indicated their information needs to be concerned mainly entertainment and further education. Most of the students also indicated that teachers' recommendation of information sources served an important role in their information search practices and that majority also preferred using the internet.

Moskina (2013) also examined information-seeking behaviours among national minority secondary school students in Latvia. She reported among 119 secondary school students that the majority of them take information searching very seriously. Their strategies for searching information mainly depend on the project topic they are working on and used different information channels (i.e., traditional and electronic) and also used school and non-school resources. Similar findings have also been reported in an earlier study by Chung & Neuman(2007) among high school students in the USA where students' information search behaviours depended on the topic they were working on.

Julien & Barker (2009) have also reported in Canada that most high school students are unable to critically evaluate the sources of information they search in order to ascertain the information they get from the sources. Ajiboye & Tella (2007) have also studied information-seeking behaviours among 2000 undergraduate students in Botswana and reported that information-seeking practices were significantly different between male and female students as well as different based on course of study and level of study.

Research on behaviour seeking information in Ghana, particularly in senior high school adolescents, is very small. The few studies in Ghana focused mainly on areas such as

access and use of IT (e.g., Sarfo & Ansong-Gyimah, 2011) and the search of health and sexual and reproductive health information (e.g. Quie, 2013).

On ICT for instance, Sarfo & Ansong-Gyimah (2011) have examined access to and experiences in the use of ICT among 300 senior high school students and report that all the students reported having access to one ICT tools or another including mobile phone, computer or internet. However, most of the students were reported to use it for social communication instead of as means of accessing information.

On sexual and reproductive information-seeking behaviours, for instance, Quaye (2013) conducted masters' thesis research among 197 Labone senior high school students, where she reported that families serve as dominant information sources before media and friends. Only a few of them used the internet.

C. Content of Students Academic Information Search

This sub-section of the literature review looks at what literature says about the specific academic information that the students search for. This part of the research is conspicuously missing in the literature. For some reason, most studies assume that when students engage in academic search, they are looking for the same thing. Because of this, studies do not empirically examine the specific academic information students usually search for and the approach they use in searching for such information.

This sub-section is therefore written by critically examining empirical studies to deduce the content of academic information that students normally search for as well as the approach they use. In a review of information-seeking behaviours of students conducted in different countries, Lacović (2015) observed that students' information seeking is complex and multifaceted. The study was conducted to identify information needs, sources, and types of library use by university students from various disciplinary fields.

Lacović (2015) found that the majority of respondents required academic knowledge, including writing, assignment and finalising the semester exams. Most commonly use information sources such as books, newspaper articles, online sources etc. The internet, however, was considered to be the most significant source of scholarly content. Besides this, most students were also encouraged to find important information sources from their teachers, peers and librarians.

In a study that was conducted among senior high students in Ghana, Yeboah (2016) found that students engaged in searching for academic information mainly for assignments and that they depended mainly on their course books and notebooks for end of term exams. He noted that while the schools in which the study took place have libraries, they have unprofessional workers who do not have the

experience and skills to teach students to learn the know-how in information literacy. As a result, students did not understand how to interpret details from both print and online media. Internet as an information source was minimal among students, mainly because the Internet services on campus were inaccessible.

Gyesi (2016) also conducted a study on the content and sources of information search among university students in Ghana. He used a sample of 121 graduate students from the University of Professional Studies and administered a self-reported questionnaire to them.

Study findings showed that the key students' knowledge needs included career growth, self-development, work, course information, health, entertainment, sports and religion. They use five key categories of sources of information: interpersonal, internet, television, electronic, and print. The internet was the main source of information, although it also suggests the library's use. It is digging for information involves active search, passive search and continuous search.

D. Gender Differences in Academic Information Search

Research studies in information seeking or searching have distinguished between traditional information search strategies (that use books, authority figures, etc.) and technological search strategies (that use internets, social media, etc.). However, research on gender differences in academic information seeking has mainly focused on technological search strategies. To this end, most of the studies have found significant gender differences in information seeking between males and females.

In a study that examined students use the web to search for, browse, and find information in response to a specific prompt, Roy & Chi (2003) reported significant gender differences in academic information search in basic school pupils. They found that boys tended to employ a different search pattern from girls. Boys were found to search for information from multiple sources more often compared to the girls. They found further that gender variation in information searching behaviour was related to the pattern of performance outcomes, with the boys performing academically better than girls.

Other studies have reported similar findings among different student populations at different levels of the academic ladder. For example, Imhof, Vollmeyer, & Beierlein, (2007) conducted a study to examine gender-related differences in information-seeking behaviours and if there is also a difference in actual performance characteristics between male and female students. The study was conducted among a sample of 48 university students with 23 males and 25 females. The study involved administering a technology self-efficacy questionnaire, a survey on computer access, recorded a user diary and then they were made to perform computer search tasks.

Imhof *et al.*, (2007) found that there is a large gender disparity, but the gap in computer access and self-efficacy is narrowing. They also found that students report similar quantities of machine use for their studies. User activity seems to be gender-specific, as masculine students spend more time on the machine for personal reasons. They also found that male students perform computer search tasks to female students.

In a related study, Halder, Ray & Chakrabarty (2010) examined whether gender differences exist in the information-seeking behaviour among university students. The data for the study were gathered from a sample of about 600 students studying various disciplines (arts, sciences and trade) in West Bengal, India. They administered a questionnaire to generate knowledge about behavioural research using the General Information Schedule and the Inventory for the Search for Information. Study results have demonstrated major gender differences in the search for knowledge behaviour. However, unlike the studies previously mentioned, the female student scored high in all the fields of searching for information except in diversity when the male student scored significantly high.

In FUTA University Library in Nigeria, Funmilayo (2013) explores the gaps between the sexes in the usage of academic services. The study consisted of a group of 600 respondents chosen randomly in 2012 over six months. Results from the study showed that students of different ages had an important gender gap in information-seeking behaviour. Males between the ages of 30 and 56 used library services relative to women of the same age. Young and mature men, more than women, used internet services, e-books and reference books. There was no substantial difference in the use of both male and female students of textbooks and library loans.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study used a quantitative research design to collect data. Specifically, a cross-sectional survey was used to collect data by administering a questionnaire to the study participants. The choice of cross-sectional survey design helped the researcher to collect data from a large sample of respondents so that the results can be generalised. A sample size of one hundred (100) students was selected for the study. The sampling technique that was used to select participants for the study is convenience sampling.

The convenience sampling technique was used because only students who were available and were willing to be part of the study were selected. Questionnaires were used for the data collection process. The questionnaire was divided into two (2) main sections. The first section examined the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. Among the variables that will be assessed were gender, age, a programme of study, the class name of school etc. The second section was a scale to measure the sources from

where the students obtain academic information from, the kinds of academic information that are sourced, the challenges they face in their information seeking endeavour etc. All the items here will be measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Never = 1, Seldom = 2, Sometimes = 3, Mostly = 4 and Always = 5.

The data were analysed using version 25 of the Social Sciences Statistical Package (SPSS). In each of the research questions, the data was analysed by ranking the factors based on the scores. The factors were ranked to identify the factors that students consider as most important to those they consider as least important. In order to do this, the data were analysed using Friedman’s test. The test is used when the intention is to arrange a number of variables based on their importance or ranks (Pallant, 2010). It does so by comparing the mean scores and the standard deviation to rank the variables.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE I DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	49	49.0%
	Female	51	51.0%
Program of Study	General Arts	41	41.0%
	General Science	39	39.0%
	Business	10	10.0%
	Visual Arts	4	4.0%
	Home Economics	6	6.0%
Class	SHS 1	7	7.0%
	SHS 2	48	48.0%
	SHS 3	45	45.0%
Age	12 to 15 years	4	4.0%
	16 to 18 years	76	76.0%
	19 to 20 years	20	20.0%
Name of School	Achimota School	50	50.0%
Total	Ideal College	50	50.0%
		100	100%

From Table I, it shows that equal numbers of students were selected from each of the two schools used. In terms of gender, there were almost an equal number of female (51%) and male (49%) students. The minimum age of the students was 12 years, and the maximum age was 20 years. The majority (76%) of them were between the ages of 16 and 18 years. In terms of the program of study, the majority of them were studying General Arts, followed by those studying General Science and then Business, Home Economics and Visual Arts in that order. Also, in terms of class, majority of the respondents were in SHS 2, followed by those in SHS 3 and SHS 1 in that order.

TABLE II DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF SCORES ON PEOPLE THEY SEEK INFORMATION FROM

Other	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Consult librarian	100	2.15	1.21	1.00	5.00
Consults my teachers	100	3.42	1.16	1.00	5.00
Consults friends who are in a position to help	100	3.12	1.13	1.00	5.00
Consult family members	100	2.29	1.04	1.00	5.00

Table II shows that there are differences in the mean scores on the people they consult. Consulting teachers had the highest mean score ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.16$) and consulting librarian had the least mean score ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.21$). Friedman test was then conducted to rank the scores from the ones the students consider most comfortable to the ones they consider least comfortable.

Table III shows the results of the Friedman test that ranks the scores.

TABLE III FRIEDMAN TEST RANKS

Other	Mean Rank	Chi-square (χ^2)	df	p
Consults my teachers	3.19	69.935	3	.000
Consults friends who are in a position to help	2.78			
Consult family members	2.08			
Consult librarians	1.96			

Table III shows that the differences between the means are significant ($\chi^2 = 69.935$, $p < .001$). Findings from the study show that the students considered their teachers as the people they feel most comfortable seeking academic information from, followed by their friends, family members and librarians in that order. The ranking of the students in the current study show a trend in the people they spend the most time with when it comes to academic work. The fact that librarians are ranked least comfortable may signify the fact that the students hardly visit the library.

The findings in the current study confirm findings reported by Sugihartati & Harisanty (2014) among high school students in Indonesia that most of them consider their teachers as the first point of call for academic information. However, the findings contradict findings reported by Quaye (2013) among high school students in Ghana who considered their family and friends as the most dominant source for information seeking.

TABLE IV DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Sources	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Use study materials provided by my Teachers	100	3.86	.975	1.00	5.00
Go to the library to search on my own	100	2.67	1.19	1.00	5.00
I search on the internet	100	3.19	1.16	1.00	5.00
I look through Newspaper	100	2.23	1.11	1.00	5.00
Consult other books outside of my course	100	2.86	1.13	1.00	5.00

Table IV shows that there are differences in the mean scores on the sources they seek information from. Consulting study materials provided by teachers had the highest mean score

($M = 3.86$, $SD = .975$) and looking through newspapers had the least mean score ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.21$).

TABLE V FRIEDMAN TEST RANKS

Other	Mean Rank	Chi-square (χ^2)	df	p
Use study materials provided by my teachers	4.04	96.984	4	.000
I search on the internet	3.31			
Consult other books outside of my course	2.89			
Go to the library to search on my own	2.66			
I look through the newspaper	2.11			

Table V shows the results of the Friedman test that ranks the scores. The table shows that the differences between the means are significant ($\chi^2 = 96.984$, $p < .001$). Findings from the study show that using study materials provided by teachers was the most frequently used source for information. This was followed by internet source, books outside their course, going to the library and using

newspapers in that order. The ranking of the students regarding sources where they seek information from agrees to the people, they seek information from because of teachers and materials provided by the teachers and rank top in both cases. This means that teachers constitute a dominant source of information for the students in the current study.

These findings are in line with some previous studies reported elsewhere. For instance, Moskina (2013) has reported among high school students in Latvia that the traditional source of seeking information still remains dominant among the students. In the current study, the students have shown that teachers and the materials they provide (which are considered as traditional sources) are still dominant among them.

Sarfo *et al.*, (2011) have reported that even though high school students are increasingly getting access to ICT tools, the students usually use them for social communication than as means for academic information seeking. However, the internet is ranked as the second most common source of information among the students, which suggest that electronic sources of information seeking are gradually becoming dominant among high school students.

TABLE VI DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF SCORES OF DIFFICULTY IN INFORMATION SEEKING

Difficulty	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Study materials provided by my teachers	100	2.99	.890	1.00	5.00
Library search on my own	100	3.89	1.13	1.00	5.00
Consulting librarian	100	3.93	1.18	1.00	5.00
Your teachers	100	2.38	1.05	1.00	5.00
Your friends who are in a position to help	100	2.83	1.08	1.00	5.00
Your family members	100	3.22	1.22	1.00	5.00
The internet	100	3.81	1.22	1.00	5.00
Newspapers	100	2.97	.928	1.00	5.00
Books outside of my course	100	3.79	1.07	1.00	5.00

Table VI shows that there are differences in the mean scores on the strategies they use in searching for information.

Consulting a librarian had the highest mean score (M = 3.93, SD = 1.18) consulting teachers (M = 2.38, SD = 1.05).

TABLE VII FRIEDMAN TEST RANKS

Difficulty	Mean Rank	Chi-square (χ^2)	df	p
Consulting librarian	6.16	130.753	8	.000
Library search on my own	6.11			
books outside of my course	6.06			
Study materials provided by my teachers	5.81			
The internet	4.64			
your family members	4.52			
Friends in position to help	4.36			
Your teachers	3.68			

Table VII shows that the differences between the means are significant ($\chi^2 = 130$, $p < .001$). Findings from the study show that the consulting librarian was ranked as the topmost difficulty in seeking information. This is followed by going

to the library to conduct independent search etc. These findings confirm the earlier findings were teachers constituted the most used source of information and librarians constituted the least used.

TABLE VIII DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF SCORES ON SEARCH STRATEGIES

Strategies	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Carefully read where the information came from before using it	100	3.60	1.11	2.00	5.00
Search for general information about the topic	100	3.93	.967	1.00	5.00
I do not worry myself with general information I go straight to the question	100	2.84	1.28	1.00	5.00
I break the question down to sub-questions	100	3.28	1.13	1.00	5.00
I make a list of all the information I need before I start the search	100	3.43	1.09	1.00	5.00
I identify the best places to get the information before I start the search	100	3.39	1.11	1.00	5.00
I never stop searching until I get the information I need	100	3.97	1.12	1.00	5.00
When the search is taking too long, I stop and present whatever I have got it	100	2.97	1.18	1.00	5.00

Table VIII shows that there are differences in the mean scores on the strategies they use in searching for information. Never stopping the search till they get what

they want to have the highest mean score ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.12$) and not worrying with general information and going straight ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.28$).

TABLE IX FRIEDMAN TEST RANKS

Strategies	Mean Rank	Chi-square (χ^2)	df	p
I never stop searching until I get the information I need	5.61	78.323	7	.000
Search for general information about the topic	5.50			
Carefully read where the information came from before using it	4.81			
I make a list of all the information I need before I start the search	4.45			
I identify the best places to get the information before I start the search	4.23			
I break the question down to sub-questions	4.11			
I do not worry myself with general information I go straight to the question	3.66			
When the search is taking too long, I stop and present whatever I have got it	3.64			

Table IX shows the results of the Friedman test that ranks the scores. The differences between the means are significant ($\chi^2 = 78.323$, $p < .001$). Findings from the study show that the not stopping search till they find what they want was ranked as the topmost information search strategy. This is followed by a search for general information about a topic, carefully reading where the information came from before using then, making a list of information needed etc.

The ranking of the students shows that the students show resilience in their information seeking endeavours. The fact that they never stop searching until they get the information needed means that the students do not give up when they face difficulties in searching for information. The findings also show that the students are meticulous when seeking information. They carefully evaluate the information they get by checking the sources before using the information. This helps the students to sieve through information sources by identifying credible and incredible information.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendation from the study is in relation to the teachers shaping information-seeking behaviours among the students. Depending exceptionally on the teachers and the materials they provide means that the students become less independent and creative in their information-seeking behaviour. It is therefore recommended that the teachers see themselves as a conduit for directing students towards more self-directed information seeking sources.

The teachers should, therefore, refer the students more to the source of information that the students have not made good use of. These can include the teachers directing the students to the library or directing them to consult librarians and consult internet sources. These would help to gradually build self-directed information-seeking behaviours among the students since they already demonstrate resilience.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study shows that the traditional source remains a dominant source of academic information seeking among the students. They thus mainly depend on their teachers and the materials provided by their teachers for academic information. Libraries constituted the least preferred source of seeking academic information. However, the students demonstrate a strong sense of resilience in their information-seeking behaviour.

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