

Information Seeking Behaviour in The Academic Environment: A Study Of Informal Sector Entrepreneurship in Lagos State

Odunlade, R. Opeyemi (PhD)¹ Ojo, Joshua Onaade (PhD)²
University of Lagos, University of Lagos Main Library, Akoka – Lagos, Nigeria
mrsodunlade4real@yahoo.com¹; rodunlade@unilag.edu.ng¹
onaade@yahoo.com²; jojo@unilag.edu.ng²

Abstract

Purpose: This study was carried out to investigate the information needs, seeking behaviour, as well as impact of information and influence of academic environment on informal sector entrepreneurs.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Five objectives and four research questions coupled with three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Three higher institutions: University of Lagos, Yaba College of Technology and Federal College of Education (Technical), all in Lagos State, Nigeria constituted the study population. Stratified random sampling technique was used to draw sample across the strata from the 3 campuses. 60% of the total population constituted the sample size. 350 copies of the questionnaire were administered out of which 243 were properly filled and returned.

Findings revealed that the informal sector like any other had information needs but depended more on verbal information sources than information repositories. Results had shown that highest respondents need information on how to attract more customers within the academic environments (49.7%), while another 42.7% affirmed they needed information to make their businesses grow. The lowest respondents need information on how to finance business (28.8%). Though respondents enjoyed doing business on campus because of security, there are challenges with sales of goods when students are on vacation. The findings further revealed that library and information centres within academic environments had no impact on information seeking behaviour of the informal sector.

Implications: Informal sector entrepreneurs had shown their eagerness to make use of information for variety of reasons that will guide them on how to develop their business. The implication is that all the purpose for which they use information is geared towards the growth of their business.

Originality/Value; Traditionally, the hallmark of academic environment has always been teaching and learning – for knowledge acquisition which is often characterized with information seeking and usage. A typical academic environment consists of researchers, students, non-academics and service providers otherwise known as informal sector. Regardless of career and ambition in life, human beings generally seek information to deal with challenges. Informal sectors as a group of people have information needs especially when they encounter work-related problem that can be resolved through valuable information.

Keywords: Informal sector, information seeking behaviour, entrepreneurship, academic environment, Lagos State.

Introduction

The concept of information no doubt appears over flogged both in the academia and the secular world. The use of the word information has almost assumed a state of anomaly where nearly every innovation/advancement is tagged after information – information age, information explosion, information economy, information society, and so on. Perhaps this is because information has become indispensable in the overall development of the global society. Kemp (1976) cited in Madhusudhan (2008) concurs that information has been rated as the fifth need

of man ranking after air, water, food, and shelter. Human beings generally use information in their day to day activities to meet a particular need or the other. What, then, is the meaning of this very popular and world acknowledged word – information?

The word information has been defined by various schools of thought as ‘data that has been processed in such a way as to be meaningful to the person who receives it’ (Riley, 2012); ‘Knowledge derived from study, experience, or instruction’ (The Free Dictionary, 2012); ‘that which can lead to an increase in understanding and decrease in uncertainty’

(Business Dictionary, 2012); 'knowledge communicated or received concerning a particular fact or circumstance'(Random House College Dictionary, 1999). This is to mention a few. In the context of this study, information is seen as knowledge communicated verbally or orally to individuals and is used in decision making.

Today, 'information has become a critical factor for political participation and social inclusion and the basis for competitiveness at the individual, organizational and national levels' (Babalola, Sodipe, Haliso & Odunlade, 2012). The implication of this assertion is that the urge to use a piece of information stems out of the user's need. It arises as a consequence of a need perceived by the information user, who in order to satisfy it makes demand upon formal or informal sources or services, resulting in success or failure (Wilson, 1999).

Information needs vary (Odunsaya & Amusa 2003), depending on the purpose for which information is sought. In other words, the type of information needed and the purpose for which it is being sought determines the user's pattern of seeking. Information need is a requirement that drives people into information seeking. An information need evolves from an awareness of something missing, which necessitates the seeking of information that might contribute to understanding and meaning (Kuhlthau, 1993).

Three approaches to information seeking have been identified. These are:

1. The user-values [sic] approach which focuses on perception of utility and value of information systems;
2. The sense-making approach which examines the way people make sense of their worlds and how information is used in this process; and
3. The anomalous state-of-knowledge (ASK) which examines how people seek information concerning situation about which their knowledge is incomplete. (Hewins cited in Odusanya & Amusa, 2003).

Information seeking behaviour has been described as the way and manner people gather and seek for information for their personal use, knowledge updating and development (Ajiboye & Tella, 2007). In other words, information seeking behaviour principally encompasses how individuals scout round for information to meet a particular need irrespective of the source or sources of the information.

The concept of information seeking behaviour is not alien to the academic environment. Traditionally, the hallmark of academic environment has always been teaching and learning – for knowledge acquisition which is often characterized with information seeking and usage. A typical academic environment consists of the students, researchers, non-academics and other service providers such as the informal sector entrepreneur.

The informal sector entrepreneur comprises of individuals who engage in private initiative commercial business in a small scale depicted by little income for daily survival, with little or no capital for sustainability. Their jobs are not recognized as normal income services in which taxes are paid, hence they are informal. The concept of informal sector entrepreneurship is a multifarious, dynamic and social human behaviour that is common to human beings. It arises as a consequence of a need perceived by the information user, who in order to satisfy that need makes demand upon formal or informal sources or services, resulting in success or failure (Wilson, 1999). This implies that be it formal or informal sector, academics or non-academics, scholars or students, human beings generally seek information to deal with challenges.

Information plays a positive role in business success (Vaughan, 1997). Informal sector within the academic environment could be described as a business oriented sector whose survival largely depends on access to relevant information. Various kinds of information services can be provided to enhance this sector's activities. This includes a wide range of information, such as rent charges, better access to finance (credit facilities), impending business trainings and conferences, working conditions within the academic environment, and so on. However, study has established that this sector rely more on informal information sources than in their business operation (Vaughan, 1997).

Several theories of information seeking behaviour have been propounded and various models derived. This study is taking a cue from Thomas Wilson's second model of information seeking behaviour propounded in 1981 (Wilson, 1999). Wilson upholds that information need is a secondary need arising from a basic need and attempt to meet this need by information user may attract barriers of different kinds. The basic need as identified by Wilson may be categorised as physiological, cognitive or affective. This theory also holds that the context of any of these needs may be the individual himself, his expected role as demanded by his work or life pattern, or his environment within which his life or work resides. This environment may be political, economic, technological and so on. The implication of this to the study is that the informal sector entrepreneurs have basic needs which they desire secondary information to address. In the context of this study, the basic need is perceived to be economic and survival need especially in the face of the prevailing economic hardship and unemployment in the country. The desire to meet this need drives them into whatever business or service they render within the academic environment. To sustain their various businesses, they require secondary information that borders on issues such as type of business/service required within academic environments, how and where to acquire goods at cheaper rates, how to sell at cheaper prices than their counterparts, where to source for funds (loan), goods storage process, peak period of sales on campus, periods of low sales such as students vacation periods, what and where to sell within academic environments, and so on.

Here, barrier may set in as a result of information literacy, language, illiteracy, semi-literacy and so on. The environment surely will have influence on the activities of this sector and that is why academic environment came into focus, where information resource centre is already in existence and would be ready to supply information based on users' needs and information seeking behaviour.

Entrepreneurship has been the back bone of most gigantic and growing economies of the 21st century. Any country that refuses to pay attention to enhancing her entrepreneurship sector would be left behind in the global economic development. This is because entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of

creating incremental wealth by individuals who assume major risks in terms of equity, time and/or career commitment or provide value for some product or service (Hisrich, Peters & Shepherd, 2005). Sometimes, entrepreneurs are also employers of labour though at a lower level. Traditionally, Nigeria has always had more people employed in the informal sector. Perhaps what is changing is the increasing level of education of people now involved. Apparently, this concept has come to stay with us in Nigeria. Having centre (s) for entrepreneurship adorning our academic environments has become the order of the day, especially in our universities and polytechnics though they may have nothing to do with the category of service providers under study.

The influx of the informal sector entrepreneurs in Nigerian academic environment calls for concern. This may not be unconnected with the economic situation in the society. Though, the statute that sets up an academic environment did not stipulate any rule for this category of people, human sympathy may not allow them to be ejected from their source of livelihood. Lagos as the commercial nerve centre of the nation no doubt attracts more people than any other city in Nigeria. As a result, there is every tendency that campuses in this city may house more of this category of people than other academic environments in the nation.

More so, the informal sector entrepreneurs have been identified as contributing significantly to national economy in terms of output and employment even when their activities are difficult to measure, they are highly dynamic and contribute substantially to the general growth of the economy and personal or household income (Ekpo & Umoh, 2013).

This development is not peculiar to Nigeria. For instance, in Uganda, the Ministry of Planning Economic Development [MPED] cited in Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2004) affirm that the informal sector is the main bulwark against unemployment, destitution and crime in that country. In Ghana, the informal sector is made up of about 90 percent of working population, it is characterised by ease entry of small scale operator, unregulated markets, reliance on indigenous resources and outdated technology" (Baah, 2007). The informal sector in Nigeria may be categorised into the following sub-sectors:- (i) Productive; (ii) Service; and (iii) Financial (Ekpo & Umoh, 2013).

The informal sector is influential on majority of entrepreneurs who recognise it as a sector for helping themselves in a number of ways including generating income for survival, fighting poverty and unemployment, saving themselves from shame for lack of self-support or gainful employment. Literature is replete with studies of informal sector entrepreneurs both locally and globally. However, none of these focused on academic environments. Hence this study aims at unravelling the pattern of information seeking by informal sector entrepreneurs in 3 academic environments in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives will guide the study:

1. identifying the information needs of informal sector entrepreneurs in academic environment;
2. identifying the informal sector entrepreneurs' information seeking behavior in academic environment;
3. finding how informal sector entrepreneurs use information for their business growth;
4. establishing the influence of academic environment on informal sector entrepreneurs and
5. ascertaining the influence of information resources provided within academic environment on informal sector entrepreneurs .

Research questions

To achieve the objectives of the study, the following research questions have been proposed:

1. What are the information needs of informal sector entrepreneurs in an academic environment?
2. What is the information seeking-behaviour of informal sector entrepreneurs in an academic environment?
3. How do informal sector entrepreneurs use information to aid the growth of their business?
4. What is the influence of academic environment on informal sector entrepreneurship?

Research Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was formulated for the study at 0.05 level of significance.

H₁ There is no significant relationship between information resources provided in academic environment and informal sector entrepreneurs' information seeking behaviour.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation suffered by this study is lack of cooperation on the part of the respondents. Many of them were not willing to neither fill the questionnaire nor consent to the interview schedule. Their reason mainly was that their profit rate would be known in order to increase their rent. This affected the sample size for the study.

Methodology

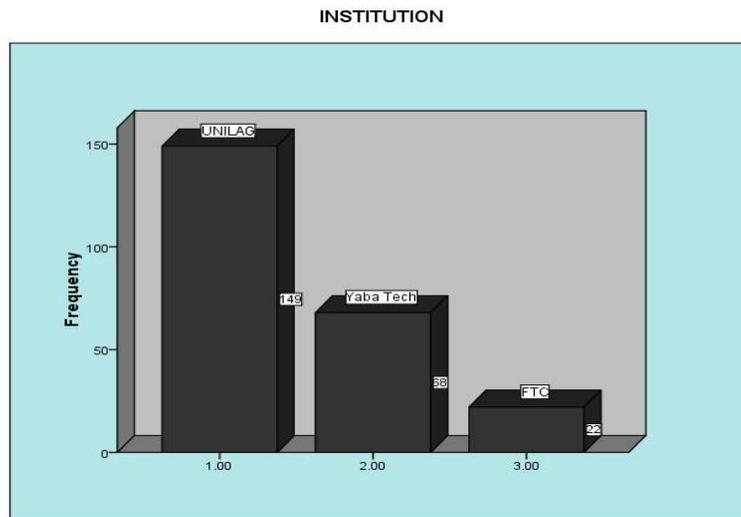
The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Three (3) campuses consisting of a University (University of Lagos), a Polytechnic (Yaba College of Technology) and a College of Education (Federal College of Education Technical), all in Lagos State constituted the study population. 60% of the total population constituted the sample size. 350 copies of the questionnaire were administered using stratified random sampling technique to draw sample among the strata from the three (3) campuses.

There are over 25 types of informal sector operating in the campuses under study. They ranged from food sellers to tailors, cobblers, telephone operators, private campus shuttles, hairdressers, shopping complex, and so on. To ensure that all of them were represented in the sample, stratified random sampling technique was adopted. 272 questionnaires were returned and 243 were found analysable. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics while null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

Results and Discussion

Three academic environments were sampled for the study and 243 respondents constituted the sample size. Figure 1 presents the breakdown.

Figure 1 **Sampled Institutions**



From this figure, the tallest bar signifies number of respondents in University environment = 149 (62.3%) representing the highest category of informal sector entrepreneurs in the study. Next

to this is Polytechnic category with 68 (28.5%) while the least is College of Education which has 22 (9.2%) of the respondents.

Table 1 gives the breakdown of the sex of respondents.

Table 1 Gender of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	93	38.2
Female	150	61.8%
Total	245	100.00

Majority of the respondents are females as indicated in the table 1. This is not surprising owing to the fact that in many communities

especially in this part of the world, women are more involved in the act of selling and buying

Fig 2: Age distribution of respondents



As shown in figure 2, most of the people involved in informal sector entrepreneurship are youths. These are people who are vibrant and should be gainfully employed in public service. Perhaps poverty and state of unemployment in the country pushed them into this sector of the economy. This supports Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2004) who reiterated that the increase in the growth of the informal sector in Uganda is as a result of retrenchment in the public service,

increase in the number of school drop-outs without formal employment, rural urban migration, and so on. This may be an indication that unemployment level is high in the country.

Information Needs of Informal Sector Entrepreneurs within Academic Environments

To answer objective number 1, table 2 presents the data analysis.

Table 2 Information needs of informal sector entrepreneurs

		SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
1	I need information on the type of Business to do on campus	33 (13.5%)	70 (38.8%)	53 (21.8%)	79 (32.5%)
2	I need information on how to start Business on campus	34 (13.9%)	50 (20.5%)	70 (38.8%)	75 (30.8%)
3	I need information on the how to finance my Business.	17 (6.9%)	51 (20.9%)	80 (32.92)	70 (28.8%)
4	I need information on where my product will attract buyer best	13 (5.34)	53 (21.8%)	89 (36.6%)	74 (30.4%)
5	I need information on how to sustain my business on campus	5 (2.05%)	27 (11%)	113 (46.5%)	77 (31.6%)
6	I need information on how to make my business grow.	0 (0%)	19(7.8%)	94 (38.6)	107 (44%)
7	I need information on what the community frequently request for.	8 (3.2%)	21 (8.6%)	91 (37.4)	104 (42.7%)
8	I need information on how to attract more customers.	4 (1.6%)	14(5.7%)	108(44%)	121(49.7%)

Respondents were presented with variety of options for which they require information with regards to their businesses on campus in a likert scale of 4 namely: Agree = A; Strongly Agree = SA; Disagree = D; and Strongly Disagree = SD.

From the table above, respondents' highest need of information is on how to attract more customers within the academic environments (49.7%), while another 42.7% affirmed they needed information to make their businesses grow. The lowest need as indicated on the table is use of information on how to finance business (28.8%). On the average, it is obvious that this group of people do have

information needs for various purposes but all geared towards the growth and sustenance of their businesses. This finding supports Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2004) who confirm that the informal sector entrepreneurs has information needs and use the information at macro levels.

Information Seeking Behaviour of Informal Sector Entrepreneurs in Academic Environments

Table 3 gives the details of data for objective number 2.

Table 3: Strategy adopted by entrepreneurs in getting information

	ISB	Freq	Percent
1	I go to the library	8	3.2%
2	I check the notice board	17	6.9%
3	I seek from the media, e.g newsflash, radio, newspaper, etc	33	13.5%
4	I ask my business partners	72	29.6%
5	I ask Students	139	57.2%
6	I go to information Unit	15	6.1%

7	I attend Business training/seminars	10	4.1%
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Table 3 revealed that students (57.2%) are the highest source of information to the group under study. Next to this is their business partners (29.6%) while library is the least consulted of the sources (3.2%). The reason for having students and business partners as highest sources of information may not be unconnected to the fact that less time and effort is spent to gather information from people than consulting information repositories (Robinson, 2010). However, their non use of the library calls for concern. This is because majority of the group under study are youths which by implication are supposed to be literate. It is

therefore assumed that the desire to obtain information regarding their businesses should drive them more to the library or other media than verbal sources of information (people) as it's being revealed in this study. The implication of this to the study is that the impact of the library and other information centres located within academic environments are not being felt by this group of people.

Use of Information by Informal Sector Entrepreneurs to aid Business Growth

Data obtained for objective number 3 is presented in table 4.

Table 4: Use of information for business growth

	Variable	Freq.	Percent
1	Guide on how to further develop my business	166	68.3%
2	Guide on how to control price of goods to be sold.	30	12.3%
3	Guide on how to get goods at cheaper rate.	31	12.7%
4	Helps me on how to obtain credit facility in sustaining my business	17	6.9%
5	Guide me on the choice of product to sell.	35	14.4%

Though table 4 revealed that respondents make use of information for variety of reasons, guiding them on how to further develop their businesses has the highest use (68.3%). Basically, all the purposes for which they use information are geared towards the growth of their businesses. This is not surprising since an

average businessman will not only desire to make profit but to also sustain (develop) his business.

Influence of academic environment on informal sector entrepreneurship

Table 5 gives the details of data for objective 4

Table 5 Influence of academic environment on ISE

No	Contribution of academic environment	Frequency	%
1	Contributes so much	158	65%
2	Contributes averagely	48	19.7%
3	Contributes not so much	20	8.2%
4	Does not contribute at all	4	1.6%

In table 5, 65% of respondents affirmed that academic environment has a great deal of positive influence on their businesses while only 1.6% indicated that the environment has no contribution whatsoever to their businesses. Influence as we know could be positive or negative. Having considered the positive

influence of academic environment on this sector, challenges being faced by them were looked into and Table 6 presents the breakdown of their responses.

Challenges facing informal sector entrepreneurs within academic environments

Table 6 Challenges facing informal sector entrepreneurs

No	Challenges	Freq.	%
1	Students vacation	182	74%
2	My literacy level	105	43.2%
3	Campus price control affects my profit margin	48	19.75%
4	Arbitrary increase in shop rent by school authority	85	34.9%
5	Strike/students' unrest	133	54.7%

A high number (74%) of respondents indicated that their greatest challenge has to do with sales of their goods when students are on vacation while a few (19.75%) of them affirmed that campus price control affects their profit margin. Again, the latter is not surprising since observation has shown that an average human being has the tendency to exploit the other if allowed to do so. The campus price control is an attempt to ensure that the informal sector do not exploit the community where they carry out their businesses. Though this may not go down well with the sector, other benefits they enjoy like security, business relationship and so on are

binding factors that may not let them quit the environment.

Relationship between Information Resources and Entrepreneurs’ Information Seeking Behaviour

To answer the fifth objective which is the last, one null hypothesis was tested.

H₁ There is no significant relationship between information resources provided within academic environment and informal sector entrepreneurs’ information seeking behaviour.

Table 7 Correlations

		Information Resources (1)	Information Seeking Behaviour (2)
IR	Pearson Correlation	1	.006
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.464
	N	236	236
ISB	Pearson Correlation	.006	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.464	
	N	236	236

One tail test at 0.05 significant level was carried out on the variables of information resources and informal sector entrepreneurs’ information seeking behaviour as perceived in the study. The result of the test showed the ‘r’ value to be 0.006, meaning that there is no significant relationship between the two variables. The implication of this to the study is that the group under study does not depend on the information resources provided in the libraries within the academic environments where they sell. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has revealed that the informal sector entrepreneurs need information to enable them thrive in their businesses. The study also established that the sector do not make use of information resources though they operate within academic environment where information is the life wire of all activities. The study lamented that despite the fact that majority of the group under study were youths who should be at the fore front of exploring information technology facilities to expand their businesses amongst others, they depended more on verbal information. The sector needs

skills as entrepreneurs in their various fields and it is obvious that these needs particularly information needs are not being met by library and information centres – the supposed information reservoir, situated within the environment they operate.

Recommendations

In view of the findings, the study recommends that this category of people should be made to see the benefit they can derive from the various information resources at their disposal. We are in the information age and since majority of them are youths who are supposed to be literate or semi literate, they should be encouraged to interact with information resources (print and media) and even the internet in order to be updated about their businesses.

Also, libraries located within the academic environment should reach out to them through exhibitions targeted at their needs. This will not only create awareness about the type of information available in the library but also enable them to ask questions in their areas of businesses and as well obtain relevant information. Ideas will be exchanged at such

forum and different kind of business information will be shared.

Services such as current awareness (CAS) and selective dissemination of information (SDI) where informal sectors areas of information needs will be identified and provided for should be encouraged by library and information professionals. This will bring relevant business information that may help in boosting their businesses and enhance a better service delivery.

Access to information on government policies and activities of other stakeholders that bothers on credit facilities to further develop their trade should be made available to them through the various information media.

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