

# Information Needs and Information Seeking Pattern of Adult Learners

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**Abstract** - This study examined the information needs and information seeking pattern of adult learners in literacy programmes in Oyo State, Nigeria. Descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for the study and 200 learners were randomly selected from literacy centres across the state. A self-structured questionnaire was designed and appropriately reviewed and validated by experts in the field of information studies and adult education. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, simple percentages and mean score was used to analyse the data collected from the learners. Results of the analysis revealed a ranking of need for information on health and general wellbeing coming first, followed by information on how to acquire basic literacy skills of reading, writing & arithmetic which was ranked second among others. The findings also showed that adult learners seek information mostly through radio and television (mean = 3.0450), followed by textbooks (mean = 2.8550) and through their facilitators (mean = 2.7400). Adult learners also seek information through their various religious books (mean = 2.7350), literacy primers (mean = 2.6300) and social media (mean = 2.5050). Language barrier and unavailability of required materials ranked first and second respectively among others as the challenges they face in seeking information.

**Keywords:** Information Needs, Information Seeking Pattern, Adult Learners, Oyo State

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, people are classified as either rich or poor not because of their wealthy possession but by the amount of information they have at their disposal. The information-rich people have wealth of knowledge in identifying their information needs and using seeking behaviours to access and acquire the information through traditional and digital means and this enable them to properly plan for their lives and react to developmental challenges on the basis of what they know or can find out. On the other hand, information-poor people lack the required skills to satisfy their information needs and this makes them vulnerable to all kinds of pressure that often stall their personal development and limit their capacity to contribute meaningfully to national development (Yadav, 2017).

The term information need is associated with a person or group of persons' desire to locate and obtain information to satisfy a sentient or in sentient need. Information needs is defined as evolving from an unclear consciousness of missing information and as ending in locating information that contributes to understanding and meaning (Kuthlthau,

1993, as cited in Chinnasamy, 2016). It is further seen "as a gap in a person's knowledge that, when experienced at the conscious level as a question, give rise to a search for an answer and if the need is urgent, the search may be pursued with diligence until the desire is fulfilled" (Reitz, 2004, as quoted in Jonathan and Nwokocha, 2015). According to Dervin (1983), information need refers to a "state that arises within a person, suggesting some kind of a gap that requires filling. When applied to the word information, as in information need, what is suggested is a gap that can be filled by something that the needing person calls 'information'".

UNESCO (2007), observed that in the course of a person's lifetime, the more the person learn and thereby come to know, but especially the sooner the person master and adopt proficient learning skills, habits and attitudes, yet, the person struggle to know how, where, whom, and when to search for and retrieve information that the person needs to know, it thus means that the person has not learned anything. It was further stated that the more information literate an individual is, the more the chances of applying and utilizing the embedded skills, habits and attitudes to make sounder and timelier decisions to cope with personal and family health and welfare, educational, job-related, citizenship and other challenges.

With the advent and improvement in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), the information environment is highly rich and often characterized by an outburst of information sources and providers, a variety of methods for accessing information, and a redundancy of content from multiple sources. However, in spite of the 'overloaded' information environment, many users' still experience information inadequacy and anxiety, some lack the skills to navigate this complex information landscape and some find it difficult to assess the information they find as being enough to satisfy their information needs. So, understanding how information users seek information sources and how they choose content to meet their information needs becomes imperative most especially adult learners who have little or no basic literacy skills to explore various information sources (Prabha, Connaway, Olszewski and Jenkins, 2007).

World over, the primary function of librarians and information scientists alike is to provide opportunity for free and equitable access to information to all in order to create

literate environments and promoting literacy by offering relevant and attractive reading materials for all ages and all literacy levels but unfortunately adult learners in literacy programmes are 'neglected species' in this regard as there is little or no interest as to understand the dynamics involved in the information needs and information seeking pattern of this level of learners. While literature abound on information needs and information seeking behaviour of different set of learners at different levels, none exist on the information needs and information seeking behaviour of learners in adult literacy programme most especially in Nigeria where adult illiteracy rate is believed to be high and this thus creates a vacuum that this study sought to fill by exploring the information needs and information seeking pattern of learners in adult literacy programme in Oyo State.

This study is therefore guided by the following research questions;

1. What are the information needs of learners in adult literacy programme?
2. What is the information seeking pattern of learners in adult literacy programme?
3. What challenges do adult learners face in seeking information?

4. What are the possible ways of meeting the information needs of adult learners?

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive research design of the survey type and all learners enrolled in adult literacy programme in Oyo State constituted the population of the study. A total of 200 learners were randomly selected from literacy centres across the state. A self-structured questionnaire was designed and appropriately reviewed and validated by experts in the field of information studies and adult education. The questionnaire has two sessions. Session A consisted of demographic data of the respondents while session B consisted of items which sought to gather information on the research questions for the study. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, simple percentages and mean score was used to analyse the data collected from the learners.

## III. RESULTS

*Research question 1:* What are the information needs of learners in adult literacy programmes?

TABLE I INFORMATION NEEDS OF LEARNERS IN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES

S. No.	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
1	Information on different financial services that could promote my work	19	9.5	3 <sup>rd</sup>
2	Information on health and general wellbeing	26	13.0	1 <sup>st</sup>
3	Information on how to acquire basic literacy skills of reading, writing & arithmetic	24	12.0	2 <sup>nd</sup>
4	Information on how to properly care for one's family	13	6.5	5 <sup>th</sup>
5	Information on how to use internet facility on my phone	19	9.5	3 <sup>rd</sup>
6	Information on how to use the latest technologies in my profession	15	7.5	4 <sup>th</sup>
7	Information on my duties and rights as a citizen of this country	7	3.5	10 <sup>th</sup>
8	Information on my environment	11	5.5	7 <sup>th</sup>
9	Information on my profession	12	6.0	6 <sup>th</sup>
10	Information on my religion	10	5.0	8 <sup>th</sup>
11	Information on culture	7	3.5	10 <sup>th</sup>
12	Information on employment and future career	8	4.0	9 <sup>th</sup>
13	Information on global issues	10	5.0	8 <sup>th</sup>
14	Information related to continuing education after graduation from literacy centre	12	6.0	6 <sup>th</sup>
15	Information related to my literacy programme	7	3.5	10 <sup>th</sup>
	Total	200	100	

The above table I shows that information on health and general wellbeing was the 1<sup>st</sup> information need adult learners want followed by information on how to acquire basic literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Information on different financial services that could promote their work and Information on how to use internet facility on their phone were jointly ranked third. The fourth on their ranking is Information on how to use the latest technologies in their profession while Information on how to properly care for their family was ranked fifth.

Acquisition of Information on their profession and Information related to continuing education after graduation from literacy centre was jointly ranked 6<sup>th</sup>.

Information on the environment was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> while Information on religion and global issues were jointly ranked 8<sup>th</sup>. Information on employment and future career was ranked 9<sup>th</sup> while Information on duties and rights, information on culture and information on their literacy programme were ranked 10<sup>th</sup>.

*Research question 2:* What is the information seeking pattern of learners in adult literacy programmes?

TABLE II INFORMATION SEEKING PATTERN OF LEARNERS IN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES

S. No.	Items	Often	Occasional	Very often	Never	Mean	SD
1	Internet i.e. Google or Search Engine	60 (30.0%)	37 (18.5%)	41 (20.5%)	62 (31.0%)	2.4000	1.12977
2	Literacy Primer	41 (20.5%)	82 (41.0%)	54 (27.0%)	23 (11.5)	2.6300	1.00406
3	Textbooks	46 (23.0%)	75 (37.5%)	68 (34.0%)	11 (5.5%)	2.8550	0.95842
4	Newspaper	31 (15.5%)	88 (44.0%)	34 (17.0%)	47 (23.5%)	2.2600	1.00371
5	Radio and Television	56 (28.0%)	54 (27.0%)	81 (40.5%)	9 (4.5%)	3.0450	0.92588
6	Social media like Face book, WhatsApp etc	48 (24.0%)	55 (27.5%)	50 (25.0%)	47 (23.5%)	2.5050	1.10730
7	Library Materials	20 (10.0%)	85 (42.5%)	38 (19.0%)	57 (28.5%)	2.1950	1.05477
8	Friends and Family	63 (31.5%)	68 (34.0%)	61 (30.5%)	8 (4.0%)	2.8850	0.89205
9	Facilitators /Experts	57 (28.5%)	69 (34.5%)	55 (27.5%)	19 (9.5%)	2.7400	0.96803
10	Religion's book	66 (33.0%)	68 (34.0%)	49 (24.5%)	17 (8.5%)	2.7350	0.92686

Table II shows that adult learners seek information mostly through radio and television with the mean score of 3.0450 followed by textbooks (mean = 2.8550) and through their facilitators (mean = 2.7400) that guide them through the learning process. Adult learners also seek information through their various religious books (mean = 2.7350), literacy primers (mean = 2.6300) and they equally seek information through social media like face book, WhatsApp

etc. (mean = 2.5050). However, the table revealed that adult learners hardly seek information through the following medium; internet i.e. Google or Search Engines (mean = 2.4000), Newspaper (mean = 2.2600) and Library Materials (mean = 2.1950).

*Research Question 3:* What challenges do adult learners face in seeking information?

TABLE III CHALLENGES FACED BY ADULT LEARNERS IN SEEKING INFORMATION

S. No.	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Language Barrier	105 (52.5%)	64 (32.0%)	12 (6.0%)	19 (9.5%)	3.3100	0.87621	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	Lack of literacy skills to seek, obtain and evaluate information	63 (31.5%)	92 (46.0%)	18 (9.0%)	27 (13.5%)	3.000	0.90226	8 <sup>th</sup>
3	Time constraint	63 (31.5%)	82 (41.0%)	30 (15.0%)	25 (12.5%)	2.8900	1.01640	10 <sup>th</sup>
4	Inadequate knowledge about library use	66 (33.0%)	89 (44.5%)	27 (13.5%)	18 (9.0%)	2.9700	0.98179	9 <sup>th</sup>
5	Lack of ICT skills	82 (41.0%)	73 (36.5%)	28 (14.0%)	17 (8.5%)	3.0450	1.02872	6 <sup>th</sup>
6	Required material is not available	88 (44.0%)	74 (37.0%)	17 (8.5%)	21 (10.5%)	3.1650	1.02872	2 <sup>nd</sup>
7	Low income earning	86 (43.0%)	72 (36.0%)	26 (13.0%)	16 (8.0%)	3.0900	1.01343	4 <sup>th</sup>
8	Poor searching skills	74 (37.0%)	83 (41.5%)	24 (12.0%)	19 (9.5%)	3.0350	0.97392	7 <sup>th</sup>
9	Irregular Power Supply	91 (45.5%)	67 (33.5%)	30 (15.0%)	12 (6.0%)	3.0950	1.05429	3 <sup>rd</sup>
10	Libraries are located far away from home or workplace	77 (38.5%)	81 (40.5%)	25 (12.5%)	17 (8.5%)	3.0500	0.98608	5 <sup>th</sup>

Table III shows that based on the ranking of the mean value, adult learners face challenges in seeking information as a result of language barrier (mean = 3.3100) which ranked first followed by unavailability of required material (mean = 3.1650) which ranked second. Other challenges they face in seeking information include; Irregular Power Supply (mean = 3.0950), Low income earning (mean = 3.0900), Libraries are located far away from their home or workplace (mean = 3.0500), Lack of ICT skills (mean = 3.0450), Poor searching skills (mean = 3.0350), Lack of literacy skills to seek, obtain and evaluate information (mean = 3.000), Inadequate knowledge (mean = 2.9700), Time constraint (mean =

2.8900) as they were ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10 respectively.

*Research Question 4:* What are the possible ways of meeting the information needs of adult learners?

Table IV reveals that all adult learners unanimously agreed that provision of reading text/materials in indigenous languages (mean= 3.1350), making information sources readily available to adult learners (mean = 3.3800), emphasis on the need to acquire ICT skills by adult learners (mean = 3.2150), sensitization on library use (mean = 3.2150), provision of computer with internet access in

literacy centres (mean = 3.2300), establishment of information centres/libraries in literacy centres (mean = 3.1950), provision of constant electricity supply (mean = 3.1050), affordable internet subscription (mean = 3.1100),

Location of libraries or information centres in areas close to homes and workplace of adult learners (mean = 3.3350) and reducing cost of obtaining information (mean = 3.1250) are good ways to meet the information needs of adult learners.

TABLE IV METHODS OF MEETING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF ADULT LEARNERS

S. No.	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mean	SD
1	Provision of reading text/materials in indigenous languages	118 (59.0%)	60 (30.0%)	11 (5.5%)	11 (5.5%)	3.1350	0.74805
2	Making information sources readily available to adult learners	88 (44.0%)	98 (49.0%)	6 (3.0%)	8 (4.0%)	3.3800	0.70739
3	Emphasis on the need to acquire ICT skills by adult learners	77 (38.5%)	90 (45.0%)	19 (9.5%)	14 (7.0%)	3.2150	0.93179
4	Sensitization on library use	89 (44.5%)	92 (46.0%)	26 (13.0%)	10 (5.0%)	3.2150	1.00626
5	Provision of computer with internet access in literacy centres	89 (44.5%)	81 (40.5%)	18 (9.0%)	12 (6.0%)	3.2300	0.89542
6	Establishment of information centres/libraries in literacy centres	86 (43.0%)	91 (45.5%)	12 (6.0%)	11 (5.5%)	3.1950	0.82157
7	Provision of constant electricity supply	110 (55.0%)	62 (31.0%)	15 (7.5%)	13 (6.5%)	3.1050	0.81812
8	Affordable internet subscription	89 (44.5%)	75 (37.5%)	19 (9.5%)	17 (8.5%)	3.1100	0.91333
9	Location of libraries or information centres in areas close to homes and workplace of adult learners	100 (50.0%)	85 (42.5%)	12 (6.0%)	3 (1.5%)	3.3350	0.77388
10	Reducing cost of obtaining information	104 (52.0%)	63 (31.5%)	28 (14.0%)	5 (2.5%)	3.1250	0.95101

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

One of the findings of this study is the ranking of information on health and general wellbeing and information on how to acquire basic literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic as first and second by adult learners as their most preferred information needs. This indicates that adult learners prioritised their health issue as they grow older and they desire information that could give them a better understanding of their health and this form part of the reasons some of the learners enrol in literacy programmes aside the acquisition of literacy skills. While the acquisition of basic literacy skills of reading and writing could increase their capacity to assess more information on health, they want information on health and general wellbeing to be given to them separately because it's only a living soul with a sound health that can fully utilize the literacy skills and other associated benefits. Jacobs, Amuta, and Jeon (2017) observed that an important component of preventive health practice is the provision and availability of relevant information regarding risks to health and promotional measures for enhancing one's health status.

Another finding of this study is the fact that adult learners seek information mostly through radio and television and through other sources like textbooks, facilitators, religious books, literacy primers and through social media. This finding is evident from the fact that radio and television are the dominant information platforms in Nigeria as people listen to them for news and general information to keep abreast of recent information. According to the Broadcasting Board of Governors (n.d.), most Nigerian

households have both a working radio and a television set and there is little demographic variation in ownership rates. This finding is supported by the report of Familusi and Owoeye (2014), who observed that radio, is mostly used to assess information followed by mobile phone, television, social network among others. Also, in a survey conducted by NOI Pools (n.d.) on sources of information to Nigerians, it was revealed that more Nigerians source for information daily from radio and television as 62% of the respondents source for information via radio followed by television, social media and newspaper with 49%, 37% and 30% respectively.

The findings of the study also showed that adult learners are faced with challenges of language barrier and unavailability of required material when seeking information. Other challenges they face include; irregular lower supply, low income earning, libraries are located far away from their home or workplace, lack of ICT skills, poor searching skills, lack of literacy skills to seek, obtain and evaluate information, Inadequate knowledge and time constraint. Major problem adult learner's face in seeking information is the lack of understanding of the language in which the information is packaged. English is the official language in the country and most information is disseminated using the language.

Adult learners are proficient in their indigenous languages but have difficulties in understanding information provided in English language or any other language that is foreign to them and this often limits their capacity to access information that is not given to them in their own languages.

Also, the information they desire to have is not given to them as some learners expressed the desire to read comic books, indigenous newspapers like 'Alaroye' or have access to information about their health but all this are not readily available to them. Erratic power supply is another challenge as most of the gadgets used in sourcing for information require electricity to function and this is often in short supply in the country. While it is established that literacy skills play a significant role in income generating capacity of an individual, adult learners with low income will definitely have issues with getting required gadgets through which he can have chances of getting information that could promote his work.

This finding is supported by Al-Suqri and Lillard (2011), who submitted that language issue is a very significant barrier to seeking information among social science researchers. Also, Chawinga and Zozie (2016) in their study found out that 65.8% of their respondents indicated that they lack access to relevant information materials. Specifically, 25% of the respondents indicated that there are no information centres where they live as the existing information centres are far to their homes aside from the fact that they do not contain relevant information materials and notable among the challenge to seeking information in their study is the cost of internet.

This study also found out adult learners unanimously believed that provision of reading materials in indigenous languages, making information sources readily available, conscious emphasis on the need to acquire ICT skills, proper orientation on library use among others can reduce if not totally solve some of the challenges they face in seeking information. Since adult learners prefer information in their local languages, provision of information in their indigenous language will make them absorb the information well and use it better to enhance their living. Also, making information sources available can also increase their knowledge base and accelerate their literacy skills acquisition while ICT skills proficiency by adult learners can increase their capacity to navigate the emerging complex information environment. Giving adult learners proper orientation on how they can make use of the library and various services they stand to benefit from using a library is crucial to their survival in this knowledge economy because library plays a very significant role in promoting the progress of knowledge.

For instance, Trombetta (2017) identified seven reasons library is essential for all and this include: it serves as a free educational resources to everyone; it's a safe refuge for the homeless and underserved people; it helps boost local economies; it plays a significant role in second language learning, it makes communities healthier; preservation of history and more importantly, truth; lastly, libraries help connect communities. So, giving them the right orientation on library use will increase their thirst for knowledge and substantial acquisition of knowledge will increase their

capacity to contribute to the sustainable development of the country.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has assessed the information needs and information seeking pattern of adult learners in literacy programmes in Oyo State and the findings of the study revealed that adult learners ranked information on health and general wellbeing and information on how to acquire basic literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic as their most preferred information needs. Findings also showed that adult learners seek information mostly through radio and television and Language barrier and unavailability of required materials ranked first and second respectively among others as the challenges they face in seeking information. Lastly, possible ways of meeting the information needs of adult learners were highlighted.

Arising from the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made

1. Health education should be included in the curriculum of adult literacy programmes as adult learners are more interested in information related to their health and general wellbeing
2. There should be a conscious effort at packing and dishing out information to adult learners through radio and television as these means as proven to be the best medium through which adult learners seek information.
3. There should be sensitization on library use for adult learners and the inherent benefits in terms of the potential in library materials to support their literacy skills acquisition.
4. Library or information centres should be located close to their literacy centres
5. In packaging information for adult learners, there must be a consideration for appropriate language that elicits the interest of the learners to the information most especially the use of indigenous languages.
6. Further study on information needs and information seeking pattern of learners in adult literacy programmes in Nigeria should involve a larger number of participants across the six geopolitical zones of the country for better generalization for the whole country.

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