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**INFORMATION ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION TO DISTANCE  
LEARNING STUDENTS IN THE NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF  
NIGERIA, IBADAN STUDY CENTRE, IBADAN, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*The study investigated how information was acquired and disseminated and the challenges that distance learning students may encounter during their academic programmes. A survey method was used and the study population was made up of distance learning students and staff of the National Open University of Nigeria. Random sampling technique was adopted to select 229 as sample size. Questionnaire and interview were the instruments employed to collect data collected which was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that friends and colleagues, lecturers, textbooks and the Internet and electronic databases were the major sources of information available and accessible to the students (68.7- 87.9%). Information was acquired mostly from friends and colleagues (93.8%), textbooks (85.2%), staff of the centre (82.7%), internet and electronic databases (77.1%) and library (72.0%). The major information sources used for disseminating information were friends and colleagues (89.2%) and staff of the centre (85.1%). The major challenges to their information acquisition and dissemination were lack of relevant information in the library (62.7%) and inadequate sources of information (62.6%). The interview revealed that the students' unwillingness to check the notice board for information was due to inadequate time. The distance learning students acquired information from different sources and information was disseminated to them through different sources. The problem encountered could be ameliorated through the awareness and provision of current and relevant materials in the library.*

**Keywords:** Information acquisition, information dissemination, distance learning students, Nigeria



## **Introduction**

Education is the greatest force that can be used to bring about changes and the greatest investment that a nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources (UNESCO 2002). It was in realization of this that the Nigerian National Policy on Education (NNPE) was formulated for the country. National Policy on Education (NPE) makes provision for the education of the citizens through primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, nomadic education, teacher education as well as adult education (NPE,1998). Education could be formal or informal, face to face teaching or through distance learning, however, most adult education programmes are carried out through the distance learning.

Fitzpatrick (2001) defined distance learning as the type of education that reaches a broader students audience and which better addresses students' needs, save money, and more importantly uses the principles of modern learning pedagogy. The focus is on the needs of the individual students and is more learner-centered as the learner chooses the place of study, time and pace of learning. Distance education courses that require a physical on-site presence for any reason including the taking of examinations is considered to be a hybrid or blended course of study. This emerging technology is becoming widely used in universities and institutions around the globe (Sankaran & Bui, 2001).

Sacchanand (2002) stressed that distance learning students' characteristics are different from students in traditional universities as they are generally adult learners, mature, employed and have family responsibilities. Distance learning students are self-directed, study on independent basis and learn in a variety of ways. They require information for their academics and information should be acquired and disseminated to them to achieve good academic performance. Such information may include registration of courses, information about the programme and when their lectures commence and where to receive lectures and other important notice.

Distance learners' access information and educational resources and services through various ways (Sacchanand, 2002). Access can be directed e.g. face to face, or mediated by printed material, e.g. manuals, brochure, or mediated by technology, using a variety of media such as telephone, voice mail, web site, email.

Successful direct access is characterized by flexibility, reliability, availability, user-friendly, portability and efficiency. The library also provides essential support services to distance learning students (Mabawonku, 2004) and they normally may demand much use of library resources, audio-visual media and ICT. These are essential for communicating with a large group of people especially in distance locations and also make for interactive sessions with groups and individual students. On the other hand, the distance learners also need to read all kinds of texts and information materials when they are not in school to prepare them for the course content and examinations. Thus, they need to use library and information centers for reading and for information search.

Information dissemination through resources and programmes requires the use of media such as print, audio-visual and electronic. Examples of print media are textbooks, course materials, reference materials, circular, letters etc. Audio media include radio, audio cassette, telephone, voice mail, and audio conferences, while video distributed media include video tape, satellite delivery, and microwave; broadcast video, desktop video and all these could be integrated multi-media through ICT. Access to information could also be provided to the distance learning students through the digital libraries (Gertz, 2000).

There are some problems that may affect the way distance learners acquire information and the way information is disseminated to them in Nigeria (Oladokun, 2002). Problems such as poor infrastructural facilities like irregular power supply, poor and unstable internet connectivity and poor telecommunication services (Ajidahun, 2004). These technical problems may interrupt the instruction and may create confusion and frustration for both the instructor and students. Other factors include poor management of these distance learning programmes (Obajemu, Ogunyade & Nwoye, 2004) and lack of understanding the programme on the part of the student. For example, the routine practice and idea that course materials will be supplemented by media components of audio cassettes, radio broadcast, and video and that well-equipped study centres will be established at reasonable distance to serve learner within a particular area or region. All these have not materialized in most of our distance education institutions in Nigeria due to the infrastructural problems..



### Statement of the Problem

Distance learning students need to acquire relevant information for their academics from different reliable sources and this can only be achieved through timely information dissemination to them for decision making about their academics. However, there is little knowledge on the study of information acquisition and dissemination by the National Open University of Nigeria, Ibadan study centre and their students in Nigeria despite the fact that research studies abound on other closely related issues. The study therefore sought to investigate how the distance learners acquire information, how information is dissemination to them and challenges faced by them in their quest for information.

### Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study include to:

- (i) examine the type of information available and accessible to distance learners at the National Open University of Nigeria;
- (ii) examine how information is acquired by National Open University of Nigeria;
- (iii) determine the frequency of acquisition and dissemination of information by National Open University of Nigeria;
- (iv) investigate the information dissemination procedure to students by National Open University of Nigeria
- (v) identify the challenges encountered in information acquisition and dissemination at the National Open University of Nigeria.

### Methodology

The survey method was employed for this study. The population for the study comprised both students and staff of the National Open University, (NOUN) Ibadan study centre. The University had five schools Law, Education, Arts and Social Science, Science and Technology and Business and Human Resources with a student population of 2,284. The simple random sampling technique and a sampling fraction of 10% was used to get a sample size of 227 (Table 1). Data was collected with the aid of a questionnaire and interview schedule. The questionnaire was administered to the students, while interview was conducted for the

NOUN staff involved in admissions and student information sections of the centre. The data collected was analysed using simple descriptive statistics.

**Table 1. Population and sample size**

Schools	Population	Sample Size
Law	363	36
Education	273	27
Art & Social-Science	634	63
Science and Tech.	703	70
Business and Human Resources	311	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,284</b>	<b>227</b>

## Results and Discussion

### Questionnaire Administration

A total of two hundred and twenty seven copies of the questionnaire were administered to the students and 205 copies were duly filled and used for analysis giving a response rate of 90.3%.

### Demographic characteristics of respondents

Most of the respondents, 93(46.7%) were in the age range 26 to 35, while the age range that had the least respondents was 56 and above with only one respondent (Table 2). There were more males (109, 53.7%) than females (94, 46.3%) respondents. About one third of the respondents (73) were in 100 level, while only three respondents representing 1.5% were in their final year of study. Most of the respondents were single (165) representing 81.7%, while only seven (3.5%) were widowed (Table 2). For the highest educational qualification, respondents with SSCE/GCE were found to be the highest (105) and the least was a respondent with a master degree (0.5%). Majority of respondents were self-employed (100), while only 25 were civil servants (Table 2).

### Information Availability and Accessibility to Distance Learners

Different sources of information such as lecturers, official publications, friends and colleagues, journals and the Internet were available to the students (Table 3). However from table 3, those sources that were readily and very readily available to the students were friends and



colleagues (84.2%), lecturers (83.3%), textbooks (81.9%) and the Internet and electronic databases (76.6%).

**Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents**

Variables		Frequency	Percentage %
<b>Age</b>	18-25 years	83	41.7
	26-35 years	93	46.7
	36-45 years	20	10.1
	46-55 years	2	1.0
	56 and Above	1	0.5
<b>Sex</b>	Male	109	53.7
	Female	94	46.3
<b>Level of study</b>	100	73	37.2
	200	63	32.1
	300	36	18.4
	400	21	10.7
	500	3	1.5
<b>Marital status</b>	Single	165	81.7
	Married	30	14.9
	Widow	7	3.5
<b>Highest Educational background</b>	SSCE/GCE	105	53.3
	OND/ NCE	78	39.6
	First degree/HND	13	6.6
	Masters	1	0.5
<b>Occupation</b>	Self employed	100	80.0
	Civil servant	25	20.0

**Table 3. Availability of Information Sources to Respondents**

Information sources	VRA		RA		NRA		NA	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Lecturers	77	41.6	77	41.6	26	14.1	5	2.7
Official publications (bulletins, memos)	54	30.0	88	48.9	28	15.6	10	5.6
Friends and colleagues	82	42.9	79	41.3	20	10.5	10	5.2
Newspapers/magazines	34	19.2	51	28.8	76	42.9	16	9.0
Journal	28	16.2	41	23.7	86	49.7	18	10.4
Reference sources	53	31.0	46	26.9	62	36.3	10	5.8
Internet and Electronic databases	75	40.1	57	30.5	47	25.1	8	4.3
Library	50	28.7	60	34.5	55	31.6	9	3.4
Conferences and Workshops papers	20	12.1	49	29.7	73	44.2	23	13.9
Newsletters	21	12.6	51	30.5	68	40.1	27	16.2
Radio/TV broadcasts	36	20.7	44	25.3	71	40.8	23	13.2
Textbooks	74	39.3	80	42.6	25	13.3	2	1.1

**KEY**

VRA: Very Readily Available; RA: Readily Available; NRA: Not Readily Available; NA: Not available

Some information sources had a not readily availability and not availability range of 51.9 – 60.1%, so they were not readily available to the distance learners. They included Newspapers/magazines, journal, conference and workshop papers, newsletter and Radio/TV (Table 3).

This could be due to the non availability of these sources in the centre's library and the non use of Radio/TV as a means of communicating information to the students.

The findings for the accessibility of information sources to the distance learning students revealed that lecturers (87.9%), friends and colleagues (85.1%), textbooks (80.2%) and the Internet and electronic databases (68.7%) were the information sources readily accessible to them (Table 4). This finding is supported by Aregbeyen (2005) who opined that ICT allows access to different information sources worldwide. However, the major information sources that were not readily accessible to them were newspapers/magazines, journal and reference sources. Others included conference and workshop papers, newsletter and Radio/TV (Table 4).

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**Table 4. Accessibility of Information Sources to Respondents**

Information sources	VRA		RA		NRA		NA	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Lecturers	95	52.2	65	35.7	18	9.9	4	2.2
Official publications	63	34.1	62	33.5	52	28.1	8	4.3
Friends and colleagues	104	55.3	56	29.8	16	8.5	12	6.4
Newspapers/magazines	40	22.2	33	18.3	81	45.0	26	14.4
Journal publications	29	16.8	40	23.1	72	41.6	32	18.5
Reference sources	41	23.6	37	21.3	83	47.7	13	7.5
Internet and Electronic databases	85	45.7	39	21.0	47	25.3	15	8.1
Library	54	30.2	78	43.6	39	21.8	8	4.5
Conferences and Workshops papers	12	6.9	62	35.4	71	40.6	30	17.1
Newsletters	34	19.3	39	22.2	75	42.6	28	15.9
Radio/TV broadcasts	51	28.8	36	20.3	64	36.2	26	14.7
Textbooks	84	48.8	54	31.4	29	16.9	5	2.9

**KEY**

VRA: Very Readily Accessible; RA: Readily Accessible; NRA: Not Readily Accessible; NA: Not Accessible

**Acquisition of Information**

The respondents agreed that the major sources which they acquire information from were centre staff, friends and colleagues and lecturers. Others included newspaper/magazines, the Internet and

electronic databases and the library with a percentage range of 68.3 – 93.8 (Table 5). The sources of information that were used the least for information acquisition by the respondents were conference and workshop papers (48.0%), reference sources (46.1%) and journals (46%) as the respondents disagreed to their being major sources of information (Table 5). The librarian and the ICT officer revealed that the distance learning students could acquire information from the institution's library.

**Table 5. Sources of Information Acquisition**

Sources	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Centre staff	73	38.2	85	44.5	28	14.7	5	2.6
Friends and colleagues	83	42.3	101	51.5	9	4.6	3	1.5
Lecturers	51	27.0	81	42.9	49	25.9	8	4.2
Newspapers/magazines	45	24.6	80	43.7	39	21.3	19	10.4
Journals	20	11.1	77	42.8	59	32.8	24	13.3
Reference sources	25	13.9	72	40.0	61	33.9	22	12.2
Internet and Electronic databases	86	46.7	56	30.4	36	19.6	6	3.3
Library	53	28.5	81	43.5	40	21.5	12	6.5
Conferences and Workshops papers	27	15.1	66	36.9	66	36.9	20	11.1
Newsletters	12	6.8	76	42.9	73	41.2	16	9.0
Radio/TV broadcasts	33	18.3	72	40.0	61	33.9	14	7.8
Textbooks	54	29.5	102	55.7	21	11.5	6	3.3

The distance learning students acquired information daily from friends and colleagues (56.4%) and textbooks (53.9%) and centre staff (43.5%), while the conference and workshop papers (58.2%), journals (55.7%), newsletters (54.7%) and reference sources (50.0%) were rarely and never used as sources for the acquisition of information (Table 6). The result simply implied that most of the distance learning students acquired information to support their learning. The daily use of these information sources was due to their availability to these students as informal sources were more readily accessible to the students.

**Table 6. Frequency of Information Acquisition**

Information sources	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
	No %	No %	No %	No %	No %
Centre staff	70 43.5	42 26.1	28 17.4	20 12.4	1 0.6
Friends and colleagues	97 56.4	47 27.3	19 11.0	7 4.1	2 1.2
Lecturers	57 33.7	53 31.4	24 14.2	30 17.8	5 3.0
Newspapers/magazines	32 20.0	19 11.9	31 19.4	43 26.9	35 21.9
Journal publications	23 14.6	13 8.2	34 21.5	45 28.5	43 27.2
Reference sources	41 25.6	14 8.8	25 15.6	45 28.1	35 21.9
Internet and Electronic databases	68 40.5	24 14.3	47 28.0	20 11.9	9 5.4
Library	58 35.6	18 11.0	38 23.3	27 16.6	22 13.5
Conference & Workshops Papers	10 6.3	3 1.9	53 33.5	52 32.9	40 25.3
Newsletters	28 17.6	11 6.9	33 20.8	39 24.5	48 30.2
Radio/TV broadcasts	42 26.8	14 8.9	24 15.3	43 27.4	34 21.7
Textbooks	89 53.9	22 13.3	21 12.7	9 5.5	24 14.5



**Information Dissemination**

Major sources through which information was disseminated to the distance learning students were friends and colleagues (89.2%), centre staff (85.1%) and textbook (75.8%). Others included the internet and electronic databases (67.9%), lecturers (67.8%), newspapers/magazines (59.0%), Radio/TV broadcast (56%) with percentage range of 56.0 - 89.2 (Table7). Reference sources (54.6%) and conference and workshop papers (53.6%) were acclaimed to be the least used source for dissemination of information to the distance learning students (Table 7). The result of the interview affirmed that the students' interactive portal through the Internet, radio and television broadcasts were the various ways of information dissemination to the distance learners. This was corroborated by Sacchanand (2002) who reported that information should be disseminated to distance learning students in through various media as they learn in a variety of ways.

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Table 7 Sources of Information Dissemination

Sources of Information	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Centre staff	61	32.4	99	52.7	19	10.1	9	4.8
Friends and colleagues	48	25.8	118	63.4	19	10.2	1	0.5
Lecturers	37	20.6	85	47.2	52	28.9	6	3.3
Newspapers/magazines	22	12.2	81	46.8	58	33.5	12	6.9
Journal publications	29	17.2	65	38.5	59	34.9	16	9.5
Reference sources	28	17.4	45	28.0	73	45.3	15	9.3
Internet and Electronic databases	51	27.3	76	40.6	54	28.9	6	3.2
Library	23	13.8	59	35.3	77	46.1	8	4.8
Conferences and Workshops papers	21	11.9	61	34.5	79	44.6	16	9.0
Newsletters	19	11.0	70	40.7	71	41.3	12	7.0
Radio/TV broadcasts	26	15.0	71	41.0	55	31.8	21	12.1
Textbooks	47	26.6	87	49.2	27	15.3	16	9.0

The result revealed that information was disseminated on a daily basis to the distance learning students through friends and colleagues (54.7%), the staff of the centre (43.8%) and the library (41.4%). The result simply implied that most distance learning students of the National Open University of Nigeria Ibadan centre had access to information disseminated to them through the available sources. Radio/TV (54.7%), newsletters (57.3%), reference sources (49.3%) and

textbooks (47.1%) were sources that were rarely and never used to disseminate information to the distance learning students (Table 8). This could be attributed to the sources not readily available and accessible to the distance learning students.

**Table 8. Frequency of Information Dissemination**

Information sources	Daily		Weekly		Monthly		Rarely		Never	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Centre staff	74	43.8	29	17.2	43	25.4	18	10.7	5	3.0
Friends and colleagues	93	54.7	47	27.6	16	9.4	10	5.9	4	2.4
Lecturers	60	36.4	64	38.8	19	11.5	17	10.3	5	3.0
Newspapers/magazines	35	21.7	37	23.0	25	15.5	43	26.7	21	13.0
Journal publications	29	13.7	30	14.2	18	8.5	55	25.9	25	11.5
Reference sources	29	18.4	36	22.8	15	9.5	62	39.2	16	10.1
Library	67	41.4	34	21.0	19	11.7	31	19.1	11	6.8
Conferences & Workshops papers	56	34.8	30	18.6	28	17.4	37	23.0	10	6.2
Newsletters	17	10.7	21	13.2	30	18.9	68	42.8	23	14.5
Radio/TV broadcasts	26	16.0	20	12.3	28	17.2	63	38.7	26	16.0
Textbooks	45	29.0	14	9.0	23	14.8	51	32.9	22	14.2

### Challenges to Information Acquisition and Dissemination

Results showed that there were some challenges that were encountered by the distance learning students in their acquiring information and information disseminated to them (Table 9). The major challenges were lack of relevant information in the library (62.7%), inadequate sources of information (62.6%) and non-availability of relevant information (59.3%). Others included inability to get the relevant information at the right time (58.8%) and inability to satisfy their information needs (53.2%). The librarian and the ICT officer interviewed also highlighted inadequate time to read information on



the notice boards, lack of fund, low bandwidth, distance barrier, and communication conflict between the school and the students as some of the challenges faced by distance learning students in their acquisition and dissemination of information. The result is supported by Oladokun (2002), Ajidahun (2004) and Ajadi and Adeboye (2005) who reported that the problems that inhibit information acquisition and its dissemination in Nigeria are not only technological access that is poor infrastructure, but also financial.

**Table 9. Challenges of Information Acquisition and Dissemination**

Challenges	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Inadequate sources of information	42	23.5	70	39.1	56	31.3	11	6.1
Non-availability of relevant information	58	33.7	44	25.6	41	23.8	29	16.9
Lack of willingness of colleague to disclose vital information	21	11.9	49	27.8	74	42.0	32	18.2
Inability to get the relevant information at the right time	58	32.8	46	26.0	56	31.6	17	9.6
Lack of relevant information sources in the libraries	63	35.6	48	27.1	54	30.5	12	6.8
Inability to satisfy information needs most time	54	30.2	59	33.0	43	24.0	23	12.8

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Information is important to distance learning students for their success in their academic activities, so they need to acquire relevant information from various sources and the centre also has the responsibility of disseminating relevant and timely information to them. The students however face some challenges in their quest for information acquisition and dissemination such as lack of relevant information sources in their library, inadequate information sources and inability to satisfy their information needs. These problems should

therefore be urgently addressed in order to bridge the communication gap between the centre and the students, which may have affect their academic success.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Channels of information acquisition and dissemination should be made more accessible to the distance learners.
2. The students should be made aware of the different information sources through which information may be disseminate to them especially the non-formal sources.

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