

## **Phenomenological Study on the Information Use Pattern of Teacher Librarians in Post-Primary Schools of Rural Areas in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** This was a phenomenological study that investigated the information use pattern of teacher librarians in rural areas of Nigeria. Sixty (60) teacher librarians from public post-primary schools in rural areas of Nigeria were interviewed to determine their experiences in the use of information and factors that contributed to the effective use of information. The phenomenological method was used to analyse the experiences of the teacher librarians in terms of their information use for teaching and learning. The findings indicated that face-to-face contact and print related media were the major information resources used by the teacher librarians. The findings also revealed that despite the barriers, their information use pattern was cyclical, starting from asking, skimming, referral, jotting down, photocopying, focusing, extracting, integrating and storing for further use. The findings of the study also showed that lack of funding, ICT facilities, and electricity, among others were factors that hindered them from having access to and effectively using information. Recommendations were made for the provision of basic information infrastructures to facilitate the information use pattern of teacher librarians in rural areas of Nigeria and for future research.

**Keywords:** Information Use, Information Seeking, Teacher Librarians, Qualitative Study, Phenomenology

### **1. Introduction**

By its definition, information has become a crucial resource that is used for any development process especially in the information age. Information has become a weapon that is used to fight illiteracy, poverty, health, economic and market disadvantages in many communities. Uttor (1999) defined information as data value in planning, decision making and evaluation of any programme. He goes further to say that it is data that have been subjected to some processing functions capable of answering user's queries be it recorded, summarised, or

simply collected that would help decision making. Information, therefore, could be understood as intellectual and artistic content in the form of books, journals, magazines, public and private sector documents of all kinds, whether published for mass circulation or unpublished and restricted or confidential in nature. It is apparent that information is crucial to man's survival.

From the cognitive viewpoint of information science, Eskola, (1998) sees information to be associated with a text modified by a conceptual structure, which underlines the surface structure (e.g. language) of that text. Ingwersen (1995, 1996) subsequently elaborated by defining information as being the result of the transformation of the generator's cognitive structures (by intentionality, model of the recipients' state of knowledge, and in the form of signs), and on the other way round, information is something, a structure, which when perceived may affect and transform the recipient's state of knowledge (Eskola, 1998). Dervin and Nilan (1986) see information as something constructed by human beings. In the context of this study, information will be based on Eskola's definition (1998) i.e., as something which teacher librarians need during their teaching and learning when they construct meaning about the subjects in the process of learning.

## **2. Research Design**

Phenomenology was used in this study because it is a research and philosophical method that attempts to describe and understand life experiences (Husserl, 1962). The teacher librarians described phenomena of information use as they were remembered. The teacher librarians described life experiences and the meanings they attached to these situations. Similar to most phenomenological studies, the present study was designed as a qualitative study using interviews, with a focus on the teacher librarians who practice in the post primary schools in the rural areas of Nigeria. Interview questions focused on the content and pattern of information use from various sources and formats. Questions were also asked about the difficulties related to teacher librarians' information use based on their experiences. The selection of schools and participants was guided by a research interest in deriving rich variation in experiences, and was done based on the teacher librarians who had at least five years' experience in teaching and learning. An explicit condition for participation in the study was an interest in the problems of information use and that participants were prepared to reflect on and reconsider their information use pattern during the teaching and learning process.

In selecting the participants, a set of criteria was developed based on their experiences and ability to use information for teaching and learning as follows:

1. Library use
2. Reputable person
3. Teaching experience for at least five years,
- 4 Awareness with information sources and resources

Altogether, sixty (60) teacher librarians who satisfied one or more of the above criteria were selected within thirty (30) post primary schools. The teacher librarians mainly taught in class 3 to 6. It should be recognized that this study does not concern itself with participants' magnitude, abilities or efficacy to search for information, but rather the nature and quality of their experiences, both inside and outside the library, when they use the information for teaching and learning. There is a possibility that some participants may not actually have performed information searches successfully because they lacked the necessary information literacy skills to do so and were included in the study.

Participants were solicited by their school authorities, using introductions and their supervisors who worked with them. At the time of this contact, the nature of the study was explained, and, if they agreed, an interview was scheduled. All interviews were conducted in person, tape-recorded and transcribed. The interview began by asking the participant to describe an event in which the use of information was demonstrated, the same way that he or she would tell a friend. Further questions were non-leading and open-ended, such as 'Can you tell us more about the type of information sources and resources you prefer for your practice?' and 'Does this feel complete to you?' The interviews were unstructured and ranged from 45 to 60 minutes in length.

Phenomenology relies on two main ways to prevent bias. The first is bracketing, which involves suspending one's preconceptions and presuppositions. This is done by laying them out in as clear and complete a way as possible (Valle et al., 1989). Polkinghorne (1989) describes bracketing as self-reflection by the investigator to examine his or her own beliefs, to become aware of any hidden or potential presuppositions and biases that could change the way the investigator obtains the data and interprets the results. The second method of preventing bias is the use of imaginative variation. This involves playing with the sentences to see if they could have more than one possible meaning. Where a sentence was found to have more than one possible meaning, the protocol was checked to see if other sentences clarified it. When the meaning remained in doubt, participants were asked by email or in person to please explain what they meant, or 'say more about that'.

Analyses of the interviews began by reading all of the participants' descriptions (referred to as protocols) multiple times in their entirety, in order to identify and describe the experiences in the information use pattern of the respondents. Every sentence was then individually examined for possible meanings and implications. Each protocol was then reviewed to identify the experiential statements in the participant's own words. These naturally occurring themes represent specific thoughts, feelings, or perceptions, as expressed by the participants.

The naturally occurring themes were analyzed to determine the conveyed meaning(s), placing them into psychological categories as appropriate. A

synthesis was then made of those constituents that were irreducible elements. All relevant data that occurred during the interviews were worked into the revised, final description. Phenomenological research findings were presented as categories of experiences of the phenomenon that is the object of research. It is important to observe that categories of conceptions are not tied to the different individual interviewees but are composed from the total interview material. This means that various conceptions can be expressed by the same individual.

### **3. Findings of the Study**

Of the sixty (60) respondents, twenty-four (40%) were female and thirty-six (60%) were male; all were from different positions. Twenty-five (41.7%) had taught for more than twenty (20) years, while another eighteen (30%) had taught for (10) ten years or more. Only seven (11.7%) of the respondents had taught between five (5) to ten (10) years and the remaining ten (16.7%) had taught between one (1) to five (5) years. Forty-seven (78.33%) of the respondents indicated teaching to best describe their practice, while eight (13.33%) also expressed that they were engaged in teaching and administration. Only five (8.33%) indicated that they mainly worked in administration. Two (3.33%) of the respondents hold master's degrees in library and information science education, five (8.33%) hold bachelor's degrees in LIS education and the remaining 51(85.01%) respondents hold National Certificate of Education (NCE) certificates with only two (3.33%) holding grade II/SSCE.

When asked about their choice to become teachers, most of the respondents (71.67%) stated that they decided to be in teaching by interest, while twelve (20%) indicated that it was due to lack of employment opportunities and five (8.33%) showed that teaching was the last option for them to make a living.

Five (5) clustered themes emerged from the interviews, which included: library use, types of information sources and resources use, ICT/Internet use, information use and barriers experienced in using the information. These themes are presented with excerpts from some of the teacher librarians' transcripts and they represent the information use pattern based on the experience identified from the interview categories from the respondents.

#### ***Theme 1: Library Use Pattern***

Participants were asked regarding their awareness of the library, types of resources and sources, demonstrating tools and the user's experience of the information seeking process, as illustrated in the quotations below:

*'We are aware of the existence of the library... we have little information resources such as books, non-reference materials, with few newspapers and magazines..., but are not adequate and relevant enough and most of the materials are outdated to satisfy our needs'.*

*'We have no libraries in our school and the community... Most a time we use our own efforts to find materials that we use to teach our students..., government are not providing any assistance with regards to the library development in our area'.*

*'Libraries are very important to teaching and learning but in our case, we teach our students without using any library resources, we use the little knowledge we had or we ask the parents to buy books for the children, if they want their children to learn'.*

*'We have libraries in our school and in the community but merely in name because the materials that constitute the library are almost absent and are outdated'.*

*'We have very good standard school library with relatively new books, new chairs and tables....., but we are lacking the reading culture as most of our students are lacking the skills to visit the library for their class works and reading for pleasure.'*

*'Libraries exist in our school with new facilities and books, with little other resources for consultation, reports atlas and children encyclopaedia... we have mathematics books, fiction and general sciences'.*

The responses to this question showed that teacher librarians have good experiences in the level of awareness of the existence of the library in both the school and their communities coupled with some information resources that are available in the libraries; however, their experience showed that the resources are not adequate and relevant enough to satisfy their information needs. On the usage of the library, their experiences showed that both the school and public libraries could fill their information gaps. Most of the respondents had experience in using both the school and public libraries as their key information. For each of these respondents, one of their positive experiences was that the librarians were highly accessible and had the desire to assist the teacher librarians with the information for their teaching and learning goals.

In the next question, respondents were asked to explain how they access and use information from the library and other sources.

*'We usually go to the libraries... meet our colleagues and headmasters/ school authorities to look for information that help us to teach our pupils....'*

*'We usually ask the librarians.....and also confer with colleagues in our discipline and related disciplines...Increasingly, also, we are asking out local scholars and intellectuals in the community'.*

*'We sometimes ask friends/colleagues in the same school/ community and groups to which we belong.....colleagues from other schools..... We consult with supervisors from local government education authorities and our headmaster'.*

***Themes 2: Types of Information Sources and Resources Use***

Questions about the teacher librarians' experiences on the type of information sources and resources used were asked. Their experiences had shown preference to books as the main information resources they consulted for teaching and learning.

*'We preferred to use books, journal articles, newspaper articles and media as the most important Information sources and resources..... We choose to identify, locate, and use books for our teaching and learning.... because they are available and easy to get..... plus they are easier to access and understand'.*

*'Some sources and resources are more important than others....., but books are the most important in our practice because they are common....., simpler to use and easier to get'.*

*'When using information sources and resources in our practice, especially curriculum development... I preferred to use books....., my colleague's experiences and senior teacher librarians'.*

*'The most important reason for choosing the printed information resources.... is because they are available and easy to get....., also they are the most reliable as equally as truthful of the information sources for teaching and learning'.*

Overall, their experiences in using information showed that they preferred to use printed information resources, and the reasons for this, as stressed by the respondents, was due to availability and easy access. The finding of this study corroborates the findings of Alsuqri (2007), Mundt et al, (2006) and Hoborn (1999) in which they all found that printed resources are preferred over electronic resources. For this study, the following statements illustrate their preference:

*'We preferred to use printed information such as books, journal, magazines/ newspapers.... for our information use because they are the most common materials we found useful to us..... they are available and easy to get and sometimes they are the only materials we can use for the development of curriculum and class teaching'.*

*'We preferred to use books because they are easy to understand ..... and also to our pupils.... they are also very effective for teaching and learning'.*

*'Books become the most important source of information for lesson planning and curriculum developments....., and for improving our teaching methods..... followed closely by colleagues and personal experiences'.*

In addition to the information sources and resources enumerated above, the teacher librarians also identified other information sources and resources that they used for their practices. These included prior teaching experience, observing other teachers, local government education assessments, library and information resources centres, audio-visual and media materials and government's documents (state curriculum and education standards). The last one is particularly important because public teacher librarians are required to refer to state curriculum and educational standards for planning lessons and student evaluation.

With regards to the lack of library and information resources, respondents were asked where and how they access information to keep updated with their teaching and learning practices. However, very few of the respondents indicated that they referred to the Internet, as expressed in the statements below:

*'Even though, in our schools we have libraries....., information resources are merely a story of the pass..... They are not properly organised, scanty and old, most times, the library has turned to be a children's playing ground because of lack of adequate and relevant collections..... In this situation, we either refer to our colleagues or go directly to the headmaster of the schools'.*

*'Our libraries are not school libraries per se..... they could be referred to as reading rooms ..... because by calling them school libraries we are deceiving ourselves..... we have no chairs and tables, no current and adequate books..... the room allocated to be the library is dilapidating.... As such we have no option than to go to the rural library or refer ourselves to friends and use our experiences'.*

*'Our library is having some information resources..... but we have to go beyond the library because not all our needs we can find there..... In order to get required materials that will help us in our teaching ..... most a time, I refer to my colleagues and friends to get information resources because they are more reliable'.*

*'We go directly to book shops and buy..... we photocopy the relevant part or complete/ the whole book if we have money..... We usually photocopy the book when we receive salary otherwise it will not be possible for us to obtain a copy....., we remain with the existing knowledge or information .... i.e. static without update'.*

*'I usually update our knowledge in the absence of library and information resources through brainstorming with colleagues by using our personal experiences.....'*

*'We refer ourselves back radio....., television and the internet/ electronic resources..... even though not much information relevant to our needs can be sorted out from them.... especially the Internet because we have in adequate knowledge and skills to use the Internet'.*

It was also noted that many of the respondents living in rural areas that have libraries were not excited about visiting the library.

*'Even if we go, the tendency for not getting the information resources according to our needs is very high'.*

On the other hand, for those that had no library at all, their case seems to be simpler because they either used their old books and lesson plans, or referred to their colleagues in the school or in the community.

### ***Themes 3: ICT and Internet Use***

Questions were raised as to whether the teacher librarians in rural areas have access to and use the Internet for information search and use. Most of the respondents showed their desire to use the Internet but access was the most cited deterring factor. The result indicates that respondents had experiences with the ICTs except that they do not have much access to the Internet. In addition, their experiences indicated that the majority of public post primary schools did not have Internet connectivity. Their experience also indicated that the most prominent factor hindering them from having the confidence in using ICT is lack of expertise, lack of access as a result of unavailability, and an inadequate number of ICT facilities. Some of the respondents gave the following views:

*'We have no ICTs in our schools..... We have experiences in using them.... We were given training but access to them has been the major problems.... because in all our community we have few places that one can access and use the internet and most a time is very congested'.*

*'Computer centre was established in our schools..... but numbers of computers are small....., they cannot be circulated between we and the students....., therefore we usually sacrificed and leave them to the students....., no Internet connection but they promised to connect us as soon as possible'.*

*'I have no access to ICTs and internet....., in the case of internet, I only hear about it..... but I have not seen it.... they allocated an office telling us this will be our computer and internet centre'.*



*'Lack of knowledge and skills to use the ICTs and the Internet is stopping us from using them..... but in terms of access we have internet connection and computer laboratory in our schools....., and we train our pupils the use of ICTs as subject'.*

**Theme 4: Information Seeking and Use Pattern**

In reference to information seeking and use, respondents were asked to state what they do first when they need information. The statements below explain their own views:

*'If we encounter the need to seek and use information we normally start the process by asking questions from our colleagues..... because they our immediate sources we can lay our hand first..... Followed by we go to the library and asked the librarian ... or browse the shelf or check the catalogue...'*

*'I usually start my information use by reading the books... I skim the pages until I find relevant part that contains the information I need'.*

*'I start by going to the library to ask the librarians..... I move to the catalogue to check and proceed to the shelf and browse the materials I need'.*

*'I used to go directly to the shelves .....or refer myself back to colleagues and friends in the community..... in addition, I ask the school authorities'.*

It is pertinent to note that most respondents portrayed similar experiences in the process of searching and using the information they need, i.e. by following different systematic procedures based on the interest of the respondents. In addition to this process, it was observed that teacher librarians in rural areas of Nigeria portrayed referral behaviours. Their experiences showed three referral processes during their information seeking activities. First, referral from formal information sources to informal (printed to colleagues, friends and individuals in their communities. Second, referral from formal to formal sources of information and third is referral from informal to informal sources.

Respondents shared the followings with regards to the methods they used for identifying and locating relevant information.

*'When looking for information in the library I usually ask the librarians.....I proceeded to check the catalogues....., I move to the shelves..... If gotten the materials..... I usually read and skim the materials to identify the relevant information I need'.*

*'When using the computer or Internet to search for information, first of all, I try to ask the officer in charge..... on the procedures to follow, after getting the materials I read it to extract relevant information from it..... I request*

*information that I need from my colleagues and friends through the e-mail and GSM phones'.*

*'Every time I need information I usually ask my colleagues in the community....., in the school..... I refer myself to other libraries and information centres'.*

*'I locate relevant information in the library by browsing the library catalogues and shelves....., I refer myself to books and collect references from colleagues'.*

*'I used to jot down relevant information.... I locate information from the library or when reading a book..... sometimes I photocopy the relevant areas'.*

*'Every time when I am searching for information I usually focus my attention on one type of subjects and materials at time'.*

*'I start by jotting down the main point of interest.....sometimes photocopy the area of interests for future references'.*

*'Certainly, I use to search through variety of materials..... reading all through the materials and coming back till I locate what I need... Sometimes I use to review whatever information I find'.*

*'I sometimes focus my search on variety of materials... I evaluate the materials whenever I locate relevant information on them.... I evaluate them individually'.*

In the next analysis, respondents were asked to indicate what they do with the information they locate or identify. As can be seen from the following responses, information is not always immediately obtained or applied according to the experiences.

*'Whenever I find relevant information, I use to integrate it for teaching and learning immediately after I locate it..... I will review the information before integrating it'.*

*'I used the information that I found directly into teaching and learning activities..... I evaluate the information before I use it for my lessons plan'.*

*'I stored the information I found within my personal files..... I use it when planning for curriculum developments and class room teaching..... I confer with colleagues on future lesson plan using the new information acquire'.*

*'I use the information materials to supplement the mandatory curriculum guides provided by the school authorities and to develop my lesson plans'.*

According to the participants' experiences, lack of accessible information sources and resources in the rural areas not only hinders them from updating and building their knowledge, but also affects their students. Hence, it was not surprising to find teacher librarians in Nigeria not using information resources for their teaching and learning, but relying only on their past experiences.

***Theme 5: Barriers Experienced in Information Use***

There are challenges and barriers faced by teacher librarians in rural areas of Nigeria in terms of their information use as their experiences indicated. Some of the respondents' views are presented below:

*'Lack of adequate time is the biggest problem..... I usually look for information after school hours and week-ends.... There is never enough time..... students need direction, assistance, guidance and care every minute of the school day'.*

*'School and students' task couple with teaching and curriculum requirements..... Inadequate information resources.....lack of time are major barriers that hinders me from seeking and using information'.*

*'Lack of library and information resources is the major deterring factors to my information seeking and use..... using the Internet to seek for information is frustrating.... Poor quality and overwhelming slow of the network..... Lack of information search skills is another major barrier stopping us from seeking and using information'.*

*'Lack of ability to proactively seek information... lack of support from the school and government are my major deterring factors limiting me from seeking and using information for teaching and learning..... Lack of adequate income and finance are also other major factors that restrict my information seeking and use process'.*

Income and financial limitations were among the major barriers experienced by the respondents in terms of their information use. Similarly, this is also a major factor affecting adequate supply or provision for information resources. Lack of adequate and current books on classroom lesson plans available in the libraries, and in most of the post primary schools, were other factors experienced by the teacher librarians.

**4. Discussion of Findings**

From the above findings, it could be said that the major barriers experienced by the teacher librarians in rural areas of Nigeria is the provision of information infrastructural facilities, especially academic support facilities such as the books, Internet connectivity, and income. However, beyond the problem of facilities is the way teacher librarians organise their own information for teaching and learning, how they identified resources for the academic information needed for them to excel.

Information gathering and use could be a challenging and an arduous task for the teacher librarians in rural areas of Nigeria. They are usually loaded with many assignments and class teachings, which required them to look for information on their own, in an environment that seems academically unfriendly as there are very limited sources. Printed information resources were the most consulted sources among the plethora of sources listed in this study. It is striking to note that teacher librarians in rural areas of Nigeria have little or no access to the Internet facilities, and they utilise the same resources for their teaching and learning even though at a very minimal level. This seemingly growing dependence on printed resources calls for urgent action in the provision of better library facilities. This could explain why teacher librarians in this study did not rate the school library as the most preferred avenue to get information sources.

It may be postulated that the teacher librarians actually found it easier to locate printed resources than searching through the Internet and the library, a task which may seem laborious. Fidzani (1998) also reported that there was a heavy reliance on library books and journals in Botswana. This perhaps is an indication that the school libraries in rural areas of Nigeria have not progressed yet from the traditional, paper-based library environment to that of an electronic or hybrid library. It may also be reasoned that appropriate library education programs need to be put in place to assist the teacher librarians further in accessing and using library information. The expectation is that when teacher librarians are fully informed about the potential of the libraries and information use, they will make use of them more.

Though teacher librarians in this study used information in their practice, they found it difficult to get information and had to be satisfied with whatever information facilities were provided by the government. Basically, most respondents have explained what they do to remedy the situation when they do not have libraries and information resources in their schools. It is pertinent to note that things are changing for the better as observations by the researchers' shows that the Nigerian government is making giant strides to reverse the situation. Observations have shown that more funds were released to the state level through the Educational Trust Fund (ETF) to rehabilitate, establish and supply current and more materials to the school libraries in rural areas of Nigeria. In addition, the government has also considered providing Internet connectivity in primary schools even though the process is moving at a snail's speed.

While it may be plausible to argue that a majority of the respondents indicated positive responses to most of the parameters examined, it might be dangerous to dismiss those who were neither using information, nor had access to information. More facilities are still needed, especially, in the provision of adequate and current books, and more computers with Internet connectivity for teacher librarians to use. From the above findings and discussion, it is quiet

glaring that, Nigerian teacher librarian's information use pattern was derived from various sources and resources, applying different methods to identify and locate information. There are eight processes they follow when they are using the information for teaching and learning. The following framework summarizes the information use pattern.

1. **Asking:** This is the first process by which teacher librarians embark on their information use. This process is done by asking colleagues, librarians, scholars in the community, friends, and family, especially those who have the knowledge of the types of information the teacher librarians need. This process helps them to identify the physical location or environment through which they can locate or identify the needed information with regards to teaching and learning.
2. **Reading/Skimming:** Having identified the relevant information, whether in printed or electronic format, teacher librarians continue the process by reading the entire documents or skimming the pages to identify the relevant contents they need. This process helps them to understand and evaluate the contents of the information.
3. **Referral:** This process deals with making references to other information sources and resources i.e. colleagues, other libraries, community, friends/family etc. When the earlier identified information could not satisfy their information need, the teacher librarians quickly referred themselves back to one of the above-mentioned sources.
4. **Jotting down/Photocopying:** Having found the information they need, the teacher librarians tried to read it from cover to cover, or skim the pages and jot down the relevant points that captured their interest. In some cases, they photocopied the relevant pages for future use, especially if they did not have the money to acquire a copy of the materials.
5. **Focusing:** In using the relevant information, the teacher librarians concentrate or focus on one material or subject matter at a time, identifying the relevant information to consume before proceeding to other material.
6. **Extracting:** In this process, the teacher librarians remove the exact contents of information that they put into use for their teaching and learning. This process proved to be the most difficult part of their information use.
7. **Integrating:** The extracted information is integrated into their lessons plans, curriculum review and development, class room teaching, updating their knowledge, entertainment and other daily activities.

8. **Storage:** Finally, the information is stored for future consultation and reference services.

In a nutshell, the information use pattern of the teacher librarians is a cyclical process, rotating from one step to another. The cycle will repeat itself as in addressing future information needs, as the teacher librarians will first refer to their personal information storage medium.

## **5. Conclusion**

Evidence from this study indicated that the teacher librarian's information needs in rural Nigeria varied according to demographic factors, other various activities, and availability of information sources and resources. They mainly referred to printed information sources and their colleagues. There was high reliance on printed books, magazines, journals compared to electronic information sources for teaching and learning activities. Availability, easy access, trustfulness, and reliability were among the reasons given for the preference.

The issue of quality in primary education in Nigeria has become more paramount now because primary education, in particular, is the level of education that develops individuals' capacity to read, write and calculate. In other words, it helps to eradicate illiteracy, being one of the strongest predictors of poverty, which is very common in rural areas (Bruns, Mingat & Rakotamalala, 2003). In tackling the problem of quality education, therefore, it is imperative that the provision of adequate library facilities and relevant information infrastructure be the focus. Teacher librarians in public primary schools in Nigeria need information for their teaching and learning activities and this cannot be taken for granted. A well-articulated and sustained effort is required to provide adequate information material and ICT facilities in public primary schools in Nigeria.

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