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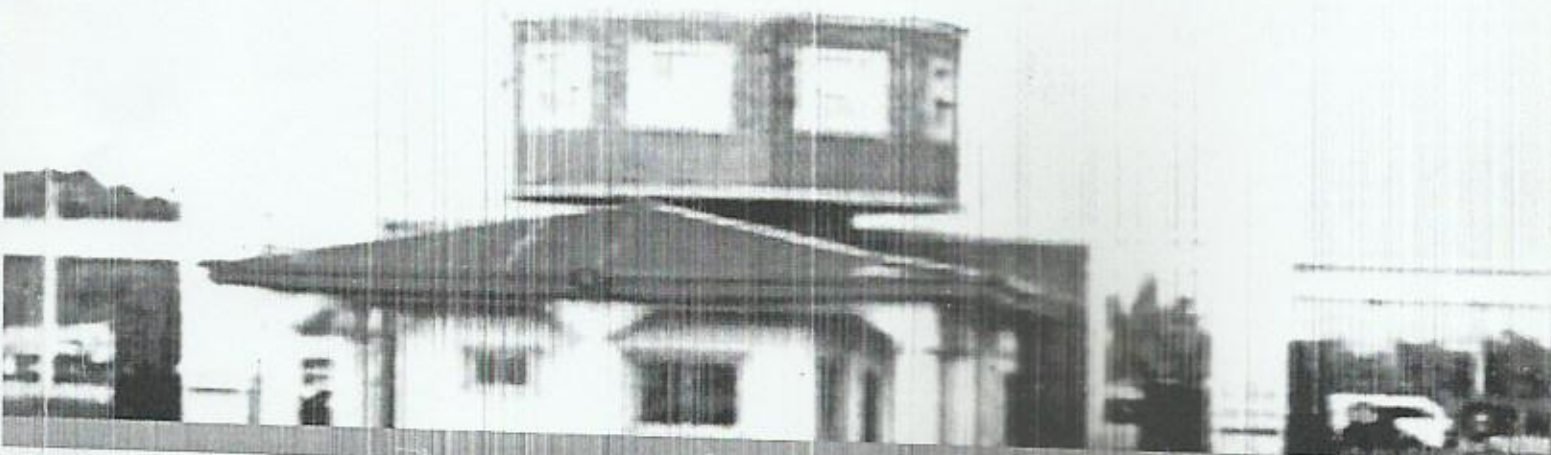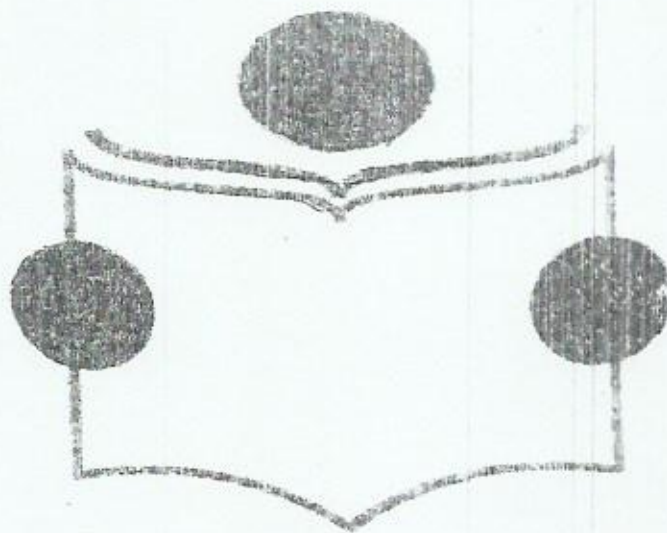# LITERACY AND READING IN NIGERIA

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LITERACY AND READING IN NIGERIA

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EDITORIAL

The Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN) is an affiliate of the International Reading Association. The association was inaugurated at the end of an International seminar on Reading held in Zaria from August 9 to 13 1982 by the institute of Education Ahamadu Bello University, Zaria.

The Association had held fourteen biennial conferences and three midterm conferences. It published quality articles which were peered reviewed from the articles presented at the conferences. This edition is a the fifteenth publication emanating from the last conference. It is a special edition because the papers published were selected from the papers presented during the third midterm conference held at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

The midterm conference threw its search light on **Literacy, Learning Spaces, Strategies and Opportunities in the Information Age.**

This 15th edition contains well researched position and empirical articles which will enrich readers' knowledge in their chosen fields.

Professor Gabriel Oyinloye
National President
Reading Association of Nigeria

Contents

Global Information Literacy for Entrepreneurship: the Experience of Undergraduates.

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Abstract

Literacy has gone beyond the ability to read and write since anyone who is unable to operate the computer is said not to be computer literate. The computer is a veritable tool for transacting business among countries of the world. Entrepreneurship requires that the entrepreneur or the prospective entrepreneur has access to information that will enhance his business and enable him to succeed. Since the business world has been brought together by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), it is mandatory that an entrepreneur becomes computer literate in order to take advantage of modern technology, particularly those which are used for information search. Similarly, the student of entrepreneurial studies is expected to seek information that is relevant to his training in entrepreneurship. The thrust of this paper, therefore, is to evaluate the level of global information literacy among undergraduates who are being prepared for entrepreneurship in a bid to eliminate graduate unemployment and provide a knowledge base for job creation. The acquisition of information search skill is considered an important avenue for ensuring economic freedom and national development. (176 words).

Key words: Information Literacy. Information and Communication Technology. Global Entrepreneurial Studies, Entrepreneurship.

Introduction

Information literacy can be traced to Paul G. Zurkowski, in 1974 when he was the president of the Information Industry Association. According to him, "information is not knowledge; it is concepts or ideas which enter a person's field of perception, are evaluated and assimilated reinforcing or changing individual's concept of reality…" (Badke, 2013). This means that information has to be manipulated in order to acquire knowledge. It will need to be evaluated in line with the individual's values. Information literacy is suggestive of a search for information in order to broaden one's knowledge for a better quality of life. The American Library Association (2013) defines information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." Limberg, Sundin and Talja (2012) view it as "the ability to search for, select, critically evaluate and using information for solving problems in various contexts, such as independent project work in schools". To Huvila, it is an intellectual framework for identifying, finding, understanding, evaluating and using information. The Business Dictionary defines information literacy as the "ability to define problems in terms of their information needs, and to apply a systematic approach to search, locate, apply, and synthesize the information and evaluate the entire process in terms of effectiveness and efficiency". After an examination of the definitions of information literacy by various scholars. Wolf (2013), concludes that common themes found in the definitions include the ability to recognize that information should be used to solve problems, the importance of basic information retrieval skills, the ability to be critical in the information use process and the ability to use information to across contexts or subject areas".

Thus, an information literate person is anyone who has learnt to access various sources of information in order to solve work related problems or daily living. The individual must be able to identify the information that is required, know where to obtain it and decide on when it is needed. Information literacy requires the ability to interpret information, filter it if need be, and use it effectively and efficiently.

Sourcing for information is not strange to the Nigerian public as well as students. Even in the 1960s when the computer was unknown to most Nigerians, the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service introduced rediffusion (an information disseminating gadget). It was possible to listen to educational programmes on the good old red box which was mounted on the wall of almost every classroom for students to have access to information.

Access to information in the twenty-first century has been made very easy globally through the World Wide Web which, according to Head (2008), was introduced by Timothy Berners-Lee in 1989. It has helped to create inter-connectivity among all the countries of the world.

The information super-highway such as the internet allows everyone to gain access to various types of information including music, videos, pictures as well as written materials. The World Wide Web has made global connectivity a reality such that it is possible to have access to information about virtually any subject under the sun. It is very easy to access information on the internet as a matter of seconds. More recently, Web 2.0 was introduced. Apart from the possibility of downloading information, it is possible to upload materials the internet for others to use. Information is expected to enlighten people about a subject matter. Hence, every requires the skill to know where to get the particular information and the ability to differentiate information from 'bad information'. Swanson (2010), assert that the internet, among other media sources, is full of inaccuracies, opinions, speculation and outright lies just as it contains true information. The user must be able to filter the accurate from the inaccurate information.

In the face of crippling unemployment among Nigerian youths which has necessitated the introduction of entrepreneurial studies into undergraduate curriculum, it is absolutely necessary that the undergraduate is information literate. Alarape (2008), made the assertion that unemployment rate, it is on the rise in spite of government policies and institutional support to reduce unemployment rate, it is on the rise. The unemployment situation has been brought about partly (and to a large extent) by lack of skills among university graduates. Information literacy will enable the individual get ahead of others and ensure that he is gainfully employed in order to contribute meaningfully to national development. It is with this at the background that this paper presents the theoretical rationale and the empirical findings of a research project on the status of information literacy among Nigerian students.

The paper is structured into four sections with introduction as one. Part two dwells on information literacy skills and three focuses on the role of information literacy in entrepreneurial studies and relevance to entrepreneurship while four presents the findings of a study which assesses the level of information literacy among Nigerian undergraduates who have been introduced to entrepreneurial studies.

Information Literacy Skills

There is an ever widening gap between information that is usable and information that is available to us (Davis 2012). Many undergraduate simply download information from the internet without verifying the source or authenticity of such information. It is their belief that coming from the internet, the information has to be accurate. Many have not stopped to consider the fact the viruses are written programmes camouflaged as information which unsuspecting users download. McAskill (2008), identified 5 steps in the information literacy process. They are:

1. Recognise information needs
2. Locate and evaluate quality of information
3. Store and retrieve information
4. Make effective and ethical use of information
5. Apply information to create and communicate knowledge.

Stanford University (2003-2013), asserts that an information literate person should be able to:

- determines the nature and extent of information needed
- access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system

- use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- understands many of the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

From the foregoing it is evident that information literacy is not the preserve of undergraduates who seek information to do assignments or write projects. Apart from academic work, those in social circles, government and business, all need information literacy for their daily living and for interaction with people in other parts of the world.

The Role of Information Literacy in Entrepreneurial Studies and Relevance to Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been variously defined by Gana (2001), as "the ability to seek investment opportunities and establish an enterprise based on identified opportunities". To Abruga (2011), it is:

> The initiative and voluntary act of managing risk and assuming
> responsibility in transforming creativity and innovation to unique products
> for the purpose of providing effective and efficient solutions to consumers,
> while achieving long-term profitability and contributing growth to the
> economy as a whole.

Garba (2010).suggests that in spite of the various definitions "there are some common aspects such as risk taking, creativity, independence and rewards.

Entrepreneurship as a concept is knowledge based. Therefore, it requires that those who study it in any higher institution be enlightened enough to recognise the need to search for information. To do this, they must identify the type of information that is required for a particular purpose, where to search for the information, the ability to evaluate and interpret that information, and how to apply it in order to achieve the set purpose.

Moreover, entrepreneurship requires clear cut goal definition which should be stated in terms of the mission and vision of that organisation. With a focus on the vision, the entrepreneur along with the management team will have well defined reasons for sourcing for information, the purpose such information is meant to serve and how to go about utilising it. It will enable them to buy into it. It will also make it possible for the entrepreneur to create and post advertisements on the website of the business organisation and visit the website of clients or customers, suppliers and competitors to gather information.

Many people tend to mix up entrepreneurship with small scale business. Small scale business only needs a minimal amount of money to set it up while entrepreneurship requires huge take-off capital. The entrepreneur who has probably obtained a loan requiring the payment of interest or sought the contributions of others, whom he has brought on board as shareholders, cannot afford to trifle with such funds. Until and unless an entrepreneur becomes information literate, s/he will be toying with insolvency. The information s/he is able to gather would often form the basis of decision making in such important areas as: personnel to engage, what to produce, where to produce it, how tom produce it, sources of raw materials, the best source of funding, markets for the finished products, competitors in the same market, management of the organization and much more.

Information and Communication Technology has pushed business interaction beyond local frontiers. With e-payment it is now easy to order goods from abroad or export goods to other countries, using the internet as a means of communication. Moreover, undergraduates who are being prepared for entrepreneurship must be well grounded in information literacy because the quality of information has implications for the quality of information literacy (Kerr, 2009). Education is all about information. The amount of information that has been assimilated stands an undergraduate in good stead and he should be able to fall back on it when the need arises in future.

This study presents the report of a survey whose purpose was to assess the level of information literacy among Nigerian undergraduates who have been introduced to entrepreneurial studies. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. determine the accessibility of students to the computer
2. determine the extent and frequency of students' use of the computer
3. assess the ability of students to source for information

4. identify weaknesses and gaps in the use of information literacy.
5. propose changes to the curriculum of Entrepreneurial Studies on the basis of (1) to (4) above that will ensure the attainment of desired objectives.

Methodology

The survey employed a qualitative method. A questionnaire and an interview guide validated by a team of experts and subjected to inter-rater reliability used for data gathering. The questionnaire has three parts. Section A sought demographic data, B requested for information on variables on interest in the study while section C sought suggestions for remedying the weaknesses. The interview guide was used for focus group discussions patterned along the lines of the interview.

Procedure

The procedure for data collection was the administration of the questionnaire and the application of the interview guide on an individual rather than group basis. The interview took the form of a structured discussion based on issues related to the study.

The return rate of the questionnaire was 100%. 400 level undergraduates in the Department of Business Education of a University in Lagos State were selected for the study through the stratified sampling technique. The choice of this category of students was on the basis of their knowledge of entrepreneurship, being a course content in their curriculum.

Research Findings
Result of the Qualitative Study

Data collected were analysed in line with the four research questions.
Question one states, "Is the number of undergraduates who have access to and able to use the computer higher than those who do not"? From the responses, it was discovered that 18 out of the 20 students are computer literate although one of them said "very little" while only two are unable to operate the computer. Of the twenty undergraduates, 8 own computers while the other 12 have none. Thirteen students know what it is to be computer literate while the statement does not make any meaning to the remaining seven. Eight of them agreed that a well educated person who does not know how to use the computer could be labelled illiterate while the other twelve disagreed.

Question two states, "Is the number of undergraduates who have access to and able to use the internet higher than those who have none"? Fourteen students were able to describe the internet while six were unable to. Only two of the students do not have e-mail addresses while the other 18 have and supplied the addresses. One of the students is ignorant of what is meant by website since that student has never had access to a website. Two of those who claimed to have accessed websites are interested mainly in the social network such as facebook and twitter. Fourteen mentioned search engines from which it is possible to access websites, three were able to mention websites while one had no idea of what it is to access a website.

Question three goes thus "To what extent are undergraduates able to source for information? All the students are familiar with the Global System for Mobile communications as all the 20 students are able to send text messages. Most of the students are aware of sources of information apart from the electronic media as they visit libraries within and outside their campus. . In fact 15 out of the twenty students own personal libraries. Only two students are aware of any journal on entrepreneurship in the library while the other eighteen have never searched for one. A student actually claimed to have visited the library only once in four years

Question four states, "What is the level of interest of undergraduates in sourcing for information"? Nine out of the 20 Business Education students who were interviewed could not define 'entrepreneurship' while the other eleven did. Only four are aware of government's policy on entrepreneurial studies. The other 16 are not. Five of the students were able to define 'information literacy' while the remaining 15 were unable to define it. All the students were ignorant of the website of the university. Two were able to state the post office box of their institution but the remaining 18 could not. Not a single student knew the name of the vice-chancellor of their institution. Fourteen could differentiate between a vice-chancellor and a provost but seven could not.

The table below further clarifies the result of the study.

Table 1: Frequency Counts of Responses on Information Literacy of University Undergraduate

S/N	ITEM	POS. RESP.	%	NEG. RESP.	%
1.	Can you use a computer?	18	90	02	10
2.	Do you own a personal computer?	08	40	12	60
3.	What does it mean to be computer literate?	13	65	07	35
4.	Is it proper for a well- educated person who does not know how to use the computer to be labelled 'illiterate'? Yes/No. Why?	08	40	12	60
5.	How would you describe the internet?	14	70	06	30
6.	What is your e-mail address?	18	90	02	10
7.	Which site do you access on the internet?	19	95	01	05
8.	How often do you send text messages	18	90	02	10
9.	What are the sources from which a student studying entrepreneurship can obtain information?	18	90	02	10
10.	Apart from the college library, which other library do you visit?	15	85	03	15
11.	How many books do you have in your personal library?	15	75	05	25
12.	What is entrepreneurship?	11	55	09	45
13.	Which entrepreneurship journal do you have in the college library?	02	10	18	90
14.	What is the policy of Nigeria government concerning entrepreneurship studies at the tertiary education level?	04	20	16	80
15.	How would you explain the term 'information literacy'?	05	25	15	75
16.	What is the website address of your university?	0	00	20	100
17.	What id Post Office Box or Bag of your institution?	02	10	18	90
18.	What is the different between a Vice-Chancellor and a Provost?	14	70	06	30
	TOTAL SCORES	204	53.97	174	46.03

Positive response   =   53.97%
Negative response   =   46.03%

Even though they are close, it can be concluded that positive response are greater than negative responses. Looking at the overall result, the conclusion is that more Business Education students exhibit information literacy behaviour that those who do not belong to that category.

Discussion of Results

The outcome of research question one, reveals that in spite of the fact that only 8 of the 20 students own personal computers, 18 of them have the ability to operate computers. Ideally every one of them should be able to operate it. It was expected that as Business Education students, all of them would be able to make informed comments on computer literacy but many of them are not even aware of what computer literacy means. Apart from that, the students are mostly young people. Youths are usually outgoing and quite sociable. Apart from academics information literacy also

affects the social lives of individuals. This should allow them to have a better quality of life. In situations where students are unable to comprehend the lecturers' explanation on any topic during a lecture, they are expected to have recourse to computer-mediated resources. It is also possible to contact others through computer-mediated communication, requiring the use of a computer with internet connectivity. It breaks down geographical barriers, it is cheap and can be accessed at any time of the day or night (Wikipedia 2006). The fashion in the present day education system is for learner-centred education which should make access to learning materials beyond the classroom available. Among such materials are e-books.

The second research question is about internet use. More students were able to describe the internet than those who could not. Information and Communication Technology has become so wide-spread in the last two decades that one finds it a bit curious that about 30% of the undergraduates studying Business Education could not describe the internet. Nghiem (2010), opines that the advent of the internet, as well as, ICT have had critical influence on people's working, learning and living contexts. Every undergraduate is expected to need the internet at one time or the other for obtaining information for their assignments. Apart from that, most, if not all higher institutions, require students to register for their courses on-line at the beginning of every semester. Even their West African Examination Council results as well as Joint Admission and Matriculation Board entrance examination results can only be accessed on-line. In a situation where a student is unable to use the internet, s/he is expected to be able to describe it with the way information flies around. Their inability to describe it could be traced to lack of interest in education and in their environment. It was taken for granted that the present day youths who have unfettered access to the internet will all have e-mail addresses. One wonders how it is possible that an undergraduate does not have an e-mail address which is free of charge. If it had to be paid for, their inability to pay might have been a tenable excuse for not having an e-mail address. Many people who do not have the opportunity of seeing the four walls of a university have and maintain e-mail addresses. To find that an undergraduate who has a circle of course-mates and friends around the campus and beyond has none must have stemmed from indifference. It is hard to believe that a student who has been in the university for four years has never accessed a website. Of those who visited the internet, two were only interested in face book and twitter. Many of them have Blackberries from which they ping. Fourteen mentioned such search engines as Google and yahoo but only three actually pinpointed websites from which they collected information.

The result of question four which deals with the level of interest of undergraduates in sourcing for information was far from positive. It should therefore not come as a surprise if after graduation these students find it difficult to get jobs. It appears that most of them lack the skill to contribute to the upliftment of a business organisation. Put bluntly, it may be more accurate to talk of graduate unemployability than graduate unemployment in a situation where all the 20 undergraduates interviewed were unable to furnish answers to basic questions such as the website of their institution, and the name of their Vice-Chancellor. Only two of them knew the post office box of their university. This is an information age in which some people have come up with the phrase, 'information explosion'. Davis (2012), and Koltay (2012), refer to 'information overload' yet; students do not appear to be interested in taking advantage of the free flow of information. Fourteen of them could differentiate between a Vice-Chancellor and the Provost of an institution. The reasoning behind the introduction of entrepreneurship into the undergraduate curriculum was to produce graduates who, instead of becoming job seekers, will be employers of labour. Nearly half of these same undergraduates who are being prepared for self-employment were unable to define 'entrepreneurship'. Seventy-five per-cent of the students are unaware of government's policy on entrepreneurship education, yet they attend the lectures. Fifteen of them had never heard the phrase 'information literacy' and could therefore not define it. This could be due to apathy. Wolf (2006-2013), believes that information literate students are students who recognise the need for information in solving problems. A student who is interested in education is expected to seek information on every course of study, either on his own or by asking the lecturer.

Conclusion

The study which sought to align the overt behaviour of undergraduates with best practice in order to make an informed judgement on their level of information literacy has been able to draw conclusions. Information is available and is expanding at an unprecedented rate. The internet is replete with information on any subject imaginable but there is a need for the user to conceptualise the information. The fact remains that an undergraduate who hopes to become a successful entrepreneur must be information literate. S/He must be able to leverage on computer mediated resources, especially the internet to get connected with people around the globe. The opportunity provided by Information and Communication Technology gives every student the opportunity to take advantage of computer assisted instructions without depending exclusively on the lecturer. Information literacy requires him to be able to decide on where to find information, evaluate it, obtain only necessary information, and utilise it.

Recommendations

1. The possession of a computer should be made compulsory for every Business Education student to aid their studies, just as it is for medical students.
2. Lecturers are implored to ask their students to forward their assignments to their e-mail boxes to ensure that every student has an e-mail address. They should also maintain a mailing list in order to pass information on to their students electronically.
3. The use of the library by students should be emphasised.
4. There is a need for the provision of journals for various courses and drawing the attention of students to the availability of such journals.
5. Information literacy should be part of higher education curriculum to make them information literate. It will also ensure that students who cannot do without accessing information will be aware of the legitimacy of what they come across on the internet. That way they will be aware of ethical issues such as copyright and plagiarism.
6. Inter-faculty quiz programme could be organised intermittently to avoid situations where undergraduates do not know their institution's website nor the name of their Vice-Chancellor.

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