

INFORMATION SEEKING ACTIVITIES OF GRADUATE SCHOOL TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Information seeking behavior depends on the reasons for seeking information and the starting knowledge of the individual. Information seeking is a special case of problem solving. The study examines the information seeking activities of graduate school teachers with the aim of recommending better ways that provides information services for the school teachers in Sri Lanka and to identify different attributes of information seeking. The study adapted a survey method and a self administered questionnaire used as the main research instrument for the data collection. It can be suggested to both libraries to revive modes and timing of providing access to EIR. Future research is required to identify particular group of students who are indeed in need of training, in order to improve ICT skills.

Keywords: Information seeking activities, Information needs, school teachers, Information sources

INTRODUCTION

Information-seeking is a purposive acquisition of information (Johnson, 2003) and it examines the ways in which people find information they require (Burke, 2007). Information seeking behavior depends on the reasons for seeking information and the starting knowledge of the individual. Information seeking is a special case of problem solving. The present study examines the information seeking activities of graduate school teachers with the aim of recommending better ways that provides information services for the school teachers in Sri Lanka. The main objective of this study was to reveal the information seeking activities of graduate school teachers and to identify different attributes of information seeking.

METHODOLOGY

The study adapted a survey method and a self administered questionnaire used as the main research instrument for the data collection. The postgraduate students who followed Masters in Education in the University of Peradeniya were selected as the study population of the survey. The questionnaires were distributed in early May 2015, among the whole population (n=46) and 41 completed questionnaires were returned making 89.1% response rate.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Use of Information Sources and channels of communication

The teachers used various information sources to acquire information that need for their educational purposes. The respondents of the survey were asked to rate how frequently they used 13 different sources of professional information on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 indicated “ Often” while 2 indicated “ Sometimes “ and 3 indicated “ Never”. Table 1 presents the frequency of information sources used by teachers for their teaching purposes.

Table 1: Usage of information sources

	Information Source	Often		Some times		Never	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Books	36	87.3	02	4.9	0	0
2	Teachers' Guides	32	78.0	05	12.2	0	0
3	Personal knowledge or experience	29	70.7	09	22.0	0	0
4	Media (e.g., TV, radio, newspapers, etc.)	19	46.3	19	46.3	0	0
5	School library	17	41.5	20	48.8	01	2.4
6	Internet	12	29.2	24	58.5	01	2.4
7	Printed or electronic journals	12	29.2	25	60.9	01	2.4
8	Personal discussion with friends, family and relatives	10	24.4	28	68.3	0	0
9	Conference and workshop reports	05	12.2	31	75.6	02	4.8
10	Associations and unions	03	7.3	28	68.3	02	4.8
11	Government ministries	03	7.3	24	58.5	10	24.3
12	private institutions' documents	02	4.9	24	58.5	10	24.3

As explicit in Table 1, teachers often used books (87.3 %) followed by Teacher's Guides (78.0%) and personal knowledge or experience (70.7%). The results further revealed that 46.3% of the respondents either often or sometimes used mass media followed by 41.5% either often or 48.8% sometimes used the school library. The study examined the communication channels used by teachers to obtain information for teaching purposes and the respondents were asked to mention how often they used them. It was found that 56.1% of the teachers often used media and face-to-face discussions as communication channels. According to the data in Table 2 below, 60.9% of the respondents sometimes used letters followed by 56.1% used telephone while 46.3% send e-mails as communication channels.

Table 2: Usage of communication channels

	Communication channels	Often		Some times		Never	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Media (Radio, TV, etc.)	23	56.1	12	29.2	0	00
2	Face-to-face discussions	23	56.1	14	34.1	0	00
3	Telephone	07	17.1	23	56.1	03	7.3
4	E –mail	07	17.1	19	46.3	08	19.5
5	Letters	05	12.2	25	60.9	06	14.6
6	Fax	0	00	13	31.7	21	51.2

Preferred Information Formats

The study examined the preferred information format of the respondents and the results are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Preferred Information Formats

	Format	Frequency	Percentage
1	Printed format only	08	19.5
2	Electronic format only	01	2.4
3	Both format	30	73.3
4	Not responded	02	4.8
	Total	41	100

As revealed in table 3, majority of the respondents (73.3%) prefer to use both printed and electronic information formats while 19.5 % respondents prefer to use printed materials only whereas 2.4 % of them prefer to use electronic materials only for their teaching.

Information needs of school teachers

The respondents were asked to indicate their information needs and the responses received are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Scope of information needs

	Information needs	Frequency	Percentage
1	Subject related matters	34	82.9
2	Audio visual information materials	28	68.3
3	Printed information sources	27	65.6
4	Educational information sources	27	65.6
5	Current & accurate information for content	26	63.4
6	School regulations/examination questions and marking schemes	24	58.5
7	Class room management & learners assessment documents	23	56.1
8	Ministry publications/Policy documents	17	41.5
9	Social problems/Students 's information	16	39.0

As indicated in the Table 4, majority of the respondents (82.9%) seek information on subject related matters that need for teaching. Of the respondents 68.3% of them seek audio visual materials while 65.6% seeking printed information sources and educational information sources to fulfill their information needs.

Difficulties encountered when seeking information

The present study examined the difficulties encountered by the teachers when seeking information and the hindrances they had experienced in searching for information are given below. (Table 5)

Table 5: Difficulties encountered when seeking information

	Problem encountered	Major difficulty		Minor difficulty		Difficulty not experienced	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Heavy teaching load and too many learners in class room	25	61.0	12	29.3	01	2.4
2	Information available was not adequately addressing syllabus	23	56.1	15	36.6	0	0
3	Information was outdated	22	53.6	11	26.9	03	7.3
4	Inadequate library facilities in school library	21	51.2	14	34.1	01	2.4
5	There was a lack of information sources	21	51.2	16	39.0	02	4.8
6	No qualified librarian for school library	20	48.8	15	36.6	01	2.4
7	Lack of time to search for Information	19	46.3	16	39.0	03	7.3
8	Could not find the relevant information easily	19	46.3	16	39.0	01	2.4

It is evident from table 5 , 61% of the respondents mentioned the heavy workload and too many students in class room as major difficulty and 29.3% mentioned it as a minor difficulty faced by them when seeking information. Of the respondents, 92.7 % mentioned that the information available was not adequately addressing the syllabus was either major (56.1%) or minor (36.6%) difficulty and 80.5% indicated the information that available was often outdated as major (53.6%) or minor (26.9%) difficulty they encountered.

CONCLUSION

The study led to the general conclusion that the respondents of the survey used a wide array of information sources and communication channels for satisfying their information needs. Majority of them used books, teachers' guides and personal knowledge for teaching purposes and often used communication channels were mass media and face to face discussions. Most of them seek information on subject related matters and preferred information format was both electronic and print format. Based on the conclusion, the recommendations were made to improve availability of information resources and teachers' information literacy skills for upgrading the school education in Sri Lanka.

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