INFORMATION SEEKING ACTIVITIES OF GRADUATE SCHOOL TEACHERS IN SRI LANKA: A CASE STUDY

Chamani Gunasekera
Main Library, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

chamanig@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: This 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 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. The study found that the teachers use a wide array of information sources and communication channels to satisfy 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.

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

1. 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. It includes recognizing and interpreting the information problem, establishing a plan of search, conducting the search, evaluating the results, and if necessary, iterating through the process again. (Marchionini, 1995)

Information-seeking is conceived as a process in which information needs are pursued, or in which problem-solving takes place within a context. (Foster (2004)) The information-seeking process is initiated by a recognised need for information and a decision to act on it (Byström & Hansen, 2005) and would reflect the experiences of the information seeker (Kuhlthau 1993; Foster 2004). It occurs in different stages marked by different emotions as well as the thoughts of the information seeker (Kuhlthau, 1993). Seeking information for lesson planning and use in class for learners is purposive information-seeking by teachers and it is evident in studies by Sànchez & Valcàrcel (1999), Kahlert (2001) & Lundh (2005)

Although there is a substantial amount of literature which exists in research on information seeking behavior of different professional groups there is a dearth of literature related to information seeking activities of school teachers. When it comes to Sri Lanka not a single library and information researcher has done a research on this subject area. Therefore the present study will be the pioneer study in Sri Lanka bridging the gap of literature on information seeking activities of school teachers.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

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 (i.e., Use of

sources, channels of communication use, preferred format of information etc). An effort was also made to idetify the problems encounter when seeking information. The present study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Which information sources are preferred by the school teachers?
2. Which information channels and formats do teachers utilize when seeking information for teaching?
3. What are the information needs of school teachers?
4. What are the problems encountered by the teachers when seeking information?

3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Olsen and Diekema (2011) found that teachers' information seeking behavior is understudied and found few studies that focused on teachers' information seeking behaviour. They found that the teachers' information needs are driven by curriculum and school policy and they mostly shared knowledge with their close colleagues. Barriers to information seeking online included the abundance of resources that made searching overwhelming, and lack of time to search. They concluded that teachers are unique information consumers and users.

Teachers have reported that having access to available information is a priority for their information seeking, yet lack of access to information continues to be a main barrier to information seeking (Williams & Coles, 2007). Shulman (1987) found that the minimum knowledge base required for teaching includes content knowledge; general pedagogical knowledge; curriculum knowledge; knowledge of the learners and their characteristics; knowledge of educational contexts; and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values. In addition, Pattuelli (2008) notes that teachers' information needs are related to pedagogy, national curriculum standards and the syllabus, including examinations as well as knowledge of the subject matter to be taught.

Recker and others (2004) examined how middle and high school science and mathematics teachers use and find online resources and the study established that the teachers used a broad range of search strategies and main factors that used to evaluate the information sources were age of materials, currency and accuracy. Recently Bitso and Fourie (2014) conducted a study on information-seeking behaviour of prospective geography teachers at the National University of Lesotho based on their experiences during teaching practices. They examined the scope of the information needed, various styles of information-seeking and preferred information sources of prospective geography teachers and the study found the teachers preferred to use traditional information sources and hardly used modern electronic sources.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The study adapted a survey method and a self administered questionnaire was used as the main research instrument. The postgraduate students who followed the Masters degree in Education in the Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya were selected as the study population of the survey. Since the study population is small the entire population was surveyed. A structured questionnaire was designed to gather data it was distributed in early May 2015, among the whole population and the collected data were statistically analysed using SPSS software package version 17.0.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The questionnaires were distributed among the whole population and out of 46, 41 duly completed questionnaires were received making 89.1% response rate. Of them 68% were female while 32% were male. Table I provide the demographic data and number of periods work per week of the respondents of the study.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

	About respondents	No	Percentage
1	Age Of respondents		
	31-35 years	11	26.8
	36-40 years	27	65.9
	More than 40	03	7.3
	Total	41	100
2	Years of teaching experience		
	1-5 years	02	4.9
	6-10 years	19	46.3
	11-15 years	11	26.8
	16-20 years	08	19.6
	More than 20	01	2.4
	Total	41	100
3	Highest educational qualification		
	Masters degree	03	7.3
	Bachelor degree	13	31.7
	Post graduate Diploma	25	61.0
	Total	41	100
4	Periods per week works		
	5-10	01	2.4
	16-20	01	2.4
	21-25	04	9.8
	26-30	07	17.0
	31-35	18	44.0
	36-40	09	22.0
	More than 40	01	2.4
	Total	41	100

It is evident from the table 1, most of the respondents (65.9%) were in age of 36-40 years range and 26.8% of them were in age of 31-35 years range while 7.3% of them were more than 40 years old. With regard the respondents teaching experience 46.3% of them had 6-10 years experience in teaching followed by 26.8% had 11-15 years and 19.6% had 16-20 years in experience. Results further revealed that most of them (61%) had Postgraduate diplomas and 31.7% of them had bachelor degrees. The results further revealed that most of the respondents (44%) worked periods of 31-35 while 22% worked 36-40 and 17% worked 26-30 periods per week.

5.1 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 3 presents the frequency of information sources used by teachers for their teaching purposes.

Table 2: Usage of information sources

	Information Source	Often		Some times		Never	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
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
	Note: N=46						

As explicit in Table 2, 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 3 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 3)

Table 3: Usage of communication channels

	Communication channels	Often		Some times		Never	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
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
Note: N=46							

5.2 Preferred Information Formats

The study examined the preferred information format of the respondents and they were asked to indicate the preferred format of information from the following list: Printed format only, Electronic format only and both format.

Table 4: 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 4, 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.

5.3 Information needs of school teachers

One of the key to studying information seeking activities is to identify the information needs and therefore the respondents were asked to indicate their information needs. The responses received from the respondents are presented in Table 5 below. The table is drawn from a question where multiple responses per teacher were possible.

Table 5: 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
Note: N=46			

As indicated in the Table 5, 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. The results further revealed that 63.4% of the respondents concern current and accurate information for content when seeking information followed by 58.5% of them seek information on school regulations, examination questions and marking schemes and 56.1% seek information on class room management and learners' assessment documents which directly needed for teaching.

5.4 Difficulties encountered when seeking information

The present study examined the difficulties encountered by the teachers when seeking information. Therefore the respondents were asked to identify what are the hindrances they had experienced in searching for information. Eight hindrances were identified that respondents might have encountered when seeking information, and respondents were asked to respond in terms of major difficulty, minor difficulty and difficulty not experienced.

Table 6: Difficulties encountered when seeking information

S/N	Problem encountered	Major difficulty		Minor difficulty		Difficulty not experienced	
		Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
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
Note: N=46							

It is evident from table 6 , 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. More than half of the respondents (51.2%) reported that inadequate library facilities in the school library and lack of relevant information sources as major difficulty faced when seeking information.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

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 following recommendations were made for upgrading the school education in Sri Lanka.

1. There should be some awareness program to educate on modern electronic information sources specially the internet to improve information accessibility in order to narrow digital divide among school teachers.

2. More seminars and workshops must be conducted to find out the teachers' experiences and views about the procedure of information seeking.

3. Information literacy training should be conducted on school level or provincial level   on print and electronic information sources available for school teachers.

4. The results of the study proved that the limited resources in the school library hindered the information seeking of the teachers and it might affect negatively for the students also, therefore clustering of schools and formation of a school library consortium for resource sharing is encouraged.

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