

A Survey of the Information Needs of Automobile Technicians and Road Transport Workers in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Information is an indispensable element which is crucial to the development of human societies. This study investigated the information needs of automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of study comprises 2976 automobile technicians and road transport workers in the communities of Offa Local Government Area. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 1786 respondents from the study population while questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The analysis of data collected was based on frequency counts and percentages. Challenges such as unavailability of information sources, poor information searching/ retrieval skills, low awareness of the importance of information, time constraints and inefficient information infrastructure hindered access to information. The study recommends establishment of modern information infrastructure, increased funding and sensitization on the importance of information among others.

Keywords: Information, Information needs, Automobile technicians, Road transport workers, Offa Local Government Area

Introduction

The relevance of information to the sustenance and advancement of human societies cannot be overemphasized. Throughout the phases of human existence, the germane roles played by information have been accorded proper recognition hence appreciated by various nations. Information is synonymous to knowledge and it has been recognized as the driver of economic growth and productivity which has no substitute when it comes to the national development (Oyeronke, 2012). The transition of nations from the state of underdevelopment to actual development depends largely on the availability, accessibility and utilisation of

information. Kaniki (2008) viewed information as ideas, imaginative works of the mind, and data of value that are potentially useful in decision making, question answering, and problem solving. In his own view, Martin (1995) conceptualized information as the life blood of society. Information can therefore be viewed as the fuel which powers the vehicle of development in nations. Information is that which is transmitted by the act or process of communication, it may be a message, a signal, and a stimulus (Shera, 1972).

Adequate access to information and its effective utilisation is central to improved performance and attainment of set goals by individuals and organisations. As a valuable resource, information is now regarded as a prerequisite for individual growth and societal development. In this 21st Century, information is increasingly being recognised as an economic resource like land, labour, capital and skills (entrepreneur). The importance of information has made it a basic need for optimum performance in all facets of human endeavours. To thrive in this modern era, one needs a variety of information, no matter how well-versed one is in a field or profession. Every individual and society have their respective information needs which must be adequately catered for (Tahir, Mahmood and Shafique, 2008).

According to Ehikhamenor (1990), information need could be referred to as the extent to which information is required to solve problems, as well as the degree of expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the information. Information need is a gap in a person's knowledge that, when experienced at the conscious level as a question, gives rise to a search for an answer (Reitz, 2004). Thus, information needs refer to requirements which must be met in order to fill the conscious knowledge gap in a particular activity. People need information in order to increase their knowledge, reduce their level of ignorance, eliminate their uncertainties and to make rational decisions in daily activities.

Information needs of individuals can be categorised in many ways based on their peculiarities which are noticeable in occupations, educational qualifications, ethnic background, locations and economic status. Thus, information needs could be on academic, social, health, finance, legal and economic activities. All these categories of information needs are geared towards enhancing the daily activities of individuals in the society. The satisfaction of the different categories of information needs is largely influenced by the availability and accessibility to relevant sources of information. The understanding of information needs and information-seeking behaviour of various professional groups is essential as it helps in the planning, implementation, and operation of information system, and services in work settings (Devadason and Lingman, 2008). Furthermore, the awareness of the different information needs of professional groups helps in determining the appropriate sources of information to be adopted in meeting their social, health, finance, legal, economic and security needs.

Statement of the problem

The relevance of information to the attainment of developmental goals in human societies cannot be underestimated. Information, unarguably, constitutes an invaluable resource without which meaningful development can be achieved. Information is needed in order to accelerate growth in the productive sectors of a nation's economy and to ensure sustained development in the lives of the citizenry. Regrettably, adequate information which has been identified as a key resource in developmental activities is not always made available to artisans and professional groups especially automobile technicians and road transport workers who contribute immensely to the economic development of Nigeria. In cases where information is disseminated to them, such information is not always timely and pertinent to their diverse needs. Furthermore, the information disseminated to this category of workers are not usually obtained from authoritative sources which makes it to be misleading and susceptible to multiple interpretations. This affects the productivity of automobile technicians and road transport workers as they are usually constrained to work with the inaccurate information at their disposal. It is against this background that this study aims at assessing the information needs of automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Background information of Offa Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria

Offa Local Government Area is located in Kwara State, Nigeria (coordinates 8° 9'N and 4° 43' E) with a population of about 90,000 inhabitants. The vegetation in Offa is savannah vegetation and the city is well known for the cultivation of sweet potatoes and maize, weaving and dyeing trade. There is presence of social amenities such as good road network, electricity supply, telecommunication facilities, hospitals and others in the local government area. Offa local government is home to some tertiary institutions which include the Federal Polytechnic Offa, (established in 1992), the Kwara State College of Health Technology (established in 1976), Summit University, National Open University, Lens Polytechnic and the Nigeria Navy School.

Research objectives

The major objective of this study is to assess the information needs of automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. examine the information needs of automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area;
- ii. investigate the sources of information available to automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area;
- iii. determine the challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area; and

- iv. proffer solutions to the challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area.

Research questions

This study will provide answers to the following questions:

- a. What are the information needs of automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area?
- b. What are the sources of information available to automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area?
- c. What are the challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area?
- d. What are the solutions to the challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area?

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprises 2976 automobile technicians and road transport workers in the communities of Offa Local Government Area. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 1786 respondents from the study population while questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The analysis of data collected was based on frequency counts and percentages.

Analysis of data and interpretation of results

Questionnaire administration and response rate

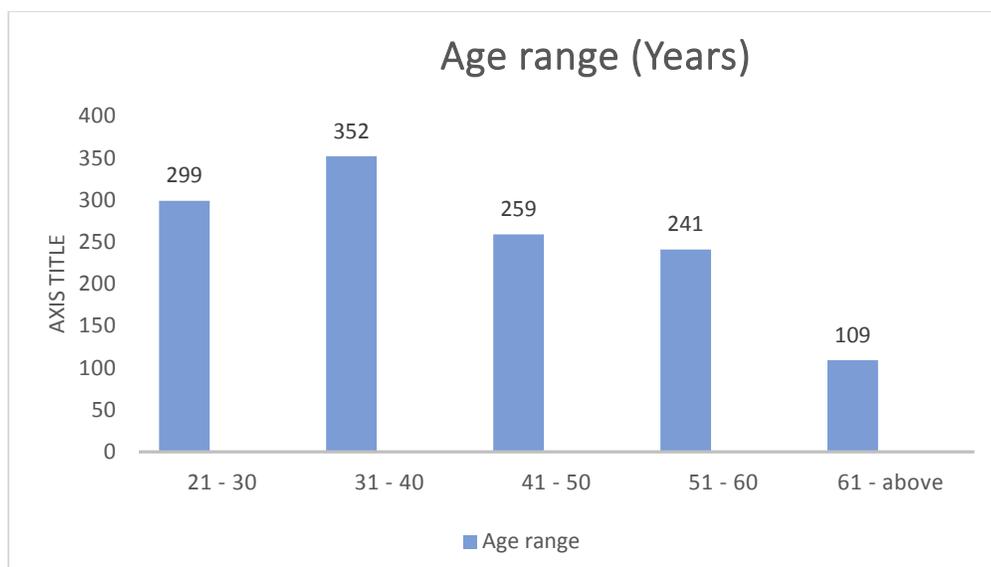
The sample size consists of 1786 respondents drawn from the total population of the study. Out of 1786 copies of the questionnaire administered, 1260 copies were returned and found valid for analysis giving a response rate of (70.5%) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Response rate of respondents

S/N	Artisan groups	No of questionnaire administered	No of questionnaire returned	Response rate (%)
1	Automobile technicians	154	123	70.5
2	Road transport workers	1632	1137	
	Total	1786	1260	

Demographic details of the respondents

Figure 1: Age range of the respondents



The figure above shows the age range of the respondents of the study. A total number of 299 respondents (23.7%) falls within the age range of 21-30, 352 respondents (27.9%) were between the ages of 31 and 40 while 259 respondents representing (20.5%) were between the ages of 41-50. Two hundred and forty-one respondents (19.1%) are between 51 and 60 years while 109 respondents (8.7%) are above 61 years. Thus, it could be inferred that most of the respondents are between 31 and 40 years.

Figure 2: Marital status of the respondents

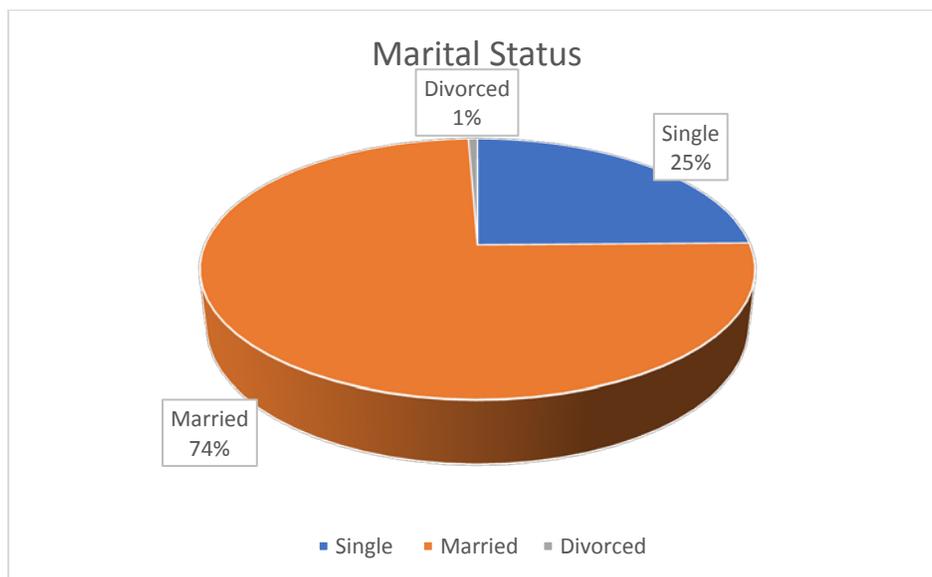


Figure 2 revealed that 312 respondents (25%) are single, 940 respondents (74%) are married while 8 respondents (1%) are divorced. Hence, it could be noted that most of the respondents are married.

Answers to the research questions

1 What are the information needs of automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area?

In order to ascertain the information needs of the respondents, they were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the items in the Table below.

Table 2: Information needs of automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara state, Nigeria

Hint: f = frequency, % = percentage

S/N	Information needs	Agreement score		Disagreement score	
		f	%	f	%
1	Information on availability of mechanical/engineering products (spare parts, fuel, automobile dealerships, tyres etc.)	1222	97	38	3
2	Information relating to commercial activities of your immediate community	1197	95	63	5
3	Health information (personal hygiene, disease prevention and control, food and nutrition, housekeeping, child care and family planning)	1065	85	195	15
4	Legal information (laws, statutes, government legislation, human rights)	860	68	400	32
5	Information on government/political activities (political parties, electoral processes, governance system)	592	47	668	53
6	Information on financial activities (how to obtain loan, banking activities, insurance, financial support by government and other agencies)	1184	94	76	6
7	Information on social activities (entertainment, leisure, recreation, religion, sports)	902	71	352	29
8	Information on staff welfare, union activities	1043	82	217	18
9	Information on community/societal development	1006	80	254	20
10	Safety/security information	1116	89	144	11
11	Educational information (adult literacy classes, vocational education)	712	57	548	43
12	Information on current affairs in my nation and international communities.	302	24	958	76

Table 2 shows the information needs of automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area, Kwara state, Nigeria. A vast majority of the respondents (97%) and (95%) stated that they need information on availability of mechanical/engineering products such as spare parts, fuel, automobile dealerships, tyres and on commercial activities of their immediate community respectively. A total number of

1065 respondent (85%) noted that they require information on health issues such as personal hygiene, disease prevention and control, food and nutrition, housekeeping, child care and family planning while 860 respondents (68%) agreed that they need legal information (laws, statutes, government legislation, human rights).

Nearly half of the respondents (47%) expressed that they need information on government/political activities (political parties, electoral processes, governance system) while majority of the respondents (94%) require information on financial activities (how to obtain loan, banking activities, insurance, financial support by government and other agencies) in order to perform optimally. Nine hundred and two respondents (71%) reiterated their need for information on social activities (entertainment, leisure, recreation, religion, sports), 1043 respondents (82%) required information on staff welfare, union activities while 1006 respondents (80%) stated that they need information on community/societal development. A large section of the respondents (89%) noted that they need safety/security information, 712 respondents (57%) required information on educational activities (adult literacy classes, vocational education) while few respondents (24%) expressed their desire for information on current affairs in their nation and in international communities.

Based on this, it could be inferred that most of the respondents need information on availability of mechanical/engineering products, commercial activities in their immediate community, health issues, safety/security and on financial activities. Information needs on current affairs, educational activities and on government/political activities were ranked low by the respondents and not required by most of the respondents.

2. What are the sources of information available to automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area?

Table 3: Sources of information available to automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area

Hint: f = frequency, % = percentage

S/N	Information sources	Agreement score		Disagreement score	
		f	%	f	%
1	Professional colleagues	1023	81	237	19
2	Friends/relatives	895	71	365	29
3	Radio	781	62	479	38
4	Television	612	48	648	52
5	Seminar/workshops/conferences	112	9	1148	91
6	Libraries	25	2	1235	98
7	Information centres	12	1	1248	99
8	Newspapers	214	17	1046	83
9	Association meetings/Town hall meetings	832	66	428	34
10	Internet	101	8	1159	92

11	Government agencies	328	26	932	74
12	Local government authority	214	17	1046	83
13	Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs)	113	9	1147	91

Table 3 shows the sources of information available to automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area. Majority of the respondents (81%) stated that they obtain information to meet their needs through professional colleagues while 895 respondents (71%) got information from friends and relatives. Radio constitutes a viable source of information to 781 respondents (62%), 612 respondents (48%) depended on television to meet their information needs while 112 respondents (9%) obtained information from seminar/workshops/ conferences. Very few respondents (2%) and (1%) used the libraries and information centres in meeting their information needs, 214 respondents (17%) relied on newspapers while 832 respondents (66%) got information from association meetings/town hall meetings. One hundred and one respondents (8%) identified the Internet as their source of information, 328 respondents (26%) obtained information from government agencies, 214 respondents (17%) got information from local government authority while 113 respondents (9%) identified Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) as their source of information.

Based on the findings, it could be noted that most of the respondents relied on professional colleagues, friends/relatives and association meetings/Town hall meetings in obtaining information relevant to their daily activities. Sources of information such as newspapers, Internet, libraries and information centres was used by few section of the respondents.

3. What are the challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area?

Table 4: Challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area

Hint: f = frequency, % = percentage

S/N	Statements	Agreement score		Disagreement score	
		f	%	f	%
1	Unavailability of information sources	1096	87	164	13
2	Lack of awareness of relevant information sources	968	77	292	23
3	Difficulty in accessing both print and online materials	1020	81	240	19
4	Financial constraints	917	73	343	27
5	Poor information searching/ retrieval skills	1084	86	176	14
6	Lack of support from government and other concerned agencies	857	68	403	32
7	Time constraints	1046	83	214	17
8	Power failure	869	69	391	31
9	Inefficient information infrastructure (libraries,	1184	94	76	6

	Internet, repositories etc.)				
10	Low awareness of the importance of information	1084	86	176	14

Table 4 presents the challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area. A vast section of the respondents (87%) identified unavailability of the information sources as a major challenge to accessing accurate information while 968 respondents (77%) noted that lack of awareness of relevant information sources prevents them from accessing the right information. A total number of one thousand and twenty respondents (81%) identified difficulty in accessing both print and online materials as a major challenge, 917 respondents (73%) identified financial constraints while poor information searching/ retrieval skills prevented 1084 respondents (86%) from accessing accurate information.

Eight hundred and fifty-seven respondents (68%) stated that lack of support from government and other concerned agencies is a major barrier to adequate information, 1046 respondents (83%) agreed that time constraints hindered them from obtaining the right information while 869 respondents (69%) attributed their inability to access accurate information to power failure. A vast majority of the respondents (94%) stated that inefficient information infrastructure (libraries, Internet, repositories etc.) prevented them from accessing accurate information while 1084 respondents (86%) submitted that low awareness of the importance of information is a major encumbrance to accessing accurate information.

From the analysis above, it could be inferred that challenges such as unavailability of information sources, poor information searching/ retrieval skills, low awareness of the importance of information, time constraints and inefficient information infrastructure (libraries, Internet, repositories etc.) hindered the respondents from accessing accurate information.

4 What are the solutions to the challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area?

Table 5: Solutions to the challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area

Hint: f = frequency, % = percentage

S/N	Statements	Agreement score		Disagreement score	
		f	%	f	%
1	Provision of the information sources	1127	89	133	11
2	Information literacy training	927	74	333	26
3	Sensitization on the awareness of information sources	1021	81	239	19
4	Provision of funds/financial support to purchase information sources	962	76	298	24
5	Training on information searching/retrieval skills	911	72	349	28

6	Provision of adequate support by government and other concerned agencies	980	78	280	22
7	Provision of stable electricity supply	824	65	436	35
8	Provision of efficient information infrastructure (libraries, Internet, repositories etc.)	1023	81	237	19
9	Sensitization on the importance of information	1016	80	244	20
10	Information repackaging	712	57	548	43

Table 5 shows the solutions to the challenges hindering automobile technicians and road transport workers from accessing accurate information in Offa Local Government Area. Majority of the respondents (89%) agreed that the provision of the information sources is a solution to the problem hindering access to information while 927 respondents (74%) identified information literacy training as a solution to the challenge. One thousand and twenty-one respondents (81%) viewed sensitization on the awareness of information sources as a possible solution, 962 respondents (72%) agreed that provision of funds/financial support to purchase information sources will help in tackling the challenges while 911 respondents (72%) expressed that training on information searching/retrieval skills will go a long way in addressing the challenges hindering access to accurate information.

A large number of respondents (78%) stated that provision of adequate support by government and other concerned agencies is a solution to the challenge hindering access to accurate information, 824 respondents (65%) advocated for the provision of stable electricity supply to tackle these challenges, 1023 (81%) agreed that the provision of efficient information infrastructure (libraries, Internet, repositories etc.) will help in addressing these challenges. A total number of 1016 respondent (80%) expressed that sensitization on the importance of information is an efficient measure in tackling the challenges while 712 respondents (57%) submitted that information repackaging will enhance access to accurate information.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study revealed that most of the respondents required information on the availability of mechanical/engineering products, commercial activities in their immediate community, health issues, safety/security and on financial activities. They need this information in order to enhance their economic activities and to foster rapid socio-economic development in their community. This importance of information was supported by *Weiss, Crowder and Bernardi (2000)* who described information as the cornerstone of successful socio-economic development which plays a key role in decision making. Some of the respondents also need information on health issues. This is in consonance with the view of *Ugboma (2010)* who stated that information is a major resource that is needed in every sphere of life endeavour especially in health matters.

Majority of the respondents relied on professional colleagues, friends/relatives and association meetings/Town hall meetings in order to obtain information relevant to their daily activities. This could be attributed to the shortage of information infrastructure and services which limit information accessibility in the local government area. This finding was supported by Kamba (2009) who highlighted inadequate basic infrastructure (electricity, telecommunication, roads and transportation), low literacy levels, lack of suitable information services and lack of technical competencies as among the barriers to delivery of information services in rural areas in developing countries.

The challenges hindering the respondents from accessing accurate information include unavailability of information sources, poor information searching/ retrieval skills, low awareness of the importance of information, time constraints and inefficient information infrastructure (libraries, archives, information centres and Internet). This assertion was further established by Dorsch (2000) who identified lack of time, inadequate access to information sources, lack of skills, cost of information and geographical isolation as the major barriers to effective use of information. Ugah (2007) also noted that factors such as lack of awareness; inaccessibility; bibliographic obstacles: environment; poor infrastructure and declining budgets affect access and use of information. Furthermore, insufficient technical infrastructure, complex and technical languages of some information sources and literacy levels of information seekers limit the usage of information sources.

Conclusion

Information is an essential resource which is needed by people in their daily activities for decision making and developmental purposes. This study established that automobile technicians and road transport workers have diverse information needs which must be catered for in order to enhance their activities. Their information needs cover areas such as availability of mechanical/engineering products, commercial activities in their immediate community, health issues, safety/security and financial activities. Though, there are several sources of information available to these professionals, majority of them relied on professional colleagues, friends/relatives and association meetings/town hall meetings in order to satisfy their information needs. Challenges such as unavailability of information sources, poor information searching/ retrieval skills, low awareness of the importance of information, time constraints and inefficient information infrastructure hindered them from accessing accurate information.

Recommendations

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

- i. The state government and the local government authority should establish modern information infrastructure such as libraries, archives and information centres which will constantly provide

accurate, timely and relevant information to meet the diverse information needs of automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area.

- ii. The existing libraries and information centres should endeavour to collect and manage information resources relevant to the needs of these professional groups. They should collaborate with local news outfits, Non-Governmental Organizations and other concerned agencies in order to keep these professionals abreast with the current happenings in their community.
- iii. The use of information sources such as newspapers, Internet, libraries and information centres should be encouraged among automobile technicians and road transport workers in Local Government Area in order to enable them have access to authoritative information.
- iv. There is an urgent need to sensitize automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area on the importance of using relevant information sources in meeting their information needs.
- v. Adequate information literacy training should be provided to automobile technicians and road transport workers in Offa Local Government Area in order to enhance their information searching/retrieval skills.
- vi. Information repackaging and translation services should be implemented in libraries and information centres of Offa Local Government Area in order to facilitate increased usage of information sources and services by automobile technicians and road transport workers.

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