EMERGING NEEDS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN AN ERA OF INFORMATION EXPLOSION: NEED FOR A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

By

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ABSTRACT

On the verge of 21st century with the knowledge explosion it has become one of the prime necessities of all the students to become an information literate life-long learner in order to meet the requirements of the fast-paced society. Students differ in the way they seek information, its use, as well as the way they adapt these information. All these tend to affect their future progress, achievement, classroom environment and learning and interpersonal relationship. Accordingly University teachers task are not only to deliver pieces of information but to support the learning process and skills for information seeking and problem solving behaviour. Therefore Universities are in desperate need to understand the nature of information seeking behaviour of the students. Information seeking has often been compared to a rational problem-solving process, where a gap in knowledge triggers a conscious search for information. It is dependent on the context and to a large extent on the individual's psychological mechanism.

The researcher finds out on the line of Wilson's 2000 model of information behaviour to show how teaching- learning method influences the information-seeking process. The present study aimed at identifying the facilitating and inhibiting factors of information seeking behaviour of the University students.

INTRODUCTION

In order to cope with the demands of fast paced society, knowledge explosion, technological advancement, culture of information revolution and new challenges of academic and vocational opportunities, the students, teachers and other academic communities are encouraged to become an information literate and life-long learner. Realizing the importance of Information seeking behaviour among the teachers, students and others, *National Policy on Education 1986* as well as *University Grant Commission* have directed the institutes of higher education to improve and facilitate the culture of information seeking behaviour and to improve the utilization of resource support library and documentation services for student and others.

By *Information behaviour,* it is meant that the activities a person may engage in, when identifying his or her own needs for information searching and using and transforming that information (Kirton 1999). *Information seeking behaviour* refers to the way people search for and utilize information (Fairer 1990). Most of the time student's information seeking behaviour involves active or purposeful information seeking as a result of the need to complete course assignments, prepare for class discussions, seminars, workshops, conferences or write final year research papers (Fister1992). Information seeking is a process of volition and the result of intellection.

Information seeking has been compared as a rational problem solving process and in most cases Information seeking process is dynamic and changeable in terms of individual differences (Allen & Kim, 2001;Borgman1989;Crozier 1997;Humphreys & Revelle 1984 ; Miculincer 1997; Solomon, 2002).The reasons behind different information approaches may lie in the context but also may be related to the person's inner processes (Eskola 1998;Heinstrom 2003;Kernan & Mojena 1973).Researchers highlighted that the needs, demands, feeling of stress, uncertainty, frustration, anxiety, insecurity, ability, cognitive style etc are mediating and moderating the nature of Information seeking behaviour of the individuals (Heinstrom 2002 ; Kuhlthau,1993; Nahl,2001; Venkula,1988).

In addition to person - related - variables, the information seeking needs of the students are influenced by the University pedagogy (Salliven 1995) that is the course content, evaluation system, learning or teaching styles. In many situations Information seeking also depend upon approaches of learning such as co-operative, competitive, individualistic approaches by the learner. (Blickle 1996; Cooper & Mueck 1990; Johnson. R, 1989).

Information behaviour can be defined by the general model of information behaviour developed by Wilson. (Wilson 1997). According to Wilson a general model of information behaviour needs to include at least the following three elements:

- "an information need and its drivers, i.e., the factors that give rise to an individual's perception of need;

- the factors that affect the individual's response to the perception of need; and

- the processes or actions involved in that response."

Information need is often understood in information science as evolving from a vague awareness of something missing, and as culminating in locating information that contributes to the understanding and meaning (Kuhlthau 1993). Information need is described as an anomalous state of knowledge (ASK) (Belkin et al. 1982;Dervin & Nilan 1986).

It has been found from various studies that the learning environment, i.e, the teaching learning methods etc adopted in many of the Universities is not very conducive to be able to trigger a driving force among the students for the nurture of information seeking behaviour. Students, apart from the time of examination do not find the motivation to attain information or knowledge. In this fast paced society the way information is constantly changing and it has become indispensable for the students to become information literate and life long learner. Most of the students do not at all find the need to search for information apart from examination and those few students who are curious in satisfying their need for information find themselves overloaded and crippled in the absence of proper information acquiring skill as well as face lack of information management. Accordingly,

University teachers and librarians are not only to deliver pieces of information but to support the learning process and skills for information seeking and problem solving behaviour of the students (Andrup, et.al.1995). Therefore there is an urgent need to understand the nature of information seeking behaviour of the student community.

Objective of the study

- To identify the nature of information seeking of the University student

- To identify different sources used by the University students to gather information

- To identify the availability of sources of information of the University students

- To identify how information is used by the University students in the process of learning

Samples

The sample is drawn from the Male and Female higher education students pursuing Post graduation in Humanities from the selected State aided Universities of the Southern part of West Bengal. The sample size was restricted to 35 higher education students selected by stratified sampling technique. The mean age is 23 years.

Tools

(a)General Information schedule covering:

(i) Particulars of the Universities

(ii) Type of teaching -learning methods used

(b)Information seeking behaviour of university students- questionnaire

Statistical treatment

Mainly Descriptive analysis is done for the study.

Findings and Discussion

Findings (Figure 1) of the study indicate that a large proportion of the students (93%) searched for information in order to pass the examination. Data revealed that 90 % students needed information related to their career, where as 50% of the students wanted information related to job. Surprisingly, there was a lack of inquisitiveness among the students to seek research (13%) oriented information. It was found during the interview that students

were heavily laden with examinations and were not at all interested to study beyond examination question patterns. In such an environment, nurture and culture of information seeking remains a distant dream. The teaching methods used by the teachers in the universities were primitive. The old educational system has been criticized for its conception of knowledge. Learners have received pieces of information which have no connection with the real life. Such information and knowledge is of little use in the modern society. Instead, there is a need for knowledge and skills for problem-solving and critical and creative thinking (Voutilainen et al. 1991). The old static conception of knowledge has to be replaced with a dynamic conception of knowledge to go beyond exams and to make the learners constructive in their approach. According to the dynamic view, knowledge flow is an inherently dynamic concept, something continuously changing and growing when individuals are actively using and producing it (Voutilainen et al. 1991). Students have to be made creator of knowledge which can come with constructivism (von Wright 1994) and problem based learning.

Figure 2 indicates the various sources students employ for their information search to fulfill their academic requirements. It clearly indicates that private coaching were a rich source of information (87 %) among students in higher education. Among all the variables studied, the least possible source was seminars/ workshops (7%), as

students rarely attended such academic gatherings which are irrelevant for their exams. So they never felt like attending such academic pursuits of the intellectuals or the scholarly discussions. According to cognitive psychology, human beings are basically active and goal-oriented and willing to get information about themselves and the world. Their actions are directed by intentions, expectations and response. But in the absence of proper environmental schemas it has been found that their natural drive gets blocked. There is necessity on the part of the teachers to provide activity oriented learning environment. Teachers' task in the learning process is to support learners in activating their prior knowledge and skills, and to give response. This type of teaching is called 'activating teaching'. Essential is that learners are not passive recipients of knowledge but actively processing and producing it (Lonka 1991). The focus has to be changed from the results of teaching to the learning process itself. The aim of educational technology is to make the learner to learn more and the teacher to teach less, i.e. to maximize learners own efforts in the learning process and that can come by modifying the existing pattern of teaching and learning in the Universities.

Clearly, as shown in Figure 3, the most frequent available sources were teachers (87%), books (80%), internet (70%), coaching (74%) and workshops/seminars (58%). Irrespective of so much of availability of seminars /workshops, the inquisitiveness among the students to attend those was very low as they do not find it helpful. Learning occurs everywhere and on all levels of
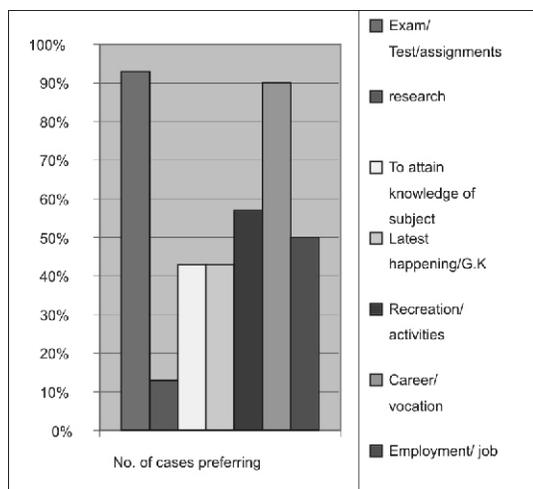

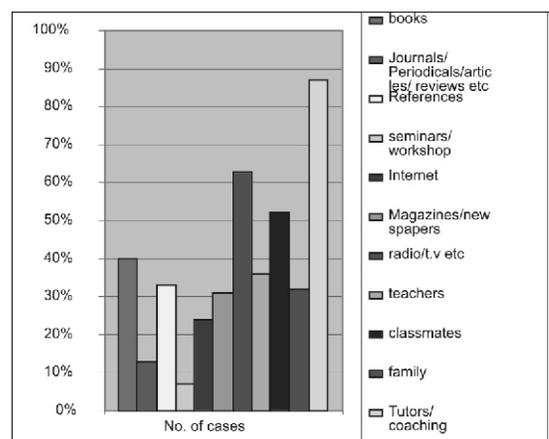Figure 1. Type of information need of the higher education students

Figure 2. Information sources students seek

education where the role of information technology and information retrieval systems is immense. Just the availability of a particular source is not the end; services have to be made accessible to the students by creating the learning environment and situations and developing an urge for learning among students. Learning should not be focused only on result, what is needed is that the student should enjoy the whole process of learning itself. The conception of learning environment has expanded from the place of the study, for instance, the institutes can include those sources of information which can be used and followed by different media, and those events which students can take part in and outside the universities virtually or directly (Lehtinen 1997). There is a prominent need for making teaching learning in higher education constructive, so that the student will feel the need of processing information not only within the campus but also out of it.

Interestingly, the data showed (Figure 4) that 90% of students after acquiring information did not do anything until the examination. If it's a photo copy material, students tend to keep it for the exams without reading or comprehending it. A large proportion (83%) of the students prepare notes and use them for examination purpose. It is quite astonishing that only 33% participate in discussion with teachers, friends or parents or other family members. Only 33% of the students exchange or share acquired information with their classmates. This sharply indicates that how the student's learning process has become mechanical, without comprehending the value of it and they are not motivated to search for the

Figure 3. Availability of the sources

information apart from their exams. This may be due to the traditional teaching learning methods, mainly lecture methods with no problem-solving based approach used in different universities, which was unable to stir up the young minds. Students are not cooperative learners. They don't indulge in interactive discussions, neither do they share or exchange their knowledge they have attained which further jeopardizes information seeking behaviour of the student community. Knowledge flow is an inherently dynamic concept, however, the corresponding phenomenon remains poorly understood, and extent approaches are fundamentally static and largely ambiguous. There is a lack of coordination between students and teachers to link and relate the existing knowledge with the new, thus most of the knowledge attained is not meaningful learning. Activating methods of teaching which support the learning process are, for example, problem based learning, activating writing assignments, projects, tutorials, journals and cooperative learning (Lonka and Lonka 1991), totally excluded from our education system. Our education system has become just too much exam oriented and bookish without proper comprehension and infuses unhealthy competition in the young minds that is reflected in the students learning approach. As a result students don't indulge in group works and exchange of knowledge. In Problem based learning (PBL) the real-life situations form a starting point for problem-solving and are the basis for learning. Self-directed learning and learning in group (Cooperative learning) are characteristic of PBL (Problem based learning1993). Research indicates that cooperative learning environment facilitates information seeking behavior.

Figure 5 indicates that nearly 80% of the students in higher education face great obstacles in language. There is a general lack of awareness about internet applicability among the students, due to which they tend to become inefficient in surfing the internet, often resulting into lack of interest to explore new information. Though internet facility is available in the universities they face tremendous problem in searching for a particular topic. Thus inefficiency in surfing the net, make them feel the process
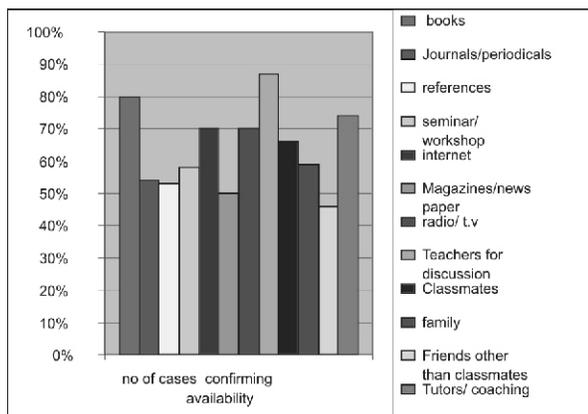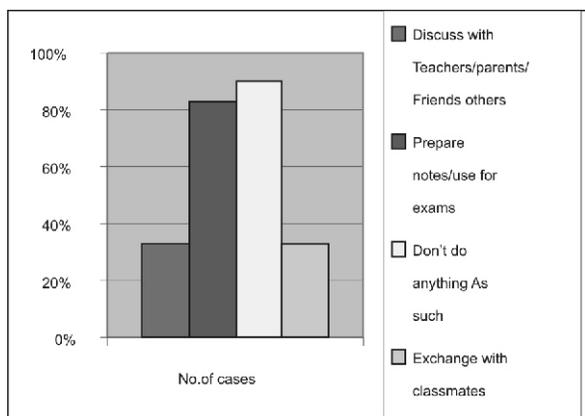
Figure 4. Information use/exchange/transfer

Figure 5. Obstacles/barriers in the way of seeking information

as time consuming. The obstacles faced by the students in the library (46%) were found to be one of the major problems. Though availability of library books was also rated high by the students, they face great difficulty in accessing the support services like how to search for a particular book, catalogue searching, problem with photo copy, availability of a particular book, indifferent attitude of the library personnel etc. Students also have difficulty in gathering information, as the time for searching (44%) for particular information is always very little after finishing their long class hours. Almost 40% of the students find them confused in the midst of over loaded information and don't know how to practically deal with them. Financial problem (33%) was another major issue of the students. It was found that most of the students came from far away places, from low to moderate socio - economic background to pursue their higher studies. They were unable to buy expensive books or surf the internet after the university hour outside, thus they were forced to search for the information in a limited set up.

Over the years several studies dealing with students attitudes to use university libraries has been conducted in several countries. The results indicate also that systematic cooperation is needed between teachers and librarians regarding education in information seeking and in support of information service to students (von Ungern-Sternberg 1996). Their information gathering was restricted by lack of time and money, language problems and poor skills in information seeking (Rissanen 1994). Kautto has explored instruction given to students in
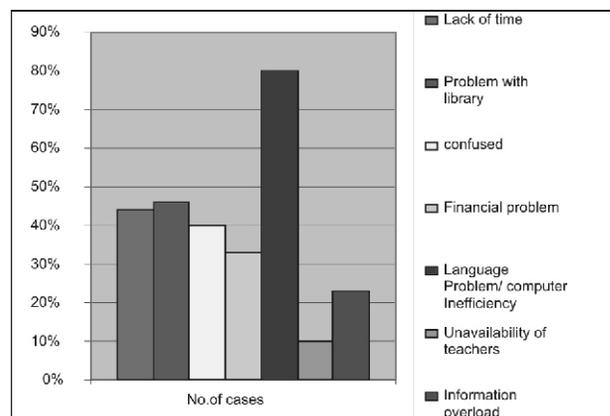
seeking and using literature as a part of university education. The findings showed that teachers do not usually teach the central literature in a domain, and information skills of students are regarded as satisfactory by teachers. (Kautto 1997).

Conclusion

The need for changes and improvement in the quality of education has become apparent in the field of higher education during the present decade. The reasons have been the growth of information, a growing number of students in higher education, demands on output and productivity from the society, and the criticism against existing university infrastructure. Generally the development in scientific research in learning and knowledge has influenced the need for changes in the university pedagogy. (Sallinen 1995). New teaching methods like student-centered methods which emphasize learners' own activity in learning process are to be adopted in the main curriculum. Essential in these methods are the active role of learners as processors and producers of information and knowledge, self-directed learning and independent information seeking (e.g. Lonka 1991).Teachers can of course help the students in developing information seeking skills by their efforts in teaching learning. The result highlights the facilitating and inhibiting factors of information behaviour, which may be helpful to prevent wastage of time and resources at the institutional level as well as the student level and just in time intervention by the counselor and teachers for streaming the motivation for Information seeking

behaviour among the students.

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