

# Information Needs of Rural Secondary School Adolescents in Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

In determining information needs of specific group of user, the research instrument is a vital factor of identifying the need areas and various influences which define such user's needs. This study is based on identifying primary areas of information needs of rural adolescents. From a sample population of 800 rural secondary school students spread through six of the Eastern states of Nigeria, it was found that 267 (60.3%) males and 207 (58.0%) females need information on 'occupation'. Their second highest area of information need was on 'health' with 126 (28.4%) males and 105 (29.4%) female. Respondents also showed interests in 'social services' with 38 (8.6%) males and 24 (6.7%) females indicating information need in this area. The survey findings further revealed high influence of parents' occupation in information generation among the students'. The majority of respondents are from the 'lower' and 'middle' class social structure and the extent to which this factor affects the shift of emphasis from education to occupation needs is also discussed. In developing rural area, the paper advocates for special attention to be focused on the information needs of rural adolescents to enhance development.

## **Introduction**

The concept of 'information needs' has been the focus of social investigators since the late seventies and early eighties (Wilson & Streatfield, 1977; Wilson, 1979; Udofia, 2004). Librarians and information specialists have also been focusing their research on users of information in urban and rural settings (Tjoumas & Hauptman, 1982; Aboyade, 1984a; Aboyade, 1984b). However there is a gap in the literature concerning target groups such as the information needs of rural adolescents who are at the starting point of choosing a career or pursuing specific business or vocational interests. This article attempts to cover such gap.

In evaluating such concept of information needs for this study, we do not agree with the contention of social workers that 'people don't have 'information needs', they experience a problem, a difficulty, or are under pressure, and these cognitive or emotional needs may be met, or partially met, by obtaining and applying information" (Streatfield & Willson, 1980; p.1). On the contrary, it is the authors' view that existing documents or information materials which have been collected for the purpose of users may not be consulted unless there is positive identification of user's needs to assist in monitoring control of information sources. Research studies, which have been based on hierarchical need of consumers of information, support this view (Moseley, 1979; Aboyade, 1984b, Udofia, 2004).

With regards to information as artefacts and their organization in social services, it has also been established that for document search to be effective, the strategy involves the user's own idiosyncratic method of enquiry as dictated by environmental circumstances (Booth & South, 1982). It follows that the study of information need of specific group of users derives from the nature of the activities in which individuals are involved and the environment that dictate such activities.

### **Family Relationship As A Variable**

The family is the social, immediate, psychological and economic entity which provides the child with his first information needs. In general parents assume advisory capacity on matters affecting their wards ranging in a variety such as domestic, social, and intellectual. This primordially is particularly entrenched in African socio-cultural milieu and any child that ignores parental advice is immediately regarded as rebellious in extended family circles. Given the influence of the family on adolescents, parental involvement in the child's developmental activities shapes the type of information the young ones will seek.

One can even go further and posit that in a depressed economy marked by poverty, the challenge for information workers is to develop a system of identifying the needs of the various user groups in order to make services relevant to the community. An active information service can form a significant part of survival kit for users in rural setting affected by severe economic deprivation (Mchombu, 1982). Again, in Nigerian the circumstance, it has been estimated that an overwhelming proportion of (70%) of Nigeria's total population are illiterate and that librarians and information workers could make their services more relevant to this silent majority of potential users (Aboyade, 1984a.)

Similarly, it can be argued that current Nigerian Federal Government efforts aimed at drastically reducing illiteracy through its mass Literacy Campaign launched in August 1992, may become ineffective or moribund as other previous campaigns (such as 'health', 'housing' and 'education', for all ) with the usual tag towards the year 2000, if librarians do not take advantage of experiments set up to provide information services in a rural setting (Aboyade, 1984b), indeed, the Federal Government of Nigeria has recently stipulated that 'a person who can merely read and write only in a ritual phrase which has been memorized is still to be considered a non-literate' (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1991). The socio-economic status of the family therefore constitutes a vital element when considering user behavior and their derivable information needs.

### **Research Rationale**

This study of rural adolescents is part of a wider Rural Information Needs (RUIN) research project initiated by the author in 1992 to determine the extent to which library and information services can support the various environmental, domestic and socio-economic needs of people with moderate literate status, but who have a chance of upward movement in the social ladder should their information needs be determinable. The RUDIS-Rural Development Information

System research project focused on rural community characterized by a high degree of illiteracy. Since the initiation of that project, it is reasonable to assume that with free primary education and considerable growth in secondary school education, most adults in similar rural environment now have some form of moderate literate status up to secondary school level.

There are other information needs based studies such as the IDUPOM project based on heuristic information and professional relevance in the Nigerian Civil service. In determining the characteristics of civil servants' information needs, it has been possible for the author to develop knowledge areas constituting information need of a civil servant stereotype (Alyepeku, 1980; pp. 3-5).

This research study is therefore primarily designed to investigate the influence of parental occupation and their social economic status on the information needs of rural adolescents based on the following hypotheses:

- a) That parents occupation influence the occupation need of their adolescent children.
- b) That the socio-economic status and background of the family influence information needs of the adolescent children.
- c) That parents desire for their adolescent children to inherit their occupation accounts for the emphasis on occupational information needs.

## **Methodology**

The sample of 800 students (443 males and 357 females) were randomly selected across six states of the Eastern part of Nigeria, namely: Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Cross River, Enugu, Imo and Rivers states. Twenty four secondary schools were chosen for the survey with senior secondary schools SS II and III as respondents. It was observed that the nearest information unit of any sort consisted of ill-equipped school libraries, state (public) libraries (often at far distances of between 10 to 20 kilometers) and the various local government headquarters. The mean age of the rural male students was 17.05 years while for the females it was 16.02 years. We observed that this was not too much at variance with urban students except that the latter are slightly less of age at SS III.

An inventory of need was developed and styled Adolescents Information Needs Inventory (ADINI). The ranking of needs on the questionnaire is as it appears in tables 1-3. It appeared that an appreciable number of secondary school adolescents in the rural areas are not as exposed to social surveys as urban children. The participation observation method was therefore applied to allay respondents' initial fears as well as create a working rapport with them on their needs. The confidence thereby gained led to the success of securing information from the respondents.

## **Data Analysis**

Table 1 indicates the pattern of rural adolescents' information needs according to sex. The data reveals that the highest needs for information was based on occupational needs with 267(60.3%) males and 207(53.0%) females score. 'Health' also accounted for second highest respondents' information needs with 126(28.4%) males and 105(29.4%) females. This result implies a de-emphasis on educational needs when compared with similar urban surveys on reasons for public library use. (Oloko, 1981). However, an appreciable need for information on social services was recorded with 38(8.6%) males and 28(6.7%) females. This is probably due to the immediate impact public utilities (or lack of it) has on rural dwellers.

With regards to table 2, one could access the influence of parental occupation on respondents information needs. For instance, the study reveals that parental occupation, more than any other factor, accounts for highest information needs with 191 males out of 243(78.6%) being influenced by his factor. Of these, 94(38.7%) followed their fathers' occupation while 97(40.7%) followed their mothers' occupation whereas 59(37.1%) reacted on their mothers occupation.

A significant aspect of the survey result is that 23(9.5%) of the males sample population required information on the education, such as guidance and counseling for career choices, admission problem (into colleges and universities, etc) and general enquiries on preparation for external examination. It becomes obvious that the emphasis of current government efforts on rural development seems concentrated on providing social infrastructures more than educational advancement of rural dwellers.

From table 3, it can be observed that the majority of respondents are from the 'lower' class of social status with 75% males and 60.4% females. The 'middle' class too showed some prominence with 25.0% and 38.6% scores for male and female respondents. The heavy cluster of needs based on occupation and health suggests a majority shift from the old educational value of the missionary era. It has been argued in the literature that the fundamental change of the last century, which was fairly begun before 1963, is that intelligence has been redistributed between the classes, and the nature of the classes changed. The talented have been given opportunity to rise to the level which accords with their capacities, and the lower class consequently reserved for those who are also lower in ability (Young, 1958; 14). This survey result has important implications for redefining the objective of information service in rural Africa as a whole.

## **Conclusion**

In this modest study, we have been able to demonstrate that there is need to focus attention on the information needs of rural adolescents who form a significant part of Nigeria's teeming population. The hypotheses guiding this research have proved to be true in the circumstances examined. The sample data wholly support the fact the study sets out to establish. In the case of the 'Upper' social class, the overall results of 8 (1.80%) is statistically insignificant to cause

any adjustments to the identified trend of information need, although this is not to ignore their strong presence in recreation and leisure information and information needs on education.

However the mere fact that the ‘lower’ and ‘middle’ class stereotypes predominate in attitude to information ‘seeking and finding’, provide signals of change in social values of education as a prestigious means of gaining security and enhanced status in the community. Parents of rural adolescents are farmers, masons, wood carvers, furniture makers, school teachers, politicians and petty/wholesome traders other than top civilians, academicians, judges or top government functionaries whose foundation for success, even survival is based on educational attainment and societal recognition therefrom. The average Nigerian society now recognizes chieftaincy titles, a complex array of university doctorate awards “honoris causa’ (not really based on honour but wealth). None of these has worthy academic equations but could be strong in terms of contribution of wealth to the community. Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that a determination of information needs of rural adolescents is not only possible but creative for new frontiers of information services to a largely semi-literate clientele. Adolescents’ information needs transcends traditional library provision in school and public libraries and the earlier information centers are set up to cater for this category of users, the better for use information profession as a whole.

**TABLE 1: Pattern of Rural Adolescents’ Information Needs (by Sex)**

	Areas of Information need	Broad/Specific information requests	Male n = 443		Female n= 357	
			No	%age	No	%age
1	Health	Treatment of Malaria, Sleeping Sickness and Cholera Anti-natal/post-natal care Infertility Addresses of nearest Hospitals and medical centres Cigarette smoking and its effects Environmental sanitation Kwashiorkor/parasitic diseases	126	28.4	105	29.4
2	Occupation	Business information Engineering Law (including customary) Teaching Journalism Pharmacy Accountancy Secretarial/Mass Communication Nursing Civil Service	267	60.3	207	58.0

3	Social Service	Water supply, Electricity, Good Roads, visits of Cinema, Vans, recreation and Leisure	38	8.6	24	6.7
4	Education	Business, Scholarships, Sources from cheap books/stationeries Admission Problems (into Colleges, Universities	6	1.4	15	4.3
5	Religion	Supply of religious literature (e.g. tracts and Magazines) Sources of subscription to religious books and journals	2	0.4	3	0.8
6	Transportation	Mass transit, movement of farm products, bus services	4	0.9	3	0.8
			<b>443</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>100</b>

**TABLE 2: Influence of parents' occupation on rural adolescents' information needs**

	Area of information need	Male n= 243				Female n= 159			
		Needs as related to:		Needs as related to:		Needs as related to:		Needs as related to:	
		Fathers' Occupation		Mothers' Occupation		Fathers' Occupation		Mothers' Occupation	
		No	%age	No	%age	No	%age	No	%age
1	Occupation	94	38.7	97	40.0	80	50.3	59	37.1
2	Health	3	1.2	1	0.4	1	0.6	1	0.6
3	Social Services	10	4.1	3	1.2	2	1.2	-	-
4	Education	23	9.5	2	0.8	-	-	2	1.3

5	Religion	4	1.6	3	1.2	9	5.7	5	3.1
6	Transportation	2	0.8	1	0.4	-	-	-	-
		<b>136</b>	<b>55.9</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>44.0</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>57.8</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>42.1</b>

**Table 3: Rural adolescents' information need according to sex and family social economic status**

	Area of information need	Male n= 443				Female n= 357			
		No	Upper	Middle	lower	No	Upper	Middle	lower
1	Occupation	267	-	67 (25.0%)	200 (75.0%)	207	2 (1.0%)	80 (38.6%)	125 (60.4%)
2	Health	126	5 (4.0%)		91 (72.2%)	105	-	40 (38.1%)	65 (61.9%)
3	Social Services	38	2 (5.3%)	20 (52.6%)	16 (42.1%)	24	1 (4.2%)	10 (41.7%)	13 (54.2%)
4	Education	6	1 (16.7%)	4 (66.7%)	1 (16.7%)	15	2 (13.3%)	8 (53.3%)	5 (33.3%)

5	Religion	2	-	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	3	-	-	3 (100%)
6	Transportation	2	-	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	3	-	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)

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