Article

Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour of International Postgraduate Students: A case study of Loughborough University.

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Abstract

This research investigated the information needs, information seeking behaviour, factors influencing information seeking behaviour and barriers to information seeking behaviour of international postgraduate students in Loughborough University. Mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative approaches were used for this research. The quantitative methods used ranking and numerical scales of information needs and challenges to meeting information needs while the qualitative approach involved a semi-structured interview with the participants. The main information needs of international postgraduate students were identified as information on the course of study and research related information. The findings also revealed the major sources of information as books and journals while the preferred channels of information were identified to be the internet and the library. The major barriers in meeting these needs are lack of proficiency in English language and lack of critical analysis skills. With the identification of the information needs, information seeking behaviour, and barriers in meeting these needs, suggestions were made as to how these needs could be met and barriers ameliorated.

Introduction

The present era is called the information era. The role of information has been acknowledged as an important aspect in the research activities of postgraduate students. It is believed that a better understanding of the information needs and the information seeking behaviour of postgraduate students is fundamental to help them achieve their research activities Thani and Hashim 2011). This is because information seeking is a key competency, which will be needed as postgraduate

students embark on their information searching to satisfy their information needs. Information need is the need for information that individual ought to have to do their jobs effectively, solve a problem satisfactorily or pursue a hobby or interest happily (Nicholas and Herman, 2009).

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), international students are defined as those who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin (World Education News and Reviews 2012, p.1. The United Kingdom is one of the most popular countries of destination for international students and it has one of the highest percentages of international students in higher education enrolments in the world (Quality Assurance Agency, 2012, Survey (NSS) and the International Student Barometer (ISB) reveal high rates of satisfaction among international students. In the most recent surveys, eight out of 10 international students are satisfied with their own experience of studying in the UK (Quality Assurance Agency, 2012, p. 1.).

One hundred and twenty six thousand[126,000] international students are currently enrolled for their postgraduate studies in the UK .They come from over 200 countries with the largest national groups originating from the USA, Greece, China, Germany, Malaysia and India (Quality Assurance Agency, 2012). These students studying in a foreign country are generally referred to as international students or foreign students as opposed to students studying in their home countries known as home students. Prior research has demonstrated that international postgraduate students face

many challenges amongst which are lack of information on acquisition skills, lack of information on course work, how to fulfill academic requirements and resources available for their assignments and research (O'Reilly, 2010). Bearing in mind this context, it was decided to investigate further information needs of international students and how they could be satisfied.

Profile of Loughborough University

Loughborough University established in 1966, is one of the UK's leading Universities with an international reputation for research. It was awarded the coveted Sunday Times University of the year2008-2009 title and is consistently ranked in the top twenty of UK universities in national newspaper league tables. Loughborough University remains England's top university for the best students experience for the sixth year running (Times Higher Education, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

With Loughborough University desire to attract students from countries of the world, it should provide the appropriate information to meet the academic, cultural, and personal information needs of this category of students for continuous attraction and retention of the students. This research aims to investigate the information needs and information seeking behaviour of international Postgraduate (Masters') Students in Loughborough University which may assist the University in providing excellent services for her international students.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the information needs, information seeking behaviour, factors influencing information seeking behaviour as well as identifying

the barriers to information seeking behaviour of international postgraduate students in Loughborough University.

1. To survey the types of information needs related to academic and everyday life.
2. To determine the priority of information needs by the students.
3. To identify their knowledge of information resources
4. To determine those needs that are difficult to meet
5. To determine sources of information available to the students
6. To survey the extent to which these needs had been met and the implications for the University.

Research questions

1. What are the academic and everyday life information needs of international postgraduate (Masters') students in Loughborough University?
2. What are the sources of information available to the international postgraduate students in Loughborough University?
3. How do international postgraduate students make use of the library and library services to meet their information needs?
4. Have the information needs of the international postgraduate students in Loughborough University been met?

Literature Review

Information Needs

Information need is the need for information that individual ought to have to do their job effectively, solve a problem satisfactorily or pursue a hobby or interest happily (Nicholas and Herman 2009). The key word here is ought, the assumption being that for people to perform efficiently, effectively, safely and happily, they need to be well informed, that is their information need should be met. Information needs is often understood as evolving from a vague awareness of something used and as culminating in locating the information that contribute to understanding and meaning (Kuhlthau, 1993). Thus, it is seen that there is a need to understand the user's requirements because the root of any information seeking is believed to be the concept of information needs, which fall into various categories: need for new information; need to expand or clarify the information obtained; and need to confirm or validate the information known (Allen 1996, p.103). Kennedy (1997) wrote that the concept of information needs is similar to the need for love and the physiological need for food and water. He added, information seeking thus, is dependent upon the problem situation from which the need arises. In this view, information need is a situation or task which depends on many factors and changes as the person goes from one stage of a task to the next.

Information Seeking

The concept of information seeking is basically the consequence of a felt information need by a user who may then make demands upon formal and informal information sources or services in order to satisfy the needs. Information seeking means different things in different context that involves the search, retrieval, recognition and application of meaningful content.

Bukhari et al (2018) in a research examined the modeling of the information seeking behavior of international students when they use social media to find information.

A mixed method approach was employed to collect data from the literature. The information seeking activities were identified as informal searching, deciding, interacting, following, verifying and saving. This research enhances the previous models of information seeking behavior by adding the role of social media and provide valuable insights for international students.

Singh et al (2015) in a study investigated the information needs and information seeking behavior of foreign students in University of Delhi. A survey method was used for the study and limited the postgraduate foreign students just like this researcher. The study revealed that postgraduate students need information regarding their programme of study, writing, research articles and doing their research work. Further findings of the study indicate how the library professionals assist foreign students to accommodate their information needs.

Majyambere (2013) investigated the information seeking behaviour of humanities and arts international postgraduate students in public universities in Kwazulu-Natal Province, South Africa. Three public Universities participated in the study, namely the University of Kwazulu –Natal, University Zululand and Durban University of Technology. The findings revealed that international postgraduate students had academic and personal information needs at the host Universities. This During the last decade, many research studies have investigated information seeking behaviour of various disciplines There is also considerable literature on the information needs of international students (Safahieh, 2007). But most of the literature does not examine these information needs holistically but instead specific aspects of need Ganster, 2011) Most of the research on international

students focused on their academic adjustment (e.g., Liao, Finn, & Lu, 2007; Yi, 2007). While some have devoted their studies to information needs of international students from Asian countries (Mu 2007) others focused their studies mainly on the library needs of international students (Bent 2008) The Investigation of the information seeking behaviour of graduate students in particular has also been increasing in recent years (Al-Muomen, Morris & Maynard 2012) However, there is only scanty literature on the international postgraduate students in Loughborough University and this study seeks to fill that gap.

A study by El-maamiry (2017) investigated use of electronic resources by students of the college of Business Administration and College of Information Technology of University of Dubai. It examined possible factors and problems in their searching habits, information seeking, use and retrieval in satisfying their needs. Findings reveled that students of University of Dubai ultimately due to cultural effects adopts different searching processes, use different phrases and spend more time to search for information to satisfy their needs

Cox and Jantti (2012), in their paper titled discovering the impact of library use and student performance reveals that by providing access to information resources academic libraries play a significant role in the students' experience. Analyzing the data reveals a strong correlation between the use of information resources and students grades. The study concluded that the abilities to demonstrate the value and impact of libraries and their collections is becoming all the more important

Al-Zubaidi (2010), carried out a study on cultural as well as language barriers which

typically confront international students undergoing postgraduate studies in Malaysia. The study also examined the possible strategies for assisting students to more effectively engage with many of the larger cultural barriers and academic challenges. The findings identified the most troublesome challenges encountered by international students at five Malaysian Universities. The problems faced were ranked as follows: first, academic difficulties, second, language difficulties, and third, cultural difficulties. It went further to explain that cultural differences concern the degree to which a student's native culture is different from that of the host country. For instance, students from some countries may have been taught that it is a sign of disrespect to look directly at lectures when they are speaking to them or differ in opinion from those of their lecturers. They may have also have been taught not to speak in class unless called upon. They may have more experience memorising information than criticising arguments or asking questions. For these reasons, students from such cultures, may be more hesitant to ask information. This study is limited to only international postgraduate Arab students studying in Malaysia and as such, may not apply to other cultures.

A small case study of the information seeking behaviour of a sample of postgraduate students attending the 13 postgraduate programmes offered by the University of Macedonia was carried out by Mallian, et. al. (2011). The study was a continuation of a previous study which was undertaken to determine the information seeking behaviour of postgraduate students of the faculties of Philosophy and Engineering at the Aristotle University of Thessalonki. The study revealed that majority of students did not use sophisticated techniques for retrieving relevant information. It was also found that gender, discipline, personal traits and library instruction progrmmes did not play a significant role. On the other hand, search experience, computer and web experience, perceived ability and frequency of use of e-resources played an important role in shaping information seeking behaviour (Mallian, Korobili, & Zapounnidou, 2011) The sample of the study is very small and as such, the result cannot be generalised. However, this and the previous study indicate the challenges international students may have.

Research on the search behaviour of the millennial generation (born after 1982) was carried out by Taylor (2012). The study examined the behaviours of undergraduate college students who were members of the millennial generation. Data was gathered from the students using surveys during an information search process as part of an assigned research project. Quantitative analysis was carried out on the data, which related to 80 individual subjects and the evaluation of 758 documents. Findings of the study showed that the execution of searches by millennial generation may be problematic (Taylor 2012)Findings also revealed that existing search models are appropriate and that it is the execution of the models by the searcher within the context of the search environment that is an issue. The subjects in this study were from a University in the USA. It is not clear from the study that search behaviour or more broadly, the behaviour of millennial generation subjects will be the same in other cultures.

Foley (2010) carried out a survey of international students of the Institute of Technology, Carlow. The survey described their library experiences, identified the main barriers and service gaps such as, language barrier, cultural adjustment

issues, library anxiety and information seeking skills encountered by them in their use of the academic library. Guidelines were developed arising from the research on how to better support their library needs and make a positive contribution to their experience of studying outside of their home countries. The survey concluded that the library needed to be proactive in addressing the needs of these students in order to provide the library support required for them to successfully pursue their studies. Curiously, Foley did not mention an effective marketing strategy that provides the means by which users are made aware of the services of the library and their value. In order for international students to maximise the use of the library, they need to be aware of the services and products available, e.g., through library orientation (Ifijeh, 2011)

Similar research to that of Foley was carried out in 2011 by Ganster. The study was about Online Information Behaviour and International Students at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Findings from the study show that the Web site did enable access to books and resources that helped international students learn about American culture (Ganster, 2011). The Web guide has also positively enhanced the library services by addressing the needs of international students and improving library outreach on the campus. However, while the goals of the Web project were met, creating a web guide is only one way of providing service to international students. Implementing a web guide does not guarantee that international students will access the resources to resolve their needs.

Ismail (2009), conducted a study on Postgraduate Students in the face of the changing higher education landscape in Malaysia. The study focused mainly on Postgraduate Students' needs in terms of information, services and support. The study revealed that the information and services in the University was moderate from students' perspective Ismail 2009, p. 324. 341 questionnaire were administered while 183 (53.96%) were successfully returned. The result obtained show that Postgraduate Students need more research materials like research and professional journals and peer reviewed articles than textbooks and general information materials. Thus, effective resources are required to enhance the postgraduate process. However, the study was limited to a Malaysian University.

Mehra (2008), carried out a study that assessed the information seeking behaviour and key information needs of international students and barriers they face in using various information and communication technology, for example, web search engines and the internet, library resource technology; and online databases for academic work. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather data from 10 Asian postgraduate students at the University of Tennessee Results from this study showed that the number one information need of the participants was about programme of study, secondly, day-to-day local information (e.g., directions to grocery stores for shopping); thirdly, information about American culture. Findings from the study also indicated that international students from Asian countries experience major difficulties in using various ICTs including web search engines, the internet, and library search technologies.

Bamford (2008), carried out a case study on international students. The study seeks to provide an insight into international students' perceptions of their educational experiences in the UK and possible solutions for improvements to their learning experiences.

Through the use of qualitative approach and themes of language, social and cultural issues that impact on learning processes, the study examined the challenges for international students and the reasons why some find it difficult to adjust to their new environment. The research clearly demonstrated the difficulties that international students have in adjusting to a new academic environment, such as the language barrier, cultural differences and previous educational experiences as well as providing a possible approach for improvement of their experiences.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate the information needs and information seeking behavior of international postgraduate students in Loughborough University. For the purpose of this study, applied research is selected as appropriate. The qualitative and quantitative approaches were used for this study. The quantitative aspect required ranking and numerical scales of information needs and challenges to meeting information needs. These types of questions allowed easy comparison and therefore easily analysed.

Simple random sampling was used to make sampling more efficient and easier. To gain as many responses as possible from the one thousand, one hundred and twenty five (1125) international postgraduate students, an e-mail was sent to the departmental e-mail account of all international students in the department inviting them for interview and letters of invitation were also hand-delivered to other international postgraduate students from other Departments and Schools.

The questionnaire was administered personally by the researcher who was an international student in the department of information Science and Library Management in the University. The questionnaire was the paper-based, printed instrument. The paper consisted of 17 questions sub divided into six sections: profile; information needs; information seeking behaviour; barriers to meeting information needs; adequacy of library/university resources; and suggestions for meeting the information needs of international students. The questions were made up of open and closed questions such as: On arrival in Loughborough University who did you ask for information first?, When looking for help in finding information for assignments, who did you ask for help? Which of the following resources do you use most? What are the main categories of your information needs? while two questions were Likert-type questions with students having to rank their level of satisfaction with selected aspects of library services. 30 questionnaires were administered while 16 were successfully returned.

There was a group interview of 12 participants and individual interviews of 8 other participants but only 4 out of the 8 individual interviews were analysed. 30 questionnaires were administered and 18 (60%) were successfully returned. Two out of the 18 returned questionnaire were discarded because of incomplete information. Only 16 questionnaires were coded, edited and analysed.

Result

The Participants
30 hand-delivered questionnaire were administered on international postgraduate (Masters') students of Loughborough University. 18 were returned while 2 out of it were discarded due to incomplete information. The 16 questionnaire that were analysed comprises of 5 students from China, 1 from Germany, 5 from Nigeria, 3 from France, 1 from Spain, and1 from Czechoslovakia

Figure 1: Students' nationality and course of study.
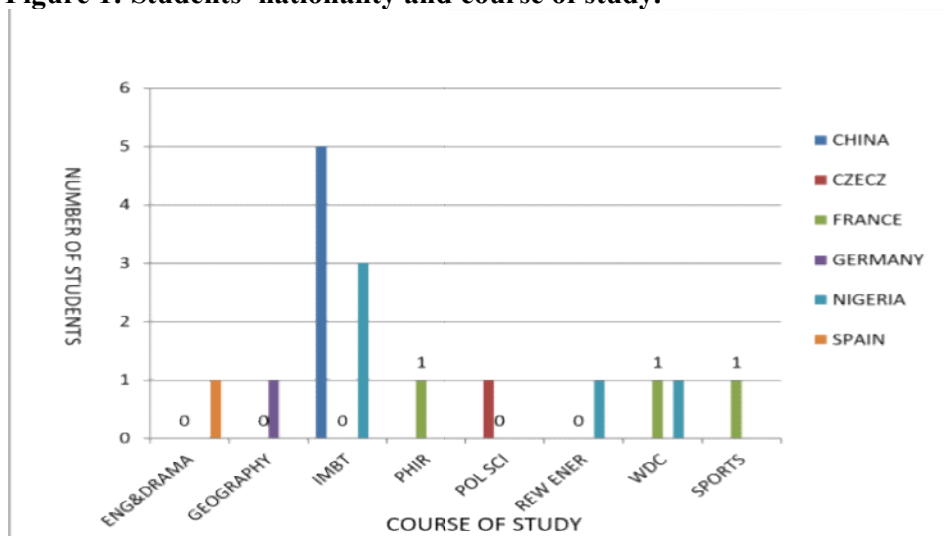
The data in Figure 3 above shows that respondents are undergoing 8 different courses of study with Information Management and Business Technology having the highest number of respondents, 50%.

Information needs

Table 2: Categories of information needs by international students

Information Needs Ranking	Inform on University / School	Inform on Prog of Study	Inform on Courses	Inform on Research Areas	Inform on Jobs	Inform on Educ After Grad	Inform on Immig Issues	Other Info	Total
First	2	4	7	2	1	0	0	0	**16**
Second	1	6	6	1	2	0	0	0	**16**
Third	1	4	1	8	1	1	0	0	**16**
Fourth	6	1	1	3	2	2	0	1	**16**

Table 3: T**he main information needs based on country of origin.**

	Inform on University/ School	Inform on Prog of Study	Inform on Courses	Inform on Research Areas	Inform on Jobs	Inform on Educ After Grad	Inform on Immig Issues	Total
CHINA	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	**5**
CHECZ	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	**1**
FRANCE	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	**3**
GERMANY	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
NIGERIA	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	**5**
SPAIN	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
TOTAL	2	4	7	2	1	0	0	**16**

Table 2 and 3 shows the respondents' choice of information needs. Only the respondents' 4 topmost choices were considered. It was clear that the topmost information need of the international postgraduate students is the information relating to their courses. 70% of the respondents ranked information related to courses taken as their main information need.

The 2nd topmost information need of the respondents is the information related to their research. 64.5% of the respondents ranked it as 2nd priority information need while 61% ranked information related to their programme of study as the 3rd topmost information need and 50% ranked information relating to the University and Schools as the 4th priority information need.
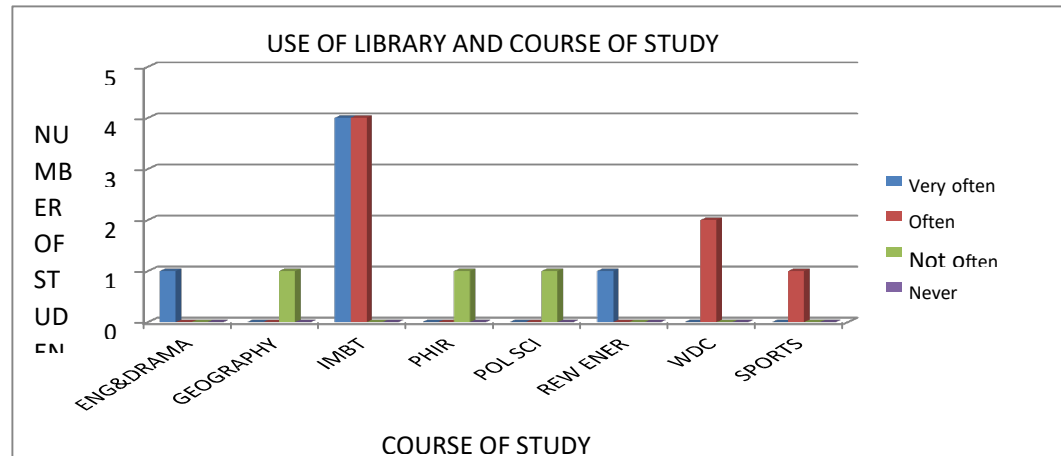
Figure 2: Library usage behaviour

Figure 2 shows Library usage behaviour. Out of the 8 respondents form the department of Information Management, four respondents indicated they visited the library very often and the remaining four claimed they visited the library often .One student from the department of English and another student from the department of Renewable Energy indicated they visited the library very often. The department of Geography, Public Health, and Political science had one respondent each who indicated that they do not often visit the library. There is none of the respondents who claimed he has not visited the library. It could be concluded therefore that there is high usage of the library for information needs of the international postgraduate students.

Figure 3: Channels of Information
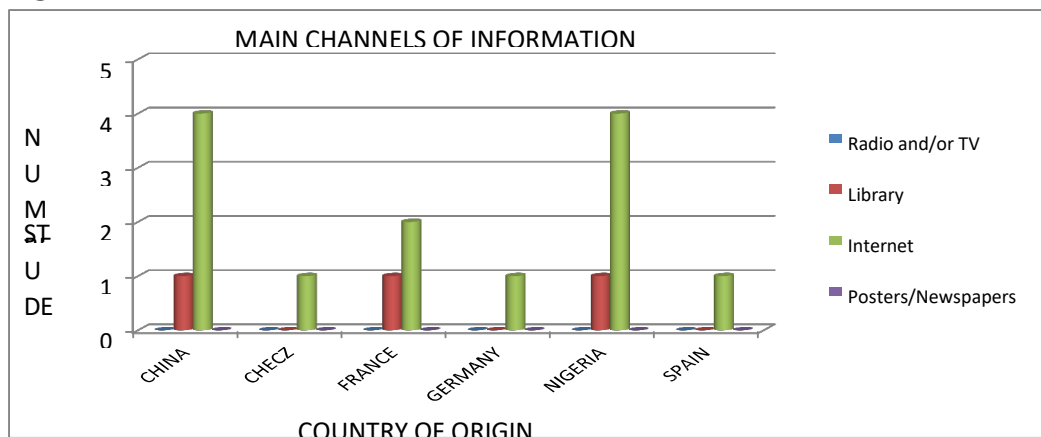
As regards the channels of information, respondents across the subject disciplines indicated their preference for the internet as their main channel of information when seeking information needs (Figure 3). The library trailed the internet as the second mostly used channel while the respondents did not indicate using Posters/Newspapers and Radio/Television. It is not surprising that most students used the internet to access information because it well documented that international students often rely on online information to aid and assist in their studies (Ganster, 2011).
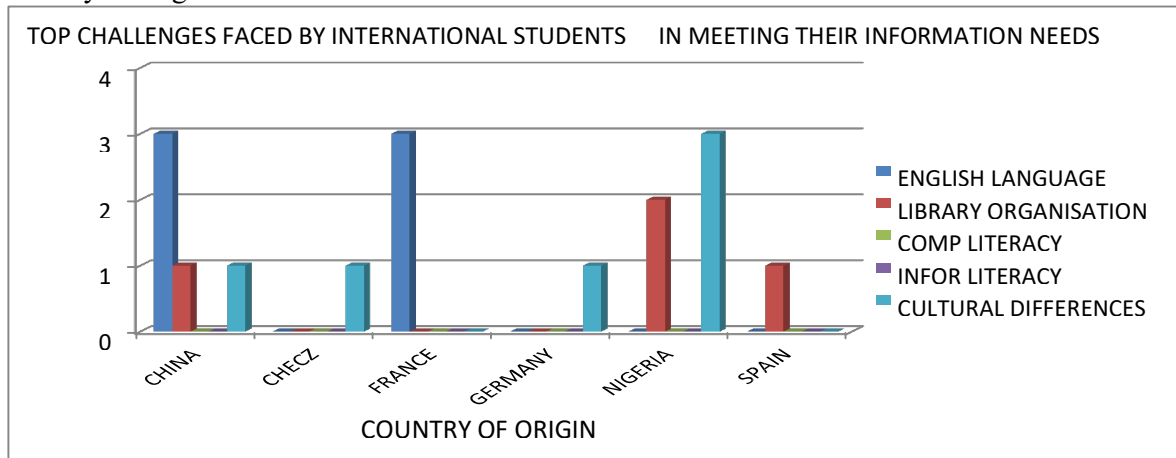
Figure 4: Major challenges faced by international students in meeting their information needs by country of origin


Figure 4 shows the major challenges faced by international students in meeting their information needs. Cultural challenges was equally rated on the same scale as English language (37.5%) being a topmost barrier. This is similar to earlier study which claimed that culture has a profound effect in shaping us as a people and providing the framework for how we live our lives and how we interact with others (Foley 2010, p.8). Al-Zubaidi (2010), also corroborated this claim by saying that some of the challenges that international students may encounter include cultural differences, for example, some students from some countries may have had more experience memorising information than criticising arguments or asking questions and for this reasons, students from such cultures, may be more hesitant to ask for information.

Adequacy of library/University resources and services

To have a clear view of how the library and University resources and services are meeting the information needs of the international students, the respondents were specifically asked to rate the library collections and academic librarians in meeting their information needs and to indicate their overall satisfaction of the University information sources.

Figure 5: Adequacy of Library Collections
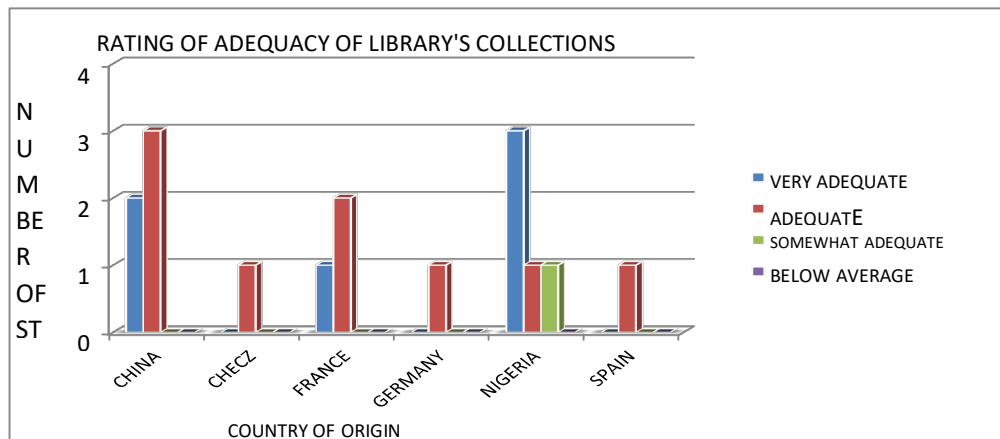
Four out of the five respondents from Nigeria indicated that the library resources and services were very adequate while three out of the five Chinese respondents and two out of the three respondents from France confirmed that the library resources and services were adequate. The only respondent from Germany and the only respondent from Chezoclovakia indicated that the library materials were somewhat adequate. The respondent from Spain was the only respondent who said the Loughborough University Library resources was below average.

Figure 6: SATISFACTION RATINGS OF UNIVERSITY INFORMATION SOURCES
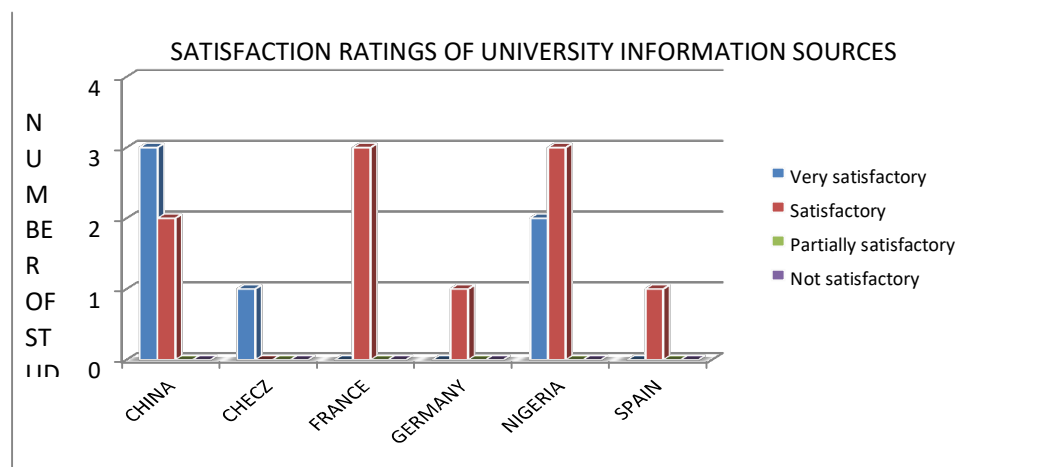

Figure shows that overall, the respondents indicated that the University sources of information are satisfactory in meeting their information needs.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the information seeking behaviour and information needs of international postgraduate students of Loughborough University in the United Kingdom. The findings demonstrate that international postgraduate students are similar in relying on information sources relating to academic activities and everyday life information needs. The findings also reveal that there are adequate library and University resources and services to meet the information needs of the international postgraduate students.

It could be deduced from the findings that the international postgraduate students are similar in relying on information sources relating to academic activities such as term papers, course work and examinations. However, they are different in relying on information relating everyday things they do in Loughborough such as food, accommodation and jobs .One major areas of commonalities of information need is information on courses pursued in the universities by individual students. The findings from this paper show that the students expressed satisfaction with provision of information sources by the university especially library resources and databases even though there is still room for improvement. This study revealed that English language proficiency is one of the challenges of some of the students especially from China. The Chinese students are more than 42% of the total number of international postgraduate students and are not proficient in the use of English language as some other nationals such as Nigerians and Americans.

Four out of the five respondents from Nigeria indicated that the library resources and services were very adequate while three out of the five Chinese respondents and two out of the three respondents from France confirmed that the library resources and services were adequate. The only respondent from Germany and the only respondent from Chezoclovakia indicated that the library materials were somewhat adequate. The respondent from Spain was the only respondent who said the Loughborough University Library resources was below average in meeting their information needs.

This is a very good development as it could contribute to their academic performance and increase their interest in furthering their education in Loughborough University. This view is supported by Wong and Web (2011), who concluded in their study that most students follow the inference that the more library books and materials they use , the higher GPA they acquire. Similar view was also expressed by Cox and Janti (2012), who said they now have a compelling story to share based on the data generated to date; students who access library resources do outperform students who do not. The library cube therefore, provides a new facet to better understand the total students' experience. However, this should not prevent the library from improving and enhancing their collections, for according to this analysis, only 25% respondents agreed that the library collection was very adequate. Very adequate is the most ranked option in questions 13-16 in the questionnaire.

Conclusion and recommendations

An overview of this exploratory study is presented in relation to the research aims and objectives. The study sought to examine the information needs and information seeking behaviour and likely barriers to these information needs of international Postgraduate students in Loughborough University. In view of the significant rise in the number of international Postgraduate students, their information need should be identified and information seeking behaviour understood in order for them to enjoy good and

excellent information services provision by the University.

This study used mixed methods of both the qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct the research. This is because the approaches have complementary strengths. A study that combines both tends to be richer and more comprehensive. Overall, findings indicated that 100% of the respondents claimed that the University information sources are satisfactory in meeting their information sources. This is a good testimony for the University and might be as a result of the University's unique relationship with her teeming students' population.

This study revealed that the main information needs of postgraduate international students are information related to their courses, information related to their programme of study, information related to research and information related to the University/Schools. They experienced information seeking stages; from initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection, and presentation. Their major resources for information are books and journals while the main channels of their information are the internet and the library. The major barriers to meeting their information needs are: English language proficiency, cultural differences, inability to seek, obtain and evaluate information and unfamiliarity with the organisation of the University library.

Recommendations

As the numbers and diversity of international students increase on the campus, the need to understand and to work effectively with those students becomes more germane. These recommendations are based on the findings of this study and organised as follows:

1. Dedicated web pages

    Since majority of international postgraduate students have indicated their preference for the internet in accessing information, web pages dedicated to the international students should be created to provide organised information needed for their course of study and other information that are peculiar to the international students. The international students are more likely to use these web pages, once they are aware that the information is tailored towards them.

2. Bilingual publications

    English language proficiency is one of the major challenges confronting the international students. This can be ameliorated if the University embarks on translating information materials for international students in Chinese, since students from China are more than 42% of the total number of international students. This could be incorporated into the induction ceremony for the international students which should be held within the first few days of resumption to allow for easy and quick access to information.

3. Integration into students' activities

    Loughborough University should proactively and overtly encourage and ensure that international students are represented in students' activities so as to quicken their acculturation process. Acculturation is the process in which an individual learns about the norms, values, and beliefs of the host country (Sin, et al., 2011). They could also be encouraged to form international students association. These will likely reduce the problem of cultural differences, loneliness and home sick.

4. Marketing the University library to international students

Effective marketing provides the means by which users are made aware of the services of the library and their values (Ifijeh 2011, p.235). Marketing is not just about developing and promoting new services and products but about bringing awareness to clients of existing services and products and determining their appropriateness. This can be done through library orientation for example. Library orientation is essential to international students as it provides a good chance for those students to familiarise themselves with the library environment, and especially with academic librarians.

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