



INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AGENTS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

Taiwo, A. M., Adeleke-Ibrahim, A. K. and Akinbile, L. A.

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Corresponding Author's Email: abioduntaiwo34@gmail.com, **GSM:** +234)8038479746

ABSTRACT

The study examined information needs and seeking behaviour of agricultural extension agents in Lagos State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 51 Agricultural extension agents for the study. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and analysed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, standard deviation and chi-square test. Results showed that 70.6% of the respondents were male, 88.2% were married, 56.7% were Christians, 92.2% were Yoruba. The mean years of formal education among the respondents was 17. They had an average of 5 persons per household. The most accessible sources of information were internet and universities with mean of ($\bar{x}=2.31$) and ($\bar{x}=2.15$), respectively. Also, the major information needs of the respondents were livestock production management ($\bar{x}=1.88$) and community health development ($\bar{x}=1.88$). Information seeking behaviour of the respondents were mainly on keeping abreast with recent developments ($\bar{x}=2.33$) and for academic purpose ($\bar{x}=2.05$). Chi-square analysis showed that there was significant ($r=0.001$; $p<0.05$) relationship between marital status and information seeking behaviour of the respondents. The findings also revealed that difficulty in accessing foreign journal ($\bar{x}=1.86$) and materials being written in foreign languages ($\bar{x}=1.26$) were the major constraints faced by the respondents. The study concluded that respondents seek information to stay updated with recent developments, with significant needs in livestock production and management. It is recommended that targeted efforts be made to provide accessible, relevant, and up-to-date information resources, particularly in the areas of need.

Keywords: Extension agents, Information needs, Seeking behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Literatures have shown that no society can grow beyond its level of information awareness, acquisition and appropriation (Gordon, *et al.*, 2020). Due to its importance, all human beings need information no matter where they live or find themselves. People depend on information in social, cultural, political, scientific and technological endeavours (Ali and Jan, 2020). Information is a catalyst for solving problems and a very important tool for enhancing economic development (Olorunfemi, 2018). It is a vital factor that influences all persons, young or old, literate or illiterate. Information can also be seen as a strategic resource for virtually every person or group of people in an organisation or establishment, whether public or private. Information is an important tool used in the realisation of any objective or goal set by individual, thus it remains the lifeblood of any organisation (Gyesi, 2020). Information ranks next to the basic human needs as air, water, food and shelter (Humbhi and Tareen, 2022). According to Vidanapathirana (2012), agricultural information is considered as an essential input to agricultural education, research and development and extension activities. The collection, transfer and use are all pervasive and universal activities.

Information needs is the amount of positive information an individual or group of users need to have for their work, recreation and other life satisfaction (Kadir *et al.*, 2018). Information needs is mostly linked by individual's work activities, therefore agricultural extension workers' information needs revolve around farming activities. Extension workers cannot be efficient in their responsibilities to their clientele if they are deficient in information dissemination resulting from not being adequately informed on some subjects. Asogwa and Daniel (2021), classified information needs of agricultural extension workers in Southwest Nigeria into technical, commercial, social, legal and general information. Most of these needs are however technical and could only be fulfilled by research scientists. Information seeking behaviour refers to the tendencies exhibited by information users in their identification and articulation of their information needs as well as their search, evaluation, selection and use of the information (Gordon



et al., 2018). According to Yahaya (2019), information seeking is a basic activity indulged in by all people and manifested through a particular behaviour.

The need to be an informed and knowledgeable individual leads to the process of identifying information needs. This process alone cannot work without knowing the ways individuals articulate, seek, evaluate, select and finally use the required information, which is commonly known as information-seeking behaviour. According to Kadir *et al.* (2018), the understanding of information needs and information-seeking behaviour of various professional groups is essential in planning, implementation and operation of information system and services in a given work setting.

Agricultural extension agents serve as conduit pipe between researchers and farmers through the transmission of information on the improved technique of farming that will enable them increase their productivity in order to meet the increasing food demands of the teeming population. The attainment and sustenance of high level of agricultural production and income are not possible without the desire and pursuit of effective and efficient information by agricultural extension workers using appropriate input and tools to disseminate information that are timely and relevant for farmers need. Brhane *et al.* (2017), observed that agricultural sector is a very information-intensive industry whose success is dependent on availability and timely delivery of such agricultural knowledge and information. As such, understanding information needs and seeking behaviour of agricultural extension agents is paramount. It is in light of the foregoing that the study assessed the information needs and information seeking behaviour of extension agents in Lagos state. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to;

- i. describe the personal characteristics of the respondents in the study area;
- ii. find out the sources of information available to respondents in the study area;
- iii. determine the information needs and seeking behaviour of the respondents in the study area;
- iv. identify the constraints facing respondents' information needs and seeking behaviour.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Area

The study was carried out in Lagos State. The state is located in Southwestern Nigeria on the West Coast of Africa, within latitudes 6° 23'N and 6°41'N and longitudes 2°42'E and 3°42'E. The population of Lagos State in 2023 was 15,772,884. Lagos State, is the country's smallest state by land area, covering approximately 3,577 square kilometres (1,381 square miles). Despite its size, Lagos is densely populated, with over 20 million residents, and stands as Nigeria's commercial powerhouse. The state experiences a tropical monsoon climate with annual rainfall averaging between 1,500 to 2,000 millimetres (59 to 79 inches), mostly concentrated between April and October, with peak rainfall occurring from June to September. Temperatures in Lagos remain warm and humid throughout the year, ranging from 26°C to 32°C (79°F to 90°F), with the hottest period in February and March and cooler temperatures in August. Vegetation in Lagos includes coastal mangrove swamps and tropical rainforests, which transition to secondary forests and grasslands further inland due to urban expansion. These ecosystems provide essential environmental support for the state's urbanized areas. Indigenous economic activities in Lagos State include fishing, as many coastal communities rely on the abundant waterways for their livelihood. Agriculture, especially the cultivation of crops like cassava, maize, and vegetables, is practiced on a smaller scale due to limited land but remains significant in rural areas. Traditional crafts such as pottery, cloth weaving (like the famous Aso-Oke), and blacksmithing are also part of Lagos's indigenous economic activities, reflecting cultural heritage. Additionally, small-scale trading and local markets are central, with many residents selling handcrafted goods, produce, and traditional foods in community markets.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The population of the study comprised all extension agents in Lagos State Agricultural Development Authority (LSADA). Simple random sampling technique was used to select fifty-one (51) respondents from the list of all extension agents in LSADA, which was a total of 90 extension agents covering the three Zones; Ikorodu, Epe and Badagry (LSADA, 2017).



Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was used to obtain information from the respondents. The specific objectives of the study covered; personal characteristics of the extension agents, sources of information available, constraints faced, information needs and the seeking behaviour of the respondents. To measure the dependent variable (information needs and seeking behaviour); for information needs, respondents were presented with a list of 15 items on a 3-point scale of highly needed (2), occasionally needed (1) and not needed (0) while information seeking behaviour was operationalized with response options of very effective (3), effective (2), partially effective (1) and not effective (0).

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using percentages, mean, standard deviation and Chi-square at 0.05 significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Characteristics of Respondents

Result in Table 1 shows that the mean age of the respondents was 46 years in the study area. This suggests that the extension agents were middle aged and therefore have all the energy to execute the extension work which is consistent with the findings of Asogwa and Daniel (2021). Majority (70.6%) of the respondents were males, this implies a gender imbalance in personnel mixture in the public agricultural extension service in the State. Olorunfemi (2018) reported that extension services were generally dominated by male extension personnel. Majority (88.2%) of the respondents were married. This may however be culturally encouraging as they are expected to be married since they have the wherewithal to take care of a family and to ensure continuity. Above average (56.9%) of the respondents were Christians while most (92.2%) of the respondents were Yoruba. The peculiarity of the state being an industrial and economic headquarter of the nation playing host to many people from other southern states accounted for the religious and tribal distribution reported in the study. The mean years (17) of formal education shows that all the respondents (100%) trained through formal school to a tertiary level. Their high educational attainment implies that extension workers in the study area were better able to understand and work with agricultural technologies and information they seek from different information sources. This finding is in tandem with Gyesi (2020). The mean value of the household size was 5, which implies that the respondents have a moderate household size.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents based on Personal Characteristics (n = 51)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	S.D
Age (years)			46	8
30-37	10	19.6		
38-45	12	23.5		
46-53	22	43.1		
54-61	7	13.7		
Gender				
Male	36	70.6		
Female	15	29.4		
Marital				
Single	4	7.8		
Married	45	88.2		
Divorced	1	2.0		
Widowed	1	2.0		
Religion				
Christianity	29	56.9		
Islam	22	43.1		
Tribe				
Igbo	3	5.9		
Yoruba	47	92.1		
Others	1	2.0		
Number of years of formal education			17	2
Household size			5	2
3-4	16	31.4		
5-6	25	49.0		
7-8	9	17.6		
9-10	1	2.0		

Source: Field survey, 2022

Sources of Information Available to Respondents

The result in Table 2 indicated that internet, universities, radio and television were the most accessible sources of information among respondents with mean values of \bar{x} = 2.31, \bar{x} =2.15 and \bar{x} = 2.05, respectively. The high access to internet is necessitated by the technological advancement hence, internet being the most used for sourcing information by the respondents. Research outputs from agriculture-based universities and faculties of agriculture have been very useful as sources of messages for extension delivery in the study area. Radio and television over the years have been among the leading sources of information and innovation, particularly with affordability favouring the use of radio. These findings are line with observation by Ali and Jan (2020) on the preferential status of electronic information among 21st century information users.



Table 2: Distribution of Respondents based on Sources of Information (n=51)

Source of information available	Very readily accessible	Readily accessible	Not accessible	Mean	S.D
Internet	8(15.7)	13(25.5)	28(54.7)	2.31	0.88
Personal collection	38(74.5)	7(13.7)	5(9.8)	1.31	0.67
Research institutes	0	34(66.7)	14(27.5)	1.98	1.06
Universities	2(3.9)	21(41.2)	19(37.3)	2.15	0.70
Colleagues	24(47.1)	23(45.1)	4(7.8)	1.60	0.63
Seminar/workshop/conference	20(39.2)	18(35.3)	13(25.5)	1.86	0.80
Scientific journals	9(17.6)	33(64.7)	4(7.8)	1.70	0.75
Library materials	8(15.7)	20(39.2)	12(23.5)	1.64	1.07
Radio programmes	15(29.4)	18(35.3)	18(35.3)	2.05	0.81
Television	15(29.4)	15(29.4)	20(39.2)	2.05	0.88

NB: The values in parentheses are percentages. **Source:** Field survey 2022

Information Needs of Respondents

Results in Table 3, revealed that livestock production and management, community health development, control of major pests and proper handling of insecticides topped the list of information needs of the respondents with mean values $\bar{x}=1.88$, $\bar{x}=1.86$ and $\bar{x}=1.85$. The need for information on livestock production and management may be because most farmers are moving into livestock production and as diseases and pests are controlled, they are prepared to invest more in livestock production. Community health development seem really important because families that are battling with disease or ailment may be unfavourably disposed to innovation dissemination and adoption. High pest infestation may require extension agents to up their games in pest management to increase yield through the use of some insecticides which must be properly and safely handled. This finding conforms to the report of Humbhi and Tareen (2022) who reported that community health development was among core information needs of health extension and social workers.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents Based on Information Needs (n=51)

Information needs	Highly needed	Occasionally needed	Not needed	Means	S.D	Rank
Cropping activities	42(82.4)	8(15.7)	1(2.0)	1.80	0.44	8 th
Livestock production and management	46(90.2)	4(7.8)	0	1.88	0.38	1 st
Scientific research	43(84.3)	8(15.7)	0	1.84	0.36	5 th
Community health development	45(88.2)	6(11.8)	0	1.88	0.32	1 st
Rural policy development	41(80.4)	10(19.6)	0	1.80	0.40	8 th
Education	37(72.5)	11(21.6)	3(5.9)	1.66	0.58	15 th
Government policy in agriculture	43(84.3)	8(15.7)	0	1.84	0.36	5 th
Agro industries	37(72.5)	13(25.5)	1(2.0)	1.70	0.51	12 th
Land tenure system	38(74.5)	12(23.5)	1(2.0)	1.72	0.49	11 th
Control of major pest	45(88.2)	5(9.8)	1(2.0)	1.86	0.40	3 rd
Proper handling of insecticides	44(86.3)	6(11.8)	1(2.0)	1.85	0.41	4 th
Women empowerment	42(82.4)	8(15.7)	1(2.0)	1.80	0.44	8 th
Nutrition and home management	42(82.4)	9(17.6)	0	1.82	0.38	7 th
Processing and packaging of agricultural produce	39(76.5)	9(17.6)	3(5.9)	1.70	0.57	12 th
Others (group action, modern method of crop production, communication)	36(70.6)	15(29.4)	0	1.70	0.46	12 th

NB: The values in parentheses are percentages **Source:** Field survey 2022

Information Seeking Behaviour

Results in Table 4 showed that keeping abreast with recent developments, academic purpose and acquiring more knowledge were the leading information seeking behaviours among the respondents with mean value $\bar{x}=2.33$, $\bar{x}=2.05$ and $\bar{x}=1.82$ respectively. The information seeking behaviour of the respondents help them make sure that they have the most recent facts and information about things concerned with agriculture and other basic information as well, the respondents sometimes seek information for academic purpose so as to be used for promotion at their work place, the desire for new ideas will enhance the dissemination of contemporary agricultural information to the farmers thereby improving productivity, and better living standard for the farming populace and also bring about sustainable extension practices.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents Based on Information Seeking Behaviour

Information seeking behaviour	Very effective	Effective	Partially effective	Not effective	Mean	S.D
Curiosity	4(7.8)	30(58.8)	12(23.5)	5(9.8)	1.64	0.10
Keep abreast with recent developments	29(56.9)	10(19.6)	12(23.5)	0	2.33	0.11
Academic purpose	12(23.5)	30(58.8)	9(17.6)	0	2.05	0.09
Acquire more knowledge	2(3.9)	38(74.5)	11(21.6)	0	1.82	0.66
Desire of new ideas	2(3.9)	30(58.8)	17(33.3)	2(3.9)	1.62	0.88
World of entertainments	2(3.9)	25(49.0)	19(37.3)	5(9.8)	1.47	0.10
Politics	1(2.0)	17(33.3)	23(45.1)	10(19.6)	1.11	0.10

NB: The values in parentheses are percentages

Source: Field survey 2022

Constraints to Respondents' Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour

The result in Table 5 indicates that difficulty in accessing foreign journals, materials written in foreign languages, inadequate information retrieval skills and inadequate current information materials were the highest constraints faced by the respondents with mean values $\bar{x}=1.86$, $\bar{x}=1.45$ and $\bar{x}=1.35$, respectively. The difficulty in accessing foreign journals could be due to restrictions and subscriptions request before accessing such journals thus high ranked foreign journals are not Open Access Journals. Materials written in foreign languages is one of the problems faced by respondents because of inability to translate non-English publications. Inadequate information retrieval skills could be seen as training need/gap of the respondents in information technologies which when bridged may enhance information retrieval and improve the reach for current information materials among respondents. Asogwa and Daniel (2021) reported insufficient information retrieval skills as constraint to information needs and seeking behaviour. Othe constraints encountered by respondents include; non-availability of relevant information ($\bar{x}=1.29$), lack of knowledge of existence of relevant information ($\bar{x}=1.15$), lack of accessibility of information resources ($\bar{x}=1.07$), computer illiteracy ($\bar{x}=1.04$) and poor remuneration ($\bar{x}=1.00$).

Table 5: Constraints to Respondents' Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour (n=51)

Constraints	Severe constraint	Mild constraint	Not a constraint	Mean	SD	Rank
Difficulty in accessing foreign journal	24(47.1)	23(45.1)	4(7.8)	1.86	1.11	1 st
Lack of knowledge of existence of relevant information	11(21.6)	26(51.0)	14(27.5)	1.15	1.06	6 th
Non-availability of relevant information	13(25.5)	27(52.9)	11(21.6)	1.29	1.08	5 th
Materials are written in foreign languages	19(37.3)	17(33.3)	15(29.4)	1.45	1.26	2 nd
Lack of accessibility of information resources	8(15.7)	31(60.8)	12(23.5)	1.07	0.93	7 th
Not being computer literate	4(7.8)	12(23.5)	35(68.6)	1.04	0.85	8 th
Inadequate information retrieval skills	18(35.3)	15(29.4)	18(35.3)	1.35	1.29	3 rd
Inadequate current information materials	14(27.5)	27(52.9)	10(19.6)	1.35	1.09	3 rd
Poor remuneration	5(9.8)	36(70.6)	10(19.6)	1.00	0.79	9 th

NB: The values in parentheses are percentages

Source: Field survey 2022

Hypothesis Testing

Test of relationship between personal characteristics of respondents and their information needs and seeking behaviour.

A significant and positive relationship existed between marital status and information seeking behaviour ($\chi^2=10.467$; $p<0.05$), this implies that marriage affected information seeking behaviour of the respondents, (Table 6). The need to be more productive on their job to attract necessary reinforcements on their duty to better improve living standard of households could have accounted for this outcome. This finding agrees with Asogwa and Daniel (2021) who found marital commitment as contributor to information seeking behaviour.

Table 6: Relationship between Personal Characteristics and Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour

Variable	χ^2	Df	Cc	p-value	Decision
Sex vs:					
Information needs	1.572	1	0.403	0.210	Not significant
Information seeking behaviour	1.071	1	0.402	0.301	Not significant
Marital Status vs:					
Information needs	1.527	1	0.602	0.217	Not significant
Information seeking behaviour	10.467	1	0.781	0.001	Significant

Source: Field survey, 2022

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that there is positive and significant relationship between marital status and information seeking behaviour of the respondents in the study area. Also, livestock production and management, community health development, control of major pests and proper handling of insecticides were the major information needs of the respondents while the respondents' information seeking behaviour was mostly to keep abreast with recent developments in agriculture. The constraining factors to information needs were; difficulty in accessing foreign journals, foreign language materials and inadequate information retrieval skills. The study recommended that targeted efforts be made to provide accessible, relevant and up-to-date information resources, particularly in the areas of need.

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