

## Information needs and Information-seeking behaviour of auto mechanics in Siwdu, Cape Coast, Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study is to find out the level of information-seeking behaviour of auto mechanics working at Siwdu and its impact on the work they do. Two methods of data collection instruments were used; these included a questionnaire and interview schedule. The researchers personally administered fifty-three questionnaires of which forty-eight completed ones were received. Twelve (12) people were interviewed at their respective workshops. The respondents were registered members of Siwdu Auto Mechanic Association and the total number of sixty respondents used represented 20% of total number of members. Quantitative data obtained mainly from the questionnaire were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20. Responses for the interview were analysed thematically. Some of the major findings are as follows: The majority of the respondents did not know how to get information from the library; some of the respondents preferred consulting their "Masters" for help; majority of the respondents had Android phones but did not know how to access relevant information; respondents were aware of the benefits of authentic information; and respondents recommended that Management of libraries should organise seminars and workshops for auto mechanics to enable them know how and where to access information. Information is needed by everybody to enhance efficiency therefore creating the awareness of the sources of information is a way of increasing productivity. Knowing the level of information-seeking behaviour of people in every manner of job is essential in the nation's human resource development.

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Brief description of Siwdu and Cape Coast*

Siwdu is a suburb in Cape Coast where a lot of auto mechanics have their shops. Siwdu in "Fante" (Ghanaian language) means "Top-of-a-Hill" meaning that the workshops of the Auto Mechanics

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were built on the Top-of-a-Hill. There are over four hundred mechanic workshops in Siwdu and the place is noted for dealings in automobiles and their parts only. The mechanic workshops in Siwdu have over the years contributed to the development of Cape Coast and its environs.

Cape Coast is the Regional Capital of the Central Region of Ghana and it is situated on the south of the Gulf of Guinea and until 1877, was the capital of Ghana. Cape Coast is noted for most of the best educational institutions in Ghana. Some of these institutions include Mfansipim Senior High School (the First second-cycle institution in Ghana), Wesley Girls Senior High School, St Augustine's Senior High School, Holy Child Senior High School, Cape Coast Technical University and the University of Cape Coast. In addition, some of its attractive sites include forts and castles, Kakum National Park and an Ostrich farm.

Auto mechanics are mainly considered to be artisans and therefore grouped with people who are engaged in such occupations like hairdressing, barbering, plumbing, tailoring, vulcanizing, electrical work, refrigerator repairing, shoe making, printing, carpentry, air conditioner repairing amongst others. There are different categories of auto mechanics in Ghana; those with polytechnic and technical education as their highest education; those with second cycle as their highest educational qualification; those with basic education and those without any formal education. No matter which category one falls into some level of apprenticeship or internship is required.

Considering the influx of both new and second-hand vehicles in the Cape Coast metropolis, it is prudent that the owners get a place to service and repair their cars when they develop faults. The establishment of shops at Siwudu has saved people from travelling long distances to Accra, Takoradi and Kumasi to have their faulty cars repaired. The existence of these shops is a great relief for the owners of vehicles and a source of revenue for the auto mechanics. Thus, whatever be the problem, these artisans need authentic information to enable them performing their jobs perfectly.

### *1.2 Objective of the study*

This study has the following objectives; to

1. find out the calibre of auto mechanics at Siwdu, Cape Coast.
2. find out the information needs of the auto mechanics.
3. discover the format the auto mechanics source for information.
4. determine their level of satisfaction with reference to information obtained.

### *1.3 Statement of the problem*

Auto mechanics are trained to be able to detect faults with motor vehicles and repair the faults detected, so the existence of auto mechanics serves as a catalyst in the transportation of goods and services from one place to another. Auto mechanics work becomes easier when their information needs are provided. On the contrary, there has been a growing number of complaints about the genuineness of the spare parts used by auto mechanics, and at times their ability to detect the exact fault on one's vehicle in order to enable them fixing it once and for all. Certainly, these

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shortcomings do not only embarrass the auto mechanics but also serve as a source of worry for the owners of vehicles. The researchers believe these arise as a result of lack of appropriate information as to how these faults could be fixed

Based on this the researchers wanted to know whether the auto mechanics have information needs and if yes, how they seek information. In fact, there is no literature on information-seeking behaviour of auto mechanics. Almost all the literature is on students and other trades. Thus, the information needs of auto mechanics are not known. This study ascertained the information needs of auto mechanics in the light of their everyday activities. For example, the kind of information they need for what purposes and how they manage to get the required information.

The findings of this study will serve as a guide to the auto mechanics in their search for information materials. It will also serve as a source of reference to anyone who would want to undertake further research on the topic.

## **2. Literature review**

Information-seeking is a situation when an individual or individuals look for, select, evaluate and use information at any given point in time. Whilst looking for information, the individual gets into contact with different people, different situations, and information-seeking tools. Information-seeking behaviour according to Wilson (2000) includes those activities a person may engage in when identifying their own needs for information, searching for such information in any way, and using and transferring that information.

Information-seeking is a process in which humans engage in order to advance and potentially alter their state of knowledge. It is also an important cognitive function related to learning and problem solving, sometimes thought of as a 'higher cognitive process'. (Marchionini 1995). According to Adekanye, Aramide, and Adewuyi there are several studies which have targeted the information needs of selected people, race and interest groups in the past. They cited the study of Ogumede et al. (2013) and Salem and Lasisi (2011) who focused particularly on rural women in West Africa, and MabaWonku's (2006) study on the information needs of career women. All these studies mentioned are related to this study. The results showed a variety of information needs. Adekanye, et. al. therefore concluded that information is needed for the proper functioning of individuals, as well as to aid increase in production levels and to assist in community development. Finally, they argued that all members of the community, whether literate or non-literate have identifiable information needs that should be met.

Information need is subjective in the mind of the individual and this can be described as an individual recognising the existence of something. The information-seeking process may be internal or external. The process also requires an information seeker to apply personal knowledge and skills. Xie (2000) states that information users utilise their general cognitive skills and their knowledge to represent their problems or tasks, to establish a set of sub goals to fulfil the overall goals, and to develop techniques and strategies to seek the required information. During information-seeking, the user's personal information infrastructures are also developed as knowledge or information gained.

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Xie (2000) continues to argue that some of these information-seeking strategies include searching, tracking, selecting, comparing, acquiring, consulting and exploring.

In a study by Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2003) on information need and information-seeking behaviour of artisan fisher folk of Uganda, it came out that there were more men fisher folk than women and their education level was found to be low. Most of the fishermen in this study gained their skills through experience and apprenticeship. According to Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla, some 53.3% of the fisher folk kept records of their business activities. Those who did not keep records argued that it was unnecessary. They also argued that the fishing business was seasonal, that they earned little, and therefore there was no good reason to keep records. Some participants even questioned the rational of keeping records when one could rely on memory.

### *2.1 What is information needs?*

Research on information needs and information-seeking concurs that information is tailored to individual's job and the tasks they perform. For one to take any decision, one needs relevant information. Shenton and Dixon (2003) as quoted in Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2005) created a typology of children's' and teens' information need categories. The typology included eleven major types of information that teens used: advice, personal information, affective support, empathetic understanding, support for skills development, school-related, subject information, inter driven information, consumer information, self-development information, reinterpretation and supplementation information and verification information. There is no doubt that the auto mechanics would need quite a number of these informational needs.

Some auto mechanics are illiterates, but whether literate or not everybody should be allowed adequate access to information to help them perform as better informed citizens. In other words, the use of and access to information is considered as one of the most fundamental and important human right (United Nations, 2014). The right of access to information", organized by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and adopted in May 2010, refers to the right to information to assist in decision-making (UNESCO, 2010)

### *2.2 Information Seeking -Behaviours of Auto mechanics*

Information-seeking can be looked at as a solution, where someone in need of information realises his need, looks for the information, evaluates it before use. This is more or less like being information literate. Seeking-information is not the same as the needed information. Wilson and Streatfield (1981) as quoted in Fatima and Ahmad (2008), information-seeking behaviours is an area of interest to librarians and information specialists. One cannot have any message to satisfy his needs if he does not go out of his way to seek. Just like the Biblical statement "seek and you shall find"

According to Fatima and Ahmad (2008), everyone needs information of increasing variety and diversity of level, frequency, volume and ease. This situation appears to be ambiguous and heterogeneous as that information of particular group of users and information flow from specific situation in organisations are difficult to determine. To them, the situation has given rise to the growth

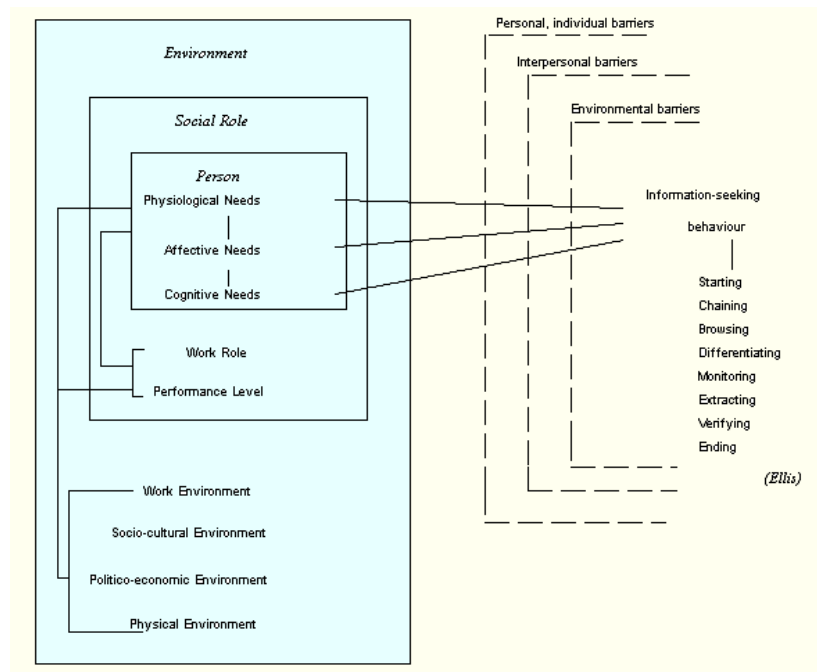
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concept of information searching and the manner of determining the pattern of searching is said to be information-seeking behaviour. Information-seeking behaviour is expressed in various forms from reading printed materials to research and experimentation.

Lakshmi, Chinnasamy and Venkatachakum (2011), Abels (2004) as quoted by Lakshmi et al. mentioned that the frequency of use of the “internet” in 1998 to 2000 had greatly increased. At the same time expenditure on monograph showed steady increase. The library therefore, is the most widely used source of information available to literate societies. It is therefore the responsibility of the librarian to know the type of information people need and how they manage to get the required information.

### 2.3 Information - Seeking Behaviour model

Information is essential in the task of auto mechanics therefore Wilson’s Micro Model of Information-Seeking Behaviour (2006) was considered to be the appropriate model for the study. The work looked at auto mechanics information needs, the sources of the information and the degree of information-seeking skills of the artisans. In addition, it can be noted that the environment plays a leading role in Wilson’s model; thus, the work role and the performance role are greatly influenced by work environment, socio-cultural environment, politico-economic environment and physical environment. However, the individual artisans may encounter challenges which could be personal, interpersonal and environmental when seeking for information.



Source: Wilson (2006)

**Fig. 1.** Information-Seeking Behaviour

### 3. Methodology

Two methods of data collection instruments were used; these included the use of a questionnaire and interview schedule. Both instruments were made up of three parts; the first part looked at the calibre of auto mechanics in the study area, the second part also considered the factors or problems that may call for the need for information and the last dealt with the information-seeking behaviour of the auto mechanics.

The researchers personally administered fifty-three (53) questionnaires of which forty-eight (48) completed ones were received. Twelve (12) people were interviewed at their respective workshops; the interviewees were considered to be the “Masters” of the auto mechanic workshops. The interview helped the researchers to gather more information and clarify other issues of importance. The respondents were registered members of Siwdu Auto Mechanic Association and the total number of sixty respondents used represented 20% of total number of members.

Quantitative data obtained mainly from the questionnaire were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20. Responses for the interview were analysed thematically

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Background of respondents

The majority of the respondents (58; 96%) were male, whilst the remaining 4% (2) were female. This confirms that this profession can be said to be the preserve for men. Physically, it involves lifting and standing for long hours that often requires brute strength.

It also came to light that 88 % (53) of the respondents were between the ages of 40 and 50 years. Eight percent (5) of the respondents were between 50 and 60 years, whilst only 4% (2) were above 60 years. This clearly shows that majority of the people have enough energy and strength to work over a long period of time. This also gives an indication of the number of years one has to go through apprenticeship and work experience before becoming a Master craftsman.

With their educational background, it came out that 6% (4) had Polytechnic education, 10% (6) Technical, 17% (10) Senior High School and the remaining 67% (40) had either Middle School leaving Certificate or Junior High School education. The interview further revealed that apart from the Polytechnic graduates, almost all the respondents acquired their skills through apprenticeship and experience.

#### **Information needs of auto mechanics**

According to the Wilson’s model (2006) used for the study, the work role and the required performance level of the type of working environment of an individual influences the information-seeking behaviour of the worker, with this in mind, the study sought to ascertain the possible problems that may call for the need of information and the following were the key factors enumerated by the respondents.

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#### *4.2 The need for durable spare parts*

All the respondents indicated that they needed to know where they can acquire durable spare parts in order to let people patronise their services. Some of those interviewed stated the following.

**My headache is where to get the spare parts that will perfect the repairs I do.**

**There are a lot of imitations on the market and that is our problem.**

**As for me, I always pray to God to direct me to where I can get good spare parts to make my customers happy.**

#### *4.3 Cost of spare parts*

The respondents stated that the cost of living is high so most car owners find it difficult to spend on their faulty cars therefore there is the need for spare parts to be cheap. The majority of them stated that

**The government should consider reducing the prices of spare parts so that we can also reduce the cost of our services.**

**More factories for the production of vehicle spare parts should be established in Ghana, because the majority of the spare parts are imported.**

#### *4.4 Low level of education*

The study earlier indicated that only 6% of the respondents had polytechnic education as a result majority of the auto mechanics lacked information literacy skills that will enable them search for information from electronic and non-electronic information sources for their work. The study also revealed that most of them (56%) are not conversant with the various sources of information.

#### *4.5 Information-seeking behaviour*

On the issue of the nature of information they want, respondents were allowed to tick more than one answer, it came to light that majority of them (88%) needed information on technical issues. Forty-six percent of them wanted information on social issues, and twenty-two percent of them also stated that they needed information on current affairs. Surprisingly, none of them stated that they needed information on academic issues.

Information needed should be searched for, and some of the strategies required for searching for information are tracking, selecting, comparing, acquiring, consulting and trial and error. The finding revealed that the minority of the respondents 8% always contacted their former bosses (Masters) for the information they needed to perform some tasks. Ten percent of them stated that they relied on their experiences, and the majority (82%) said they asked their friends

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or colleagues.

Respondents were asked to select the various electronic sources of information they have been using to acquire information for the type of work they do. All the respondents said they always listened to the radio. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of them stated that they get most of their information by watching television. Thirty-five percent (35%) stated that they used social media; to be precise Facebook and Whats App to share information with their friends and colleagues in the profession, whilst 10% of them use the internet (Percentage computed was based on multiple responses provided by the respondents). None of the respondents stated that they used the library. The following were some of the responses of the interviewees;

**I listen to the radio in my house and at work so I take note of advertisements on where I can get cheap spare parts.**

**I like viewing television when I am at home because with television you see what they are talking about**

**I am not information literate so I am comfortable with the radio and the television.**

**I use my phone to take pictures of the spare parts I need for a friend to buy them for me from Accra (the capital city of Ghana).**

**I do not know that I can get information on the work I do from the library.**

During the interview, it also came out that the Associations sometimes held meetings to discuss their challenges. To them, this helped in building good relationships. They added that sometimes at such meetings people from the Metropolitan Assembly of Cape Coast and other Government agencies visit them and through the inter reaction they are informed of some issues that hitherto they had no idea. The majority of them were not aware that their information needs can be provided in the library and in view of that some of them suggested that

**The Ghana Library Authority and other libraries can run workshops and seminars on Sources of Information available in the library for us.**

In a follow up question, respondents were asked whether they feel satisfied with the type of information they get and the interview revealed that;

**I am very happy if the information I get enables me to work well, but it is very difficult to get the right information**

To some of them the electronic vehicles are a challenge to them and that they do not have enough accurate information to enable them to work on these cars.

One of the challenges was that some of the respondents thought we were just wasting their time. Some of the respondents were even suspicious of us. One of such persons said 'people always come to us in order to increase our taxes'. The respondents also said they knew they could use the social media to check on information but did not know how to do it, while some

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others felt it was tiring and a waste of time. It also came out that almost all of the respondents did not want their children to understudy them because they felt that there were no retirement benefits, apart from the fact that the work was too difficult. A respondent said the following as a challenge;

**One needs to buy or rent a land before he could start his business, and sometimes as you begin to get established on a piece of land somebody from nowhere comes to claim ownership of that piece of land.**

## 5. Discussion

In this modern era where formal education seems to serve as a catalyst to advancement it is surprising to note that only 6% and 10% of the population under study had Polytechnic and Technical education respectively. It is also interesting to note that none of the respondents indicated that they needed information for academic purposes. One would have thought that with the advent of ICT and its relevance to societies, and a lot of announcements on pursuing higher education through distance education at least 50% of them could academically and electronically inclined.

The second objective of the study sought to find out the type of information sources used by the auto mechanics. According to Xie (2000) as quoted in Ikoga-Odongo and Odolla (2004), information users utilise their general cognitive skills and their knowledge to adapt to different situations and problems. The finding also revealed that the minority of the respondents 8% always contacted their former bosses (Masters) for information they needed to perform some tasks. Ten percent of them stated that they used their experiences while majority (82%) said they asked their friends or colleagues. This finding attests to the fact that oral communication is the most frequently used means of communication among the artisans.

With reference to the use of a library or information centre, the respondents said they knew about libraries but had never attempted to look for information with reference to their jobs. 45% said they knew libraries provided information for children because they used libraries when they were in school, and 20% said their children always sought permission to either go and borrow books or read at the public libraries. For the Polytechnic graduates, they knew about the usefulness of a library and so they were expected to continue using the library. Unfortunately, they seem not to have developed and sustained the habit of using the library and its services.

The respondents were then quizzed on how they used the information they received. What came out from this was that, they usually shared the information they accessed through whatever means they found appropriate any means. 87.5% of the respondents revealed that the information they get helped them in their work. Once they received and utilised the information, they recommended it to their colleagues. It also came out that they belong to Associations and sometimes held meetings to discuss their challenges. To them, this helped in building good relationships. Sometimes at such meetings people from the Metropolitan Assembly and other Government agencies came to interact with them. They therefore get some information from such people too.

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The respondents indicated they would be happy to be introduced to the library where they can get current information on their work. They also wondered if the Ghana Library Authority and other libraries could run workshops and seminars on access to information for them. Some of them even indicated they were ready to pay for such services although that is not a requirement for the use of a library.

As to their level of satisfaction with reference to information obtained, the respondents were not too sure of how to quantify it. To them if they do not have access to current information thereby hindering the smooth running of their jobs then they cannot say they are satisfied. To them one cannot spend about a week or two on a particular problem which could have been resolved if they knew how to get the information needed to help them fix it. They indicated that sometimes they are not even able to fix a problem due to lack of current information. This happens more especially with electronic vehicles.

The study also revealed that much is needed to be done by the Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly to enable the auto mechanics enhance their performance. The environment they operate is a matter of concern; they were confronted with the problem of payment of rent amongst others. The level of awareness creation in terms of information seeking as well as sources of the information was low.

## 6. Conclusion

The nature of work done by auto- mechanics demands a lot of information since new models of vehicles are being manufactured daily. The study however revealed that majority of the auto mechanics are not highly educated and as such fell short of information-seeking skills. Majority of them turned to rely on what they learnt during their apprenticeship. This situation sometimes did not ensure the perfection of perfect the repairs they undertake thereby generating confusion between vehicle owners and auto mechanics.

There is therefore the need for all stakeholders to help develop a system where every member of a community or country will not feel intimidated when looking for information. Whenever one knows where and how to look for information, the problem is already half solved. There is therefore the need for the library to step outside the comfort of its four corners and go out to help members of the community.

## 7. Recommendations

1. As far back as 1995, Holland and Powell asserted that graduate students need instruction in the use of the library to enable them make more effective and efficient use of information source and services to which the library provides access. These artisans also need such instructions.
  2. In this case, the Ghana Library Authority (GLA) and the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH) in collaboration with the Association of Garages and the
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Metropolitan Assembly can organise workshops/ seminars on information search and use for the artisans.

3. The teaching of Information Literacy Skills in more simple terms can be introduced to these auto mechanics.
4. The information Literacy Skills can also be taught in the local language.
5. The library can set up a desk for these artisans in all the public and academic libraries so that as and when the need arises, they can come and seek for relevant information. Before this can be implemented, the staff in these libraries should be given an orientation that will make them accept to help our less privilege artisans.
6. Apprentices attached to the Master craftsmen should be encouraged to enrol on Distance Education programmes.

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