The information needs and information-seeking patterns of secondary level geography teachers in Lesotho: implications for information service

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on a study that investigated the information needs and the information-seeking patterns of secondary level geography teachers in Lesotho with the aim of guiding the design and the implementation of information service for these teachers. It was instigated by variations in content acquired by geography teachers graduating from the National University of Lesotho. The study followed a survey method using focus group discussions with the in-service teachers who were the core participants, questionnaire with the prospective teachers and individual interviews with officials in institutions that work closely with secondary level geography teachers in order to triangulate and validate the survey results. The school libraries as part of information service provided to these teachers were also partially observed through site visits to note existing services. From the visits to school libraries the status quo and key problems in this regard were identified. The data collected through the questionnaire were mainly quantitative and were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while the qualitative data from the focus group discussions and individual interviews were analysed by examining themes in such a way that common trends were established. Narratives were compared with each other throughout the entire data-processing stage. There were 82 in-service geography teachers from 28 out of 51 schools offering geography at both junior and senior secondary level in seven out of ten districts of Lesotho who participated in the study. Furthermore, 46 out of 62 prospective geography teachers and nine officials from institutions involved in secondary level geography education participated in this study.

The study used the Leckie, Pettigrew and Sylvain’s (1996) information-seeking of professionals’ model as its theoretical framework but overlaid it with other models such as Savolainen’s (1995) everyday life information-seeking model and Wilson’s (1999) nested model of information behaviour where necessary. The Leckie, Pettigrew and Sylvain’s (1996) model helped to reveal the work environment of the in-service teachers, including their work roles, associated tasks, information needs and information-seeking patterns. The secondary level geography teachers (including in-service and prospective teachers) in Lesotho have a variety of information needs. The nature of the information needed is current and accurate for the content that they have to deliver in class. The format of information
needed is mostly audio-visual for teaching aids and materials for use in class to concretise abstract foreign geographical features and principles of geography to the learners, and print format for teachers’ personal use. The study found that the participants all have the main educator role of teaching geography. Consequently the scope of information needed covers geography content with more emphasis on physical geography sphere. The scope of information needs also covers pedagogy or teaching methods, classroom management, learners’ academic assessment and specific information pertaining to their social background, including information concerning youth and adolescence issues generally. It transpired that the participants also have administrative roles and tasks that require institution-specific information such as education policies, syllabus and curriculum documents, teaching regulations, national examinations and education legal frameworks. The results of the study also reveal that teachers have a social responsibility and caregiving role in respect of orphans whose numbers are increasing owing to the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Lesotho. Fulfilling this role requires information on social assistance for orphans and vulnerable children.

Findings on the teachers’ information-seeking patterns include preferences for information sources and the order of consulting such sources. In this study, teachers’ preferred order of information sources is the syllabus, then the learners’ prescribed textbooks, their own collection of books and then colleagues who are also geography teachers in their schools and professional associations, science, agriculture and development studies teachers. Teachers’ age and the geographic location of schools seem to have an influence on information-seeking patterns, given that younger novice teachers always start with the syllabus, while older teachers with longer teaching experience indicated that they do not consult the syllabus that much. Other marginal differences between the participants are that while younger teachers in urban schools reported occasional use of the internet, older teachers mostly consult their colleagues in other schools, as they seem to have well-established social networks. Teachers in the rural schools use the people in their communities, such as farmers and miners, as information sources. Libraries are hardly used because they are reported to be stocked with outdated books that bear no relevance to a current understanding of geography. The school libraries were reported to be staffed by incompetent people who are unable to assist with addressing the teachers’ information needs. It was evident that journals are lacking in schools
and the teachers have limited means of keeping abreast with the latest developments in geography education other than through media such as television, radio and newspapers.

In terms of preferences for information sources and order of use, it is evident that teachers begin with the syllabus, which is a national framework guiding teaching and learning, moving on to internal and external information sources such as book collections, with a preference for colleagues specialising in disciplines such as geography, agriculture and natural sciences and development studies. This is followed by selective use of the internet as a global information source by younger teachers in urban areas. In satisfying information needs, teachers in rural schools also reach out to community members, such as farmers and miners. Popular media such as television, radio and newspapers compensate for lack of journals and other current literature possibly existing in well-functioning libraries.

In seeking information, communication channels used to access information are also important and had to be considered in this study. The study found that secondary level geography teachers in Lesotho use face-to-face communication as well as telephone/cell-phone calls, including Short Message System (SMS), for communication. The internet was recommended by 100% of the participants as one of the ways that could improve information service to these teachers. The internet is regarded as the key source to provide current and varied information, even though at the time of the study it was mostly used only by younger teachers in the urban areas. Communication channels preferred by secondary level geography teachers need to be noted, as they can shed light on how to communicate information to these teachers.

Based on the findings, the study proposes an information service model for secondary level geography teachers in Lesotho. The model is based on the information needs and information-seeking patterns of these teachers, including their preferred information sources and order of use, as well as communication channels. The model also considers, in its design, the prevailing poverty and limited resources in Lesotho to ensure that it is realistic and achievable. The model outlines its implementation strategies, as well as strategies to evaluate the proposed information service.
The study concludes by making recommendations concerning the modalities for addressing the information needs of secondary level geography teachers in Lesotho, the most important being that the teachers have access to information that is current and relevant to their teaching, disseminated in their preferred format and communicated through their preferred channels. Following the findings on information needs and information-seeking patterns, including the expressed need for internet, the study also recommends strategies on how these teachers may access the internet.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACL - Anglican Church of Lesotho
AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARV - Anti-retroviral
BA - Bachelor of Arts
B Ed. - Bachelor of Education
BA Ed. - Bachelor of Arts Education
BBGTA - Butha-Buthe Geography Teachers’ Association
BGTA - Berea Geography Teachers’ Association
BSc Ed. - Bachelor of Science Education
CDS-ISIS - Computerised Documentation System-Integrated Set of Information Systems
COM - Community
COSC - Cambridge Overseas School Certificate
CSIR - Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (in South Africa)
EBIT - Engineering Built Environment and Information Technology
ECCD - Early Childhood Care and Development
ECOL - Examinations Council of Lesotho
FPE - Free Primary Education
GOV - Government
HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT - Information and Communication Technology
IE - Institute of Education, National University of Lesotho
IDC - Information and Documentation Centre
IFLA - International Federation of Library Association and Institutions
FAIFE - Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression
JC - Junior Certificate
LCE - Lesotho College of Education
LEC - Lesotho Evangelical Church
LGTA - Leribe Geography Teachers’ Association
LIS - Library and Information Science
M Ed. - Master of Education
MA Ed. - Master of Arts Education
MOET- Ministry of Education and Training
NCDC - National Curriculum Development Centre
NEPAD - New Partnership for African Development
NUL - National University of Lesotho
OPAC - Online Public Access Catalogue
OVC - Orphans and Vulnerable Children
RCC - Roman Catholic Church
RUSA- Reference and User Services Association
SGTA - Southern Districts Geography Teachers’ Association
SMS - Short Message System
SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Science
TV- Television
UK - United Kingdom
UN - United Nations
UNESCO - United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA - United States of America
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