

ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, the advent of the knowledge society and the exponential growth of digital data are radically transforming the global academic landscape. While immediate access to scientific information via Web 2.0 technologies represents a major opportunity, it also generates a cognitive and methodological constraint for learning and

independent research. In Cameroon, this paradox is particularly acute among postgraduate research students (Master's and Ph.D. levels), for whom completing a thesis or dissertation demands precise and rigorous methodological skills. The findings of this research point to a critical situation. Indeed, despite the overabundance of information, the majority of students demonstrate limited skills in accurately identifying their information needs, targeting relevant databases, critically evaluating the scientific validity of

sources, and utilizing this knowledge in an ethical and legal manner. This qualitative study aims to identify the difficulties related to information literacy among Master's and Ph.D. students. It was conducted with 10 students from the University of Yaoundé 1. The data collected through an interview guide were analysed using thematic content analysis. The results mapped the students' experiences, highlighted the exact nature of their difficulties, and identified their perceptions regarding training needs. Specifically, they reveal that information literacy gaps are not merely the result of a lack of individual effort, but are exacerbated by exogenous factors: inadequate local technological infrastructure, high costs of high-speed internet access, language barriers when facing predominantly English-language scientific literature, and a lack of familiarity with advanced indexing tools. Unanimously, participants designated training as an essential solution. Regarding this training, participants cited, among other formats, lectures, seminars, practical tutorials, and independent work.

Keywords: information literacy, training, students, University of Yaoundé 1.

1. Introduction

For several years now, there has been growing interest in the information literacy of learners (school pupils and university students) in a society where mastery of information – that is, access to and management of information – has become crucial to academic and professional success. A survey conducted by the Cameroonian Library Development Network (REDBICA) in 2020 revealed that over 70 per cent of postgraduate students in Cameroon reported having received no formal training in the use of academic databases and online resources. Furthermore, nearly 60 per cent of the students surveyed admitted that they had difficulty assessing the reliability of the information sources they used in their research. This shortfall has several consequences.

For Cameroonian postgraduate students, this lack of information literacy skills affects their ability to carry out their research successfully and to progress in their academic careers. Among other consequences, these include challenges relating to the quality of research, completion times, the risk of plagiarism and a lack of academic credibility. In light of all these consequences, several measures have been put in place to reverse the trend.

To address the problems caused by the lack of information literacy skills, a number of initiatives and measures have been taken both internationally and locally. These measures include, amongst other things, improving access to digital

resources, strengthening technological infrastructure, developing information literacy training programmes, implementing coherent and well-funded educational policies, and promoting international partnerships and academic exchanges. However, despite these measures, it appears that Cameroonian students in general, and those at postgraduate level (Master's and PhD), still face difficulties in writing academic work (dissertations, work placement reports, presentations, theses, research reports, etc.). These difficulties reveal their low level of information literacy, particularly their inability to search for the information they need, evaluate it appropriately and use it in accordance with scientific standards.

This lack of information literacy has led researchers in the field of education to investigate the factors that influence learners' information literacy. Broadly speaking, individual, educational, institutional and socio-cultural factors have been identified as influencing learners' information literacy (Gordon, 2000; Julien & Genius, 2011; Llyod, 2005; Lupton, 2008; Nkemngu, 2013; Owusu-Ansa, 2004). Specifically, the following factors are mentioned in the literature: the learning environment; the components of the information literacy curriculum; the availability and accessibility of ICT; language and culture; and learners' individual characteristics such as gender, year group, place of birth, parents' socio-economic status, and number of years of schooling (Deltor et al., 2011). Although these factors are relevant in explaining the development of information literacy, some researchers seem to pay particular attention to training aimed at teaching these skills (Dumouchel, 2016; Li et al., 2022). These authors agree that training students in information literacy is a fundamental factor in its development and in the effective mastery of information.

Despite the value of these studies, no research appears to have been carried out to identify the difficulties associated with information literacy and the underlying factors in Cameroon in general, and at the University of Yaoundé 1 in particular. This justifies the rationale for this study. It aims to identify the challenges relating to information literacy amongst postgraduate students at the University of Yaoundé 1. This objective will provide new insights to aid the planning of training strategies and the formulation of corrective measures.

2. Method

2.1. Study location

This study was conducted in Cameroon, in the city of Yaoundé, specifically within the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Yaoundé 1. There are several

reasons for choosing this location. Yaoundé is a cosmopolitan city in the sense that it brings together all the sociological groups found in Cameroon. The second reason relates to the number of universities. Indeed, Yaoundé is regarded as the main university city. It is home to two state universities (the University of Yaoundé 1 and the University of Yaoundé 2). As for the University of Yaoundé 1, it is regarded as the parent university. It is a public institution of a scientific and cultural nature, endowed with legal personality and financial autonomy. It is a member of the Francophone University Agency, the Association of African Universities and the International Association of Universities. It comprises four faculties (the Faculty of Arts, Literature and Humanities (FALSH), Faculty of Science (FS), Faculty of Education (FSE) and Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (FMSB)), and two grandes écoles (the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) and the École Nationale Supérieure Polytechnique (ENSP)).

2.2. Participants

The participants selected for this study are students from various departments within the Faculty of Educational Sciences: Educational Management (MED), Foundational Education (EFE), Subject Didactics (DID), Curriculum and Assessment (CEV), Special Needs Education (EDS) and Interventions, Guidance and Extracurricular Education (IOE). They were selected using random or convenience sampling, chosen due to the practical accessibility of the participants. In total, 10 students were selected, comprising 6 males and 4 females. With regard to age, it appears that the participants' ages range from 30 to 49 years. When grouped by age bracket, four age groups emerge: the age group comprising participants aged between 30 and 35 (n=3), the group comprising participants aged between 36 and 40 (n=2), the group comprising participants aged between 41 and 45 (n=2) and the group comprising participants aged between 46 and 50 (n=3). In terms of educational attainment, there were 4 participants on a Master's 2 programme (n=4) and 6 on a PhD programme (n=6).

2.3. Data collection tool

For this study, we used an interview guide. This choice is justified by the qualitative nature of the study. Consequently, the use of this tool appears appropriate for achieving the study's objectives. The interview guide in question consists of 13 questions divided into four themes: information seeking, information evaluation, information use, and training.

2.4. Procedure

The interview guide was administered on an individual basis. The interviews lasted 35 minutes per participant. Participants were interviewed on the campus of the University of Yaoundé 1, specifically within the Faculty of Educational Sciences. With regard to reception and the conduct of the interviews, we met with participants individually according to their availability. Once they arrived, they were shown to a seat and provided with some information. They were given the informed consent form to obtain their written approval. Participants were also informed that the interview would be recorded for subsequent analysis. After the standard procedures had been completed, the interview began.

2.5. Data analysis tool

The data collected were analysed using thematic analysis in accordance with the recommendations of Kiger and Varpio (2020). According to these authors, thematic analysis involves six stages, namely: familiarisation with the data; initial code generation; identification of themes; revision of themes; definition and naming of themes; and production of the final manuscript.

3. Results

The results of this study are presented based on the interpretation of the participants' statements in relation to the themes.

• Interpretations of participants' discourses in relation to the themes

In this section, we report the results derived from the analysis of the various themes (information seeking, information evaluation, information use and training). These themes will be addressed in turn.

• Information seeking

The participants' statements reveal four main sub-themes: the definition of information literacy, the significance of information seeking in the context of scientific research, the various resources used to search for information, and the difficulties associated with the search.

With regard to the definition of information literacy, the participants' comments suggest that most of them know what information literacy is (n=8/10). Some have a fairly good understanding of what is known as information literacy (P3, P5, P6 and P8). They agree that information literacy comprises several elements, namely: the need for information,

finding it, evaluating it and using it appropriately. This is the case with P5, who defines information literacy as *'the intellectual skills that a researcher or individual possesses to identify when they need information, to find ways of obtaining it, to analyse it and to use it within a specific field or discipline'*. This view is also shared by P8, who states that *'When we talk about information literacy, this refers to the ability of a researcher or student to find the information they need through various processes or strategies for locating that information, and to process it appropriately so that it can assist them in their research work'*. Others, however, seem to have only a vague understanding of what information literacy is (P2, P4, P7 and P9). Their definitions appear incomplete compared with those proposed by the others. The incompleteness of their definitions may stem from the fact that they view information literacy as a single element rather than a multitude of elements. P1's definition, for example, emphasises the identification of information: *'It is the set of abilities an individual possesses to retrieve information.'* P9's definition adds a new element, namely the need for information: *'Information literacy refers to an individual's ability to seek out the information they need.'*

With regard to the selection of information, the participants' comments indicate that the majority of them proposed an appropriate definition (n=8/10) when discussing information retrieval in a scientific paper. Participants used verbs such as 'find' and 'select': *'It means finding information that is relevant to one's topic, selecting the relevant information from a mass of information'* (P2); and 'extract': *'Information retrieval is presented as the actions, methods and procedures aimed at extracting the desired information from a set of documents'* (P6); and 'target' and 'locate': *'This involves using databases and search engines to target and locate the information one needs'*.

As regards the various resources used to search for information, several are mentioned repeatedly, including: documents, websites and databases. The most frequently mentioned documents include articles, books, dissertations and theses. The comments from P1, P2 and P3 reflect this: *'Articles, previously defended dissertations, journals, theses; articles, dissertations, theses and books relating to the subject; books, articles, theses'*. The websites mentioned include Google and Google Scholar: *'We also use the internet with Google; there are several search engines such as Google Scholar, which is one of the most suitable sites for finding scientific information'*. In terms of databases, participants cited 'Open Edition' (P6).

With regard to the difficulties involved in searching for scientific information, participants report encountering

several challenges when it comes to searching for, collecting and utilising information on a given subject: language-related difficulties, financial difficulties, difficulties in selecting information, a lack of literature in a particular field, the reliability of sources, difficulties in accessing documents, a lack of ICT skills, technical problems, a lack of funding and the obsolescence of documentation.

When discussing language-related difficulties, participants mentioned difficulties with the English language. They felt that the fact that most documentation is available in English is a real obstacle. P1 expressed his frustration as follows: *'Sometimes the best scientific articles are in English, but I'm rubbish at English...'* P4's comments echo this sentiment: *'... the best articles are in English, yet I'm a French speaker'*.

Financial difficulties relate to students' inability to purchase paywalled articles: *'... difficulties accessing certain websites, the cost'* (P2), and to securing funding to carry out their research effectively: *'... We can also mention funding ... most students do not receive grants ...'*

Difficulties relating to the selection of information were also raised by participants P2 and P5. These difficulties stem from the sheer volume of information: *'Selecting the right information from a mass of information...'* (P2) or *'... a lack of reliable sources...'*

A lack of ICT skills was highlighted by P7 and P8. They state that *"When you don't have good IT skills, you'll find it difficult to search for information on the internet, for example, because sifting through documents on a subject isn't often easy; you need to know how to use search engines, you need to know how to use specialist websites, and that isn't always straightforward for everyone..."* (P7) or *"... Apart from the language, there's indexing; it's a search strategy I haven't quite got the hang of yet"* (P8). Apart from these difficulties, participants also mention technical problems: *'There's the difficulty of getting an internet connection; once that's sorted, sometimes we don't have the right websites to actually...'* (P9) and the obsolescence of the material: *'... it's becoming difficult to buy it online; getting hold of books online is becoming very difficult'* (P10).

- Evaluating information

The evaluation of scientific information constitutes the second theme of this study. It comprises three sub-themes: the definition of scientific information evaluation, evaluation criteria, and the difficulties mentioned during the evaluation process.

Nine out of the ten participants (n=9/10) proposed an appropriate definition of scientific information evaluation. They agreed that scientific information evaluation involves checking a number of criteria that underpin the accuracy, reliability and relevance of scientific information. P8 states, for example, that *'This refers to an evaluation that takes a number of parameters into account, which means, for example, that one must ensure the document is relevant to the field of research; one must ensure the information is up to date because some documents are obsolete (...) so one must ensure that the documents are up to date, and also verify the credibility of the authors who have produced the documents in question. All of this contributes to the assessment of the relevance of information within the context of research'*.

P5, for her part, explains that *'it amounts to finding the appropriate information in relation to the researcher's existing knowledge of the research topic. Added to this are the author's reputation, the extent to which the information is used in other research or related disciplines, and the reliability of the source – for example, if it comes from a peer-reviewed journal'*.

As evaluation criteria, participants mention reliability, credibility, accuracy, usefulness, validity and relevance. These criteria are reflected in the author's reputation, the recency of the documents, and the quality of the sources and authors. This idea emerges from P8's comments: *'We generally rely on the author's reputation, the recency of the document, and the nature of the journal itself in which the document is published, since journals are listed in alphabetical order: A-B-C-D; when we want to access truly important documents of scientific significance, we must refer, for example, to journals that are listed in order; aside from the journals, there is also the relevance of the topics covered, as we might come across a document whose topic does not really fit with our work; we need to be sure that the content can add value to our work.'*

P9 adds that *'We check whether the information actually provides what we're looking for; for someone working in social psychology, like me, for example, is this information actually about social psychology? Are the authors leading figures in social psychology? Is the publication date recent enough? And what is the journal, actually, as there are reputable journals and those that are not very reputable'* (P9).

Participants reported difficulties relating to the evaluation of scientific information, including the unavailability of certain details concerning, for example, the author, the publication date and the source of the document. With regard to the lack of information about the author, P8 noted that *'One difficulty,*

for example, is that there are documents in which the author is not always identified...', or *'Difficulties in clearly identifying a medium or type of resource; confusion between documents of very different types, statuses and values; difficulty in summarising a document'* (P6), or even *'the source of the information: "the quality of the information varies, difficulties with the source of the information"'* (P2).

• The use of information

The use of scientific information is the third theme of this study. It comprises three sub-themes, namely the definition of the use of scientific information, the strategies involved, and the difficulties encountered when using it.

With regard to the definition of the use of scientific information, only two out of ten participants (n=2/10) know what is meant by the use of scientific information in the context of research.

P8 emphasises the analysis of selected documents with a view to supporting an argument. This is evident in his comments when he states: *'It is primarily a matter of analysing a document, extracting the essence found in the document in question; using information also involves supporting our work with arguments based on the essence of the document we have analysed, ...'* (P8).

P10 believes that the use of scientific information must play a role in argumentation. For him, using scientific information in the context of research means *'... drawing on verified knowledge; it means relying on verifiable knowledge to argue a point; it means building one's knowledge on the basis of existing, reliable knowledge.'* (P10).

With regard to strategies, participants report using scientific information in a variety of ways. Some refer to retaining and positioning ideas and arguments in relation to their work. This is the case for P8, who states: *'We use it by retaining the ideas put forward by researchers; that is to say, when we draw on certain works, we retain the arguments put forward by those authors, and then I consider, in relation to my own work, how I can position these ideas and arguments to enable me to move forward...'* (P8).

Others, however, report that they use scientific information by citing sources. The comments from P9 and P10 reflect this. P9 says: *'Generally, we cite this information by naming the author,'* (P9).

P10 adds: *'We can use scientific information in the form of a citation or as an argument; that is to say, we use it as supporting ideas that help to explain a main idea that we*

ourselves have put forward; when we put forward a main idea, we use scientific information to underpin and explain it' (P10).

Several difficulties were raised by the participants. These relate to the prevention of academic misconduct, particularly plagiarism, and to scientific writing, specifically the use of transitional phrases and sources. As regards avoiding plagiarism, P4, P8 and P9 consider it very difficult to write without plagiarising. P4 puts it in these terms: *'selecting the right information from a mass of information without plagiarising...'* (P4).

With regard to the difficulty of scientific writing, particularly the use of transitional phrases and sources, P2 and P4 state that it is difficult to use scientific information without a good grasp of transitional phrases. P4 states: *'... a lack of mastery of transitional phrases'*. (P4).

P10 believes it is difficult to make use of documentation whose source is unreliable. On this subject, he states that *"... generally we do not have the correct reference because the documentation is not accessible from the outset."* (P10).

Given the difficulties mentioned by the participants regarding information retrieval, evaluation and use, they were asked to put forward suggestions for improving their information literacy skills. Whether in relation to information retrieval, evaluation or use, the participants generally felt that training plays a crucial role in the development of information literacy skills.

- **Training**

With regard to information retrieval, several participants cited training as a tool that could contribute to the development of information literacy skills. Such training can take the form of reading, learning and self-study.

For P6, it is necessary to *'train students in scientific information retrieval; make the task easier for students by giving them easy access to the internet ...'*. (P6).

P8 shares P6's view when he states: *"There is only one thing to do here, and that is training; we must train students because a student cannot know something if they have not been trained."* (P8).

For P9, this training must be supplemented with tutorials. He states in this regard that: *"On the one hand, we need training – for example, practical sessions where we set up workshops and show how to actually carry out research. For instance, when you search on Google, the information is general, but*

when you search on specialised sites, such as , the information is more specific. We have the opportunity to access or obtain documents relevant to our field, but if students lack this training, they end up searching blindly on Google or Scholar, ..." (P9).

As for assessment, the importance of training is once again evident in the participants' comments. The majority of them believe that training should be undertaken either through training seminars or through self-directed learning.

For P8, for example, *'... training therefore comes in two forms: either you're trained, or you train yourself, so it all amounts to the same thing'* (P8).

For P7, the development of information literacy requires the organisation of training seminars. Their view can be summarised as follows: *"We need to organise training seminars on assessing the relevance of scientific information in this way, to better equip students to assess the relevance of scientific information more effectively, ..."* (P7).

Regarding the use of scientific information, P2 believes it is necessary to *"receive training in the use of IT tools..."* in order to develop information literacy. The comments made by P7 and P8 are along the same lines. They refer to training as a prerequisite for the development of information literacy in general and for the use of scientific information. P7 states, for example, that *"it always comes down to training; we need to train students to do this, to train them in the use of scientific information..."* (P7).

Apart from training, the participants also mention other factors that can contribute to improving information literacy, not only in terms of searching for information and evaluating it, but also in terms of its use. Among other things, they cited: methodology courses, workshops, the availability of teaching staff, access to ICT, the establishment of research laboratories, the creation of libraries and refresher courses.

P6, for example, emphasises proficiency in ICT in these terms: *'mastering information and communication technology'*. (P6).

4. Discussion

In this study, the main difficulties associated with the acquisition of information literacy skills were identified amongst 10 students enrolled on research programmes at the University of Yaoundé I. The results revealed that Cameroonian students have gaps in their knowledge regarding the search for, evaluation and use of scientific information

when writing academic papers in general, and their research papers in particular.

With regard to searching for scientific information, students report that they have difficulty finding and utilising information due to a lack of language skills (poor command of English, despite it being the language predominantly used in scientific practice) and digital skills (low level of proficiency in information and communication technologies). This poses serious problems regarding access to academic literature. These findings are similar to those obtained by Ekenna and Iyabo (2013). They demonstrated that Nigerian students struggle to identify the relevant information required to complete an academic task, end up selecting inappropriate electronic resources and, consequently, fail to make effective use of electronic resources. These findings can be explained by a lack of instructional design and a misconception regarding technological proficiency.

With regard to the shortfall in educational design, there is a lack of integration, as information literacy skills are often treated as a secondary or optional skill. When they are not explicitly required in coursework and assessed as such, they are perceived by students as peripheral.

There is also a lack of collaboration between libraries and teaching staff. Indeed, there is often a divide between librarians, who possess documentary knowledge, and academic staff, who provide subject-specific content, which prevents the seamless integration of research methods into day-to-day learning.

As for the misconception regarding technological proficiency, there is an illusion of competence which leads many students to believe that being comfortable with social media or intuitive web browsing is equivalent to mastering academic information retrieval. This technical ease often masks an inability to assess the reliability of sources or to understand the structure of scholarly information. Similarly, there is a confusion between the tool and the method, which means that students often perceive on research as a mechanical task – such as typing in keywords – rather than as an intellectual process involving formulating a question, identifying the need and analysing the context.

Other factors, such as structural and institutional barriers, may also explain these findings. Indeed, given the demanding nature of degree programmes, the teaching of information literacy is often sidelined in favour of theoretical subject-specific knowledge. Similarly, university management does not always prioritise information literacy on the institution's policy agenda, which limits the resources, time and

recognition allocated to such teaching. Furthermore, large student numbers at universities make it difficult to provide the personalised support that is essential for developing critical thinking and reflective skills.

On a personal and emotional level, the complexity of databases and the abundance of information can lead to stress or discouragement. Some students prefer to rely on 'easy' sources rather than tackle the rigour of scientific research. Similarly, in contexts such as that of the University of Yaoundé I, mastery of the language of research – often English for international scientific literature – constitutes a major obstacle, in addition to adapting to Western academic conventions. Furthermore, the emergence of tools such as ChatGPT simplifies the production of texts but hinders the development of research, analytical and source-verification skills if their use is not guided by specific critical training.

Other students interviewed mentioned the inaccessibility of academic resources for financial reasons. For them, relevant literature on their subject is not always available free of charge, which incurs a cost that very few students can afford. Furthermore, most paid documents are purchased online and require a credit card to carry out international financial transactions, which is also beyond the means of many Cameroonian students.

These findings are similar to those of Aryee and Apronti Tetteh (2024) and those of Tessy (2016). The former show that the lack of textbooks in the library, due to the institutions' budgetary constraints, causes frustration and survival behaviours amongst students (hiding books, damaging them, etc.). The latter, which specifically address the technological and financial barriers to open access in Benin, noted that even when resources are available free of charge online, internet access remains prohibitively expensive for students.

These findings can be explained by the fact that the funding of higher education in Cameroon rests on several pillars: the State remains the main provider, although the proportion of its budget allocated to higher education has fluctuated over the years. It covers part of the operating costs of public universities. Furthermore, families and students play a crucial role. A significant proportion of the cost of studying is borne directly by households, whether in the form of tuition fees – particularly for vocational courses – the purchase of study materials, or living expenses. Increasingly, initiatives are emerging to support student entrepreneurship. 'Junior enterprises' at the grandes écoles and microfinance schemes are being developed to offer direct funding opportunities for student-led projects.

When it comes to evaluating information in scientific research, several criteria help to determine whether information is relevant to the user. Participants in this study cited criteria such as reliability, credibility, accuracy, usefulness, validity and relevance. Despite a good level of theoretical knowledge regarding these evaluation criteria, a number of difficulties were reported concerning the ability of research-level students who took part in this study to evaluate information found on the internet via search engines and databases. These difficulties stem, on the whole, from their inability to clearly identify the nature of the document, due to the absence of certain fundamental details that should be included in the document found. Participants reported that some of the documents found, despite having rich content, lacked information necessary for their evaluation, such as the publication date, the source of the document, the author's name, etc.

All of this leads us to believe that, whilst students may well possess theoretical knowledge about evaluating scientific information, they are not always able to apply it in real-life situations. A similar observation has been made by other researchers, who have recognised that it is not straightforward for some students to evaluate information found on the web effectively, given that the majority of learners use the internet as their primary research tool. This is the case in the work of Ladele et al. (2022), whose findings were consistent with our own. Their study concluded that information literacy skills are a good indicator of library usage, as it is important to possess the necessary skills to identify and locate relevant information sources and to use them to meet one's information needs.

With regard to the use of information – that is, how it is utilised or applied once it has been found – the participants in this study mentioned several strategies they employed to make use of scientific information when writing their research papers. Among other things, they mentioned: retaining and incorporating key ideas into their own text in order to build an argument, that is, to support their reasoning. Others stated that they extract certain passages from the text they have read in order to quote them in their work. This strategy therefore involves using the information found in the form of a quotation, by inserting the relevant passages verbatim within quotation marks.

However, a practice detrimental to scientific research has been identified in the way the majority of students use scientific information when writing academic papers: plagiarism. The participants in this study generally stated that it is very difficult to avoid plagiarism when writing. This phenomenon has become a real scourge in the field of research, as even experienced researchers often find themselves with plagiarism

rates exceeding acceptable levels. This has contributed to the widespread establishment of ethics committees, which utilise anti-plagiarism software. Several previous studies corroborate the findings we obtained in this study. This is the case with the work of Koné (2024), which indicates that plagiarism is often the result of a lack of scientific writing skills rather than an intention to deceive. Students are often unable to manage the dialogue between their own ideas and those of the authors they cite. This is also the case in the work of Prashar et al. (2023), which shows that students plagiarise simply due to a lack of understanding of ethical or technical nuances.

These findings can be explained by the difficulty of mastering academic literacy, the gap between perception and reality, individual factors and the influence of ICT. Indeed, with regard to the difficulty of mastering academic literacy, it appears that plagiarism is a discursive practice linked to students' difficulty in integrating the discourse of other authors. The transition from 'copy and paste' to argumentative synthesis requires technical proficiency in citation and paraphrasing – skills that the institution assumes students have acquired, but does not always teach explicitly. There is also a gap between students' perceptions and reality. Indeed, so-called 'unintentional' plagiarism is particularly common. Many students lack an understanding of ethical rules. Without ongoing and appropriate training, students find themselves in a dead end where they are technically unable to write without plagiarising. This situation is further exacerbated by individual factors, notably a lack of self-confidence, panic in the face of deadlines, and the mistaken perception that learning simply involves students reproducing what experts have produced. Furthermore, the use of Information and Communication Technologies in education has permanently altered behaviours. When information is accessible at the click of a button, the concept of intellectual property becomes abstract for a generation for whom sharing and immediate reappropriation are the social norm.

The challenges relating to information literacy in the Cameroonian context have certain distinctive features, but are also similar to those experienced by students elsewhere. In response to these challenges, several measures aimed at improving learners' information literacy have been put in place at both international and national levels. In Cameroon, the government has taken several initiatives to equip learners with information literacy skills. Libraries have been opened, information literacy training modules have been introduced into the curricula, and training seminars on documentary research and the use of ICT have been organised. What is evident is that training lies at the heart of these initiatives. This is consistent with the suggestions made by the participants in this study when asked to identify what might resolve most of

the difficulties they had identified in their actual information literacy practices. These findings are in line with the work of Plantard (2011) and Hargittai (2002, 2010). Indeed, Plantard's (2011) research indicates that human support (training, mediation) is the limiting or facilitating factor, far more so than the technology itself. Furthermore, Hargittai (2002, 2010) shows that, even when access is equal, information literacy skills vary considerably depending on the level of education. Her research demonstrates that the ability to navigate the web effectively is directly correlated with formal education and the training programmes received.

These results are understandable when one considers the various roles of formal education. Indeed, from a cognitive perspective, formal education enables a transition from the use of tools to the mastery of concepts. It helps learners to organise their knowledge around theoretical models. Similarly, in terms of standards or the acquisition of common practices regarding scientific writing and re, formal education reduces disparities between individuals. In this sense, in an academic setting such as the University of Yaoundé 1, formal education ensures that all students share a common foundation of skills, regardless of their previous background or socio-economic status. Furthermore, formal education plays a role in social mediation insofar as it validates competence through certification or institutional recognition. It thus confers on the learner the legitimacy to use and produce information in a professional or academic context. Finally, formal education contributes to the development of autonomy, as it does not aim to teach a tool that will be obsolete tomorrow, but rather to impart transferable methods.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify the main difficulties associated with the acquisition of information literacy among undergraduate and postgraduate students. We began with the observation that the majority of students experience difficulties with academic writing. These difficulties include, amongst other things, an inability to locate relevant information, evaluate it and use it appropriately within a research project as a whole (Dumouchel, 2016). However, we sought to understand the specific nature of the difficulties faced by most learners within the Cameroonian context, which has its own particular characteristics and realities. To achieve the objective of this study, a qualitative approach was employed. A semi-structured interview guide comprising four themes (information seeking, information evaluation, information use, and training) was administered to 10 postgraduate students at the University of Yaoundé 1 (comprising 4 students at the 2nd and 6 from the ^{third} cycle). The data collected were analysed using thematic content analysis.

The results showed that Cameroonian students face roughly the same difficulties as most students, but these are exacerbated by contextual factors. In the Cameroonian context, the main difficulties associated with acquiring information literacy are: language, financial resources, the unavailability of literature in certain fields, a lack of digital literacy relating to the use of ICT, and the inaccessibility of documents on the internet. All these difficulties result in an inability to select, evaluate and use information. These difficulties, which vary in nature, appear to share a common denominator: a low level of information literacy amongst Cameroonian students.

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