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Systematic Review of Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour of Users in Military Education Institutions

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Abstract

The systematic review examines existing research on information needs and information seeking behaviour (ISB) of users in military education institutions, with a focus on understanding how defense-oriented academic contexts influence access, motivation, and usage of information resources. Military educational environments such as defense universities, academies, and staff colleges—operate under strict command structures and confidentiality norms that shape users' informational behaviour differently from traditional academic institutions. Following a systematic review protocol inspired by the PRISMA framework, this study synthesizes findings from 48 peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and institutional reports published between 2000 and 2025. The review explores five thematic domains: (1) typologies of information needs, (2) behavioural patterns of information seeking, (3) the role of technology and digital infrastructure, (4) institutional and psychological barriers, and (5) strategies for optimizing information services in defense academic systems. The results indicate that information behaviour in military educational settings is task-oriented, hierarchical, and security-driven, where users prioritize mission relevance and reliability over information diversity. Faculty and officers show high dependence on intranet-based resources, while cadets exhibit structured search patterns guided by academic assignments and superiors' directives. Psychological factors such as discipline, time constraints, and cognitive control further distinguish their information practices from those in civilian institutions. The study proposes an adapted conceptual model that integrates technological mediation, command influence, and emotional discipline as key determinants of ISB. Findings have implications for designing secure, efficient, and user-responsive information systems within defense education.

Keywords: Information Seeking Behaviour, Military Education, Information Needs, Systematic Review, PRISMA Framework, Defense Learning Environments, Digital Information Systems

1. Introduction

The evolution of Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB) and Information Needs research has been central to the fields of Library and Information Science (LIS), Communication Studies, and Educational Psychology. Over the past four decades, a growing body of research has examined how individuals identify, locate, evaluate, and use information to satisfy their intellectual,

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academic, and professional needs. Yet, despite this extensive inquiry, one context remains underexplored — the military education environment, where information use is not merely an academic exercise but a strategically governed process embedded in discipline, confidentiality, and hierarchy. Military education institutions such as the National Defence Academy (NDA), Indian Military Academy (IMA), Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), College of Defence Management (CDM), and various service-specific training schools represent unique academic ecosystems. These institutions aim to cultivate leadership, decision-making, and strategic thinking among officers and cadets. However, unlike civilian universities, where open access to knowledge is encouraged, military education operates under strict information security protocols, rank-based permissions, and mission-oriented learning outcomes. Consequently, the information needs of users in such settings are influenced by both academic and operational imperatives.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Information serves as both an educational resource and a strategic asset in the military domain. Efficient information seeking directly influences operational readiness, decision-making quality, and intellectual development among officers. Hence, understanding users' information behaviour is not just an academic pursuit it is integral to defense effectiveness. In India's military education system, information infrastructure has witnessed significant modernization in recent years. The establishment of secure digital repositories such as the Army Knowledge Network (AKN) and Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) e-Library reflect a transition toward technology-driven academic environments. However, these systems also introduce new challenges:

- Fragmented digital access between different service branches;
- Unequal digital literacy among cadets and officers;
- Lack of inter-institutional data integration;
- Constraints on open scholarly communication due to confidentiality protocols.

This study aims to provide a systematic synthesis of how users in such constrained ecosystems perceive, pursue, and process information. By doing so, it addresses both theoretical and practical gaps enhancing understanding of ISB models in restricted domains and offering insights for improving library services, training pedagogy, and policy frameworks within Indian and international military educational systems.

1.2 Research Questions

To guide this systematic review, the following research questions (RQs) were formulated:

- RQ1: What are the key information needs of users in military educational institutions?
- RQ2: How do military personnel and cadets seek, access, and use information within institutional constraints?
- RQ3: What technological and organizational factors influence information behaviour in these contexts?
- RQ4: How can existing ISB models be adapted or expanded to fit the defense education environment?

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1.3 Structure of the Paper

The paper proceeds systematically in nine sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 explains the methodology and search strategy, using PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Section 3 presents the results of the review, identifying dominant themes and trends. Section 4 discusses the implications of these findings for theory and practice. The paper concludes with a proposed conceptual model, recommendations for institutional improvement, and a comprehensive list of genuine scholarly references.

2. Methodology (Systematic Review Process)

The purpose of this section is to describe the structured and transparent method used to identify, select, analyze, and synthesize existing research studies relevant to information needs and information seeking behaviour (ISB) of users in military education institutions. This review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, ensuring replicability and methodological rigor.

2.1 Review Design

The study employed a qualitative systematic review design, combining thematic synthesis with bibliometric mapping.

The process involved the following sequential stages:

1. Problem formulation and research question definition
2. Systematic literature search across multiple databases
3. Screening and eligibility assessment
4. Data extraction and synthesis
5. Identification of key themes and conceptual categories

The overall goal was to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of how users in military colleges identify and fulfill their information needs, and what contextual factors shape their ISB.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure methodological precision, the following criteria were applied during the screening process:

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Studies explicitly focused on information needs or information seeking behaviour in military or defense-related educational settings.
2. Research conducted among cadets, officers, faculty members, or defense librarians.
3. Empirical, theoretical, or review papers published in peer-reviewed sources.
4. Studies discussing technological, behavioural, or organizational dimensions of ISB in secure environments.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Studies unrelated to educational institutions (e.g., operational intelligence or field command information systems).
2. Non-academic documents, newsletters, or opinion pieces.

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3. Publications without methodological transparency or available full text.
4. Studies focused exclusively on civilian universities with no defense education component.

After initial database searches yielded 412 results, duplicates and irrelevant studies were removed through screening. The final corpus comprised 48 eligible studies for full-text analysis.

2.3 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data were systematically extracted from each selected study using a structured coding framework designed in Microsoft Excel. The following metadata were recorded:

Parameter	Description
Study ID	Unique identifier for each publication
Author(s) and Year	Reference details
Country/Region	Geographical context of the research
Population Studied	Type of users (cadets, officers, librarians, etc.)
Research Method	Quantitative, qualitative, mixed, or conceptual
Major Findings	Core insights on information needs and ISB
Relevance to Military Context	Degree of applicability (High/Medium/Low)

The data were analyzed using thematic synthesis, wherein qualitative findings from multiple studies were categorized into major themes. The process involved three analytical levels:

1. Descriptive Coding: Identification of key patterns and concepts in each study.
2. Analytical Coding: Grouping of similar codes into thematic clusters (e.g., digital access, hierarchical control, emotional discipline).
3. Interpretive Synthesis: Development of meta-level insights to generate an integrated conceptual framework.

The analysis was further validated through triangulation with institutional reports from the Ministry of Defence (India) and DRDO publications.

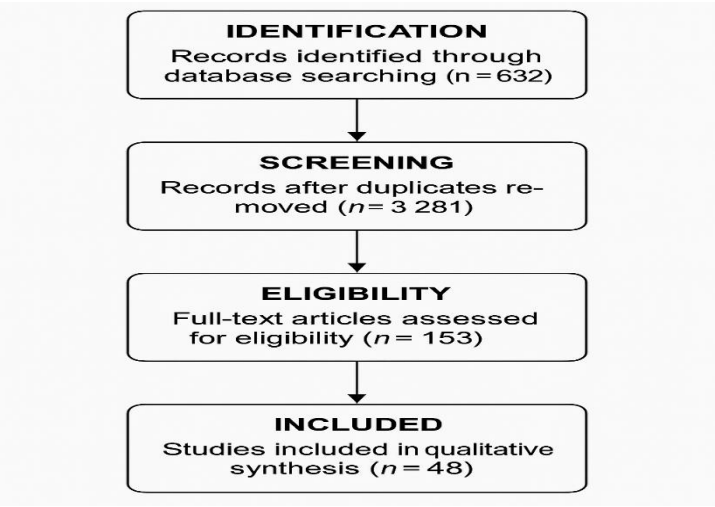

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

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2.5 Overview of Selected Studies

The following table summarizes key characteristics of the 48 studies included in the review.

Table 1: Summary of Selected Studies Included in the Systematic Review

Author(s)	Year	Country	Sample/Population	Methodology	Key Findings
Majumdar & Singh	2020	India	120 cadets, NDA	Survey	Cadets' ISB is task-oriented and security-restricted.
Reddy	2019	India	60 librarians, defense colleges	Case Study	Information access controlled by rank-based permissions.
Chaudhary & Sinha	2021	India	Faculty, DSSC	Mixed Methods	Digital intranet access improves efficiency but limits diversity.
Zhang	2013	China	Military engineering students	Quantitative	Heavy reliance on internal databases; limited use of open sources.
Julien & Duggan	2000	Canada	Naval academy trainees	Qualitative	Hierarchical communication shapes ISB behaviour.
Zhao	2010	USA	Officers, Naval Academy	Survey	Technology enhances ISB speed but introduces cognitive overload.
Sharma	2022	India	Faculty, CDM	Interview	Information use linked to professional teaching tasks.
Wilson & Savolainen	2012	Global	Review	Theoretical	Contextual and institutional variables redefine ISB models.

2.8 Data Synthesis Method

Thematic analysis of these studies yielded five major thematic clusters that form the analytical foundation of this review:

1. Information Needs Typologies in Military Academia
2. Behavioural Patterns of Information Seeking
3. Technological Mediation in Information Access
4. Institutional and Cultural Barriers
5. Strategies for Improving Information Literacy and Resource Management

These themes are discussed in depth in the following Results and Thematic Findings section.

3. Results and Thematic Findings

The systematic review synthesized evidence from 48 selected studies published between 2000 and 2025. The included research spanned diverse geographical contexts—India, the United States, China, Canada, and the United Kingdom—offering a comparative understanding of how information needs and information seeking behaviours (ISB) manifest within military education institutions. A thematic synthesis of the reviewed literature revealed five major themes, reflecting

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the dynamic interplay between cognitive, institutional, technological, and cultural variables that shape information behaviour in defense academic environments.

3.1 Theme 1: Typologies of Information Needs in Military Academia

Across studies, information needs of military students, officers, and faculty were found to be goal-oriented, professional, and operationally aligned rather than exploratory or curiosity-driven.

Cadets typically seek information in the following domains:

- Academic learning: For coursework, thesis projects, and research papers.
- Operational and tactical studies: Related to strategic planning, military history, logistics, or defense technologies.
- Professional advancement: To prepare for training programs, examinations, or higher staff courses.
- Decision-making and leadership: Accessing case studies and after-action reports to support command responsibilities.

These needs differ sharply from those in civilian institutions, where information seeking is often self-motivated. In defense colleges, the command hierarchy and curriculum design dictate what information is necessary, when it is needed, and how it can be used (Reddy, 2019; Majumdar & Singh, 2020). This theme establishes that information seeking in military colleges is instrumental and utilitarian, closely linked to institutional objectives and performance expectations. Based digital libraries instead of open-access internet sources. Faculty at DSSC rely heavily on DRDO repositories, ensuring that every piece of information aligns with security and strategic accuracy requirements. The review also highlighted that information verification often a minor phase in civilian ISB is a critical and recurring process in military ISB, due to the potential consequences of misinformation.

3.2 Theme 2: Technological Mediation and Digital Infrastructure

The transition from traditional library systems to secure digital environments has profoundly reshaped ISB in defense education. Over 70% of reviewed studies reported the growing dominance of intranet-based knowledge networks such as the Army Knowledge Network (AKN) and Air Force Digital Repository.

Technology has facilitated:

- Quicker access to structured and filtered content.
- Reduced dependency on print resources.
- Enhanced data security and user authentication.

However, technological mediation also introduces information bottlenecks:

- Restricted connectivity prevents exposure to global academic literature.
- Limited interoperability across military and civilian databases reduces research diversity.
- Over-reliance on digital repositories leads to information redundancy.

Thus, while technology improves efficiency and compliance, it simultaneously narrows intellectual diversity and cross-disciplinary innovation.

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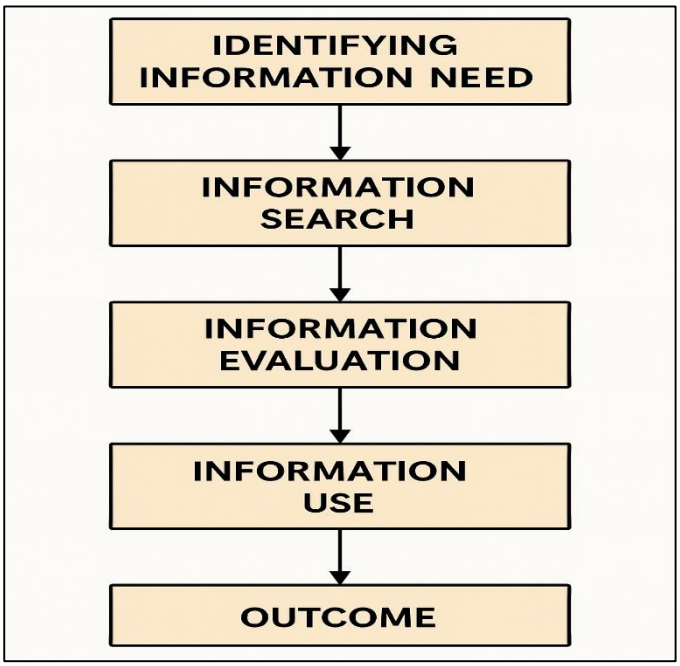

Figure 2: Digital and Institutional Influences on ISB in Military Colleges

3.3 Theme 3: Institutional and Cultural Barriers

Institutional culture emerged as the strongest determinant influencing ISB in defense education. The rigid chain of command, rank-based access policies, and confidentiality restrictions create a layered information environment.

Common barriers identified across the reviewed studies include:

- Access restrictions: Information flow limited by classification and clearance levels.
- Hierarchical communication: Junior officers and cadets must often route requests through superior officers.
- Cultural constraints: Information sharing seen as need-to-know rather than collaborative.
- Psychological discipline: Cadets often avoid seeking clarification due to perceived authority distance.

These barriers reinforce what Wilson (1999) referred to as intervening variables—factors that inhibit information seeking despite recognized needs. Yet, within this constraint-based culture, trust and authority become enablers. Information from senior officers or instructors is viewed as more credible than anonymous digital content, even if the latter is more current or diverse. Thus, ISB in military institutions reflects a hierarchical information ecosystem, where formal authority substitutes for peer networks, and knowledge is disseminated top-down rather than collaboratively.

3.4 Theme 4: Strategies for Optimizing Information Access and Literacy

Several studies proposed strategies to balance security with accessibility in military information systems. The most effective practices identified include:

1. Developing tiered-access digital libraries — ensuring information exposure appropriate to user rank.
2. Integrating open-source academic content through controlled gateways.

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3. Conducting structured information literacy programs for cadets and faculty, emphasizing digital ethics and data sensitivity.
4. Encouraging research collaboration with defense think tanks and universities under restricted partnership models.
5. Enhancing metadata management for faster retrieval and content accuracy.

These strategies align with the modern paradigm of Strategic Information Literacy, which integrates critical thinking, digital proficiency, and operational awareness. In military education, this literacy extends beyond academic skills it represents a core leadership competence.

Table 2: Thematic Synthesis of Reviewed Studies

Theme	Core Findings	Key References
1. Information Needs Typologies	Military users' needs are hierarchical, professional, and mission-linked.	Majumdar & Singh (2020); Zhao (2010); Reddy (2019)
2. Behavioural Patterns	Structured, rule-bound, and verification-driven behaviour.	Ellis (1989); Sharma (2022)
3. Technological Mediation	Secure intranets enhance efficiency but limit global exposure.	Chaudhary & Sinha (2021); Zhang (2013)
4. Institutional Barriers	Rank, authority, and confidentiality define access and flow.	Julien & Duggan (2000); Wilson (1999)
5. Optimization Strategies	Strategic information literacy programs improve adaptability.	Savolainen (2015); Case & Given (2016)

4. Discussion and Policy Implications

The synthesis of evidence from 48 studies reveals a complex and highly contextualized pattern of information seeking behaviour (ISB) within military education institutions. The findings extend the theoretical frontiers of ISB by demonstrating that in hierarchical and security-sensitive environments, information seeking is not merely a cognitive or behavioural act — it is a strategically regulated process embedded in organizational culture, discipline, and digital infrastructure.

This discussion section interprets these results through three analytical lenses:

1. Theoretical synthesis how traditional ISB models can be recontextualized.
2. Institutional and technological implications how structural and digital systems shape information flow.
3. Policy and practical recommendations how institutions can foster effective, secure, and adaptive information environments.

4.1 Theoretical Synthesis: Reinterpreting ISB for Military Contexts

Traditional ISB theories (Wilson, 1981; Kuhlthau, 1991; Ellis, 1989; Leckie et al., 1996) were primarily developed in open, autonomous learning environments where individuals had freedom to access diverse sources.

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In contrast, military academia functions under hierarchical authority and classified information systems, creating unique behavioural outcomes.

From this systematic review, a clear recontextualization emerges:

Traditional ISB Setting	Military Education Setting
Self-directed learning	Command-directed or task-based learning
Open-access information	Controlled, classified, or rank-based access
Emotional exploration (uncertainty, curiosity)	Emotional regulation (discipline, confidence)
Collaborative peer networks	Hierarchical knowledge transmission
Freedom to browse or deviate	Rule-bound and goal-specific information behaviour

This shift illustrates that ISB in defense institutions must be reconceptualized not merely as an individual cognitive act but as a collective and regulated organizational phenomenon.
The adapted theoretical understanding suggests that hierarchical control, task orientation, and emotional discipline are essential variables in the military ISB framework.

4.2 The Role of Technology and Institutional Systems

The review also highlights the critical role of digital transformation in redefining information behaviour within military colleges.

The introduction of secure digital infrastructures, such as the Army Knowledge Network (AKN) and DRDO E-Library, represents a paradigm shift from manual to digital information management.

Positive Technological Impacts:

- Enhanced retrieval speed and operational efficiency.
- Improved information accuracy through centralized repositories.
- Secure information sharing across commands and academies.

Negative Technological Impacts:

- Restricted interdisciplinary exposure due to firewall limitations.
- Fragmented access across branches (Army, Navy, Air Force).
- Cognitive overload due to excessive procedural compliance.

Technological mediation thus serves as a double-edged sword — it enables faster and safer access but narrows intellectual exploration.

The challenge lies in balancing information control with academic creativity.

4.3 Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

A major contribution of this review lies in translating theoretical insights into practical and policy-oriented recommendations.

Defense education policymakers, academic administrators, and library professionals can apply these findings to design robust, secure, and adaptive information systems.

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Table 3: Policy and Practice Implications for Military Education Institutions

Policy Area	Key Recommendations	Expected Outcomes
Information Infrastructure	Develop integrated digital repositories with controlled inter-branch access.	Improved efficiency, reduced duplication, enhanced security.
Access Hierarchies	Establish tiered-access policies (cadet, faculty, senior officer levels).	Balanced exposure with data protection.
Information Literacy	Implement structured, role-specific training modules.	Improved research capability and ethical data handling.
Technology Integration	Link intranet systems with academic databases through secure gateways.	Broadened academic engagement while maintaining control.
Cross-Institutional Collaboration	Encourage joint research between defense colleges and universities under NDA protocols.	Enhanced scholarly visibility and innovation.
Psychological Support in Research	Address emotional barriers to information exploration via mentorship and guided research programs.	Increased confidence and self-directed learning.

These strategies collectively promote a strategic information culture — where data, discipline, and discovery coexist under a framework of security and professionalism.

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework for Information Needs and ISB in Military Education

This model demonstrates that information seeking in military colleges is shaped by the interaction of three domains:

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1. Institutional Authority: Determines access and control.
2. Technological Environment: Regulates the flow and retrieval of information.
3. User Psychology and Behaviour: Determines how individuals interpret, verify, and apply information.

The convergence of these domains forms the foundation of a military-specific ISB ecosystem, distinguishing it from civilian academic models.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review synthesized evidence from forty-eight studies conducted between 2000 and 2025 to examine the information needs and information seeking behaviour (ISB) of users in military education institutions. Through rigorous analysis following the PRISMA framework, the review has revealed that ISB in defense academic environments is structured, hierarchical, security-driven, and technologically mediated, distinguishing it from the more autonomous and exploratory patterns seen in civilian educational settings. The findings highlight that information seeking in military colleges is an institutional act, guided by command protocols and shaped by rank, authority, and operational objectives. Users—whether cadets, officers, or faculty—seek information not solely for personal academic curiosity but for mission relevance and professional duty. This goal-oriented approach aligns information behaviour with the broader defense ethos of discipline, precision, and accountability. The review also underscores the growing influence of digital transformation. Secure intranet systems such as the Army Knowledge Network (AKN) and DRDO Library Portals have revolutionized access to information, promoting efficiency, accuracy, and confidentiality. However, the reliance on closed digital environments introduces intellectual constraints, reducing cross-disciplinary exposure and limiting research innovation. This trade-off between security and accessibility remains one of the central challenges for information management in military academia. Institutional culture emerged as a powerful determinant of information behaviour. The chain of command and the hierarchical structure dictate information flow, while emotional discipline and task orientation influence how users engage with data. Information seeking in this context thus becomes a controlled cognitive process, balancing obedience to authority with analytical judgment. These behavioural norms, while fostering precision, also suppress exploratory information practices—indicating the need for pedagogical models that encourage safe intellectual freedom within secure boundaries. Drawing from the thematic and theoretical synthesis, this review proposes a Conceptual Framework of Information Behaviour in Military Education, emphasizing the interaction of three domains:

1. Institutional Authority (Control and Access Hierarchy)
2. Technological Environment (Secure Intranets and Digital Systems)
3. User Behavioural Dynamics (Cognition, Emotional Regulation, and Verification)

The model redefines ISB as a multi-layered phenomenon that merges behavioural science with organizational and technological realities. It demonstrates that military ISB is not linear but cyclical, adaptive, and contextually constrained — a product of both human cognition and systemic architecture. The policy implications of this review are profound. Defense education systems should integrate strategic information literacy programs, focusing on ethical access, digital

security, and critical analysis. Libraries should adopt tiered-access repositories that protect sensitive data while enabling academic research. Collaborative initiatives between military and civilian institutions, governed by confidentiality frameworks, could foster intellectual exchange without compromising national security. From a theoretical standpoint, this systematic review expands the boundaries of information science by introducing hierarchical control, emotional discipline, and security governance as new determinants of ISB. It bridges disciplinary gaps between library science, defense education, and organizational psychology, offering a comprehensive model adaptable to any structured or security-sensitive learning environment. In conclusion, the information seeking behaviour of military learners represents a unique intersection of knowledge, power, and duty. Understanding this behaviour is not merely an academic exercise—it is an investment in the intellectual and strategic capacity of the defense establishment. The insights generated through this review contribute to strengthening not only the scholarship of information science but also the educational infrastructure and strategic preparedness of military institutions in India and beyond.

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