



AWARENESS AND USE OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION RESOURCES BY UNDERGRADUATES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

University libraries serve important purposes for meeting the information needs of students and staff of the institution. It is a store house of knowledge established to house and disseminate different forms of information materials for user consumption. This study on the awareness and use of electronic information resources by undergraduates in public university libraries in Nigeria dwells on the concept of university library which is a specialized library located within a university or a higher education institution to serve as a central information hub and resource center that supports the teaching, learning, research, and scholarly activities of students, faculty, staff, and researchers associated with the university. The study also discussed in details the concept of electronic information resources which are digital or online materials that provide access to information through electronic means. The paper x-rayed the concept of awareness of electronic information resources which refers to the extent to which individuals are knowledgeable and informed about the existence and availability of digital or online materials accessible through electronic means. In addition, the study looked at the concept of utilization of electronic information resources in libraries as the effective and efficient use of digital or electronic materials to access, retrieve, analyze, and apply information for various purposes. Furthermore, the study explored the challenges hindering effective use of electronic information resources in library parlance to include lack of strategic planning, adequate or reliable funding, lack of use of internet to provide information services to users and a lack of consistent training for users in new ICT services. The study recommended among others, the need for improved awareness strategies, enhance user training and upgrade of infrastructure in order to mitigate the challenges hindering effective use of electronic information resources in public university libraries in Nigeria.

Keywords: Awareness, Electronic, Information, Resources, Undergraduates, Libraries.

Introduction

In the digital age, electronic information resources have become a vital component of academic and research activities, providing undergraduates with a vast array of information to enhance their learning experiences. Electronic information resources have become an indispensable part of the academic and research landscape, providing students with easy access to a vast array of scholarly materials. Electronic information resources are information resources provided in electronic form and these include resources available on the internet such as e-books, e-journals and online data bases among others. These resources also include OPAC, CD-ROMs, Online-Databases, E-journals, E-books, Internet resources. Osinulu (2020). The use of electronic resources has made users to become more technologically friendly. Shariful (2012) sees electronic information resources as those resources that deal with both digital and digitized materials which can be either accessible from library's in house databases or from the world – web-web. The digital resources include: e-books, e-journals, e-magazine, e-projects, e-thesis, e-dissertations, e-reports, websites, WWW-resources and other related materials which can be converting the materials formats into electronic format. Public university libraries in Nigeria, have made efforts to offer these electronic resources to their students, recognizing their significance in supporting scholarly pursuits.

However, despite the availability and accessibility of these resources, there are concerns regarding the level of awareness and utilization among undergraduate students in these libraries. Many undergraduate students seem not to be fully aware of the existence and availability of electronic information resources provided by public university libraries. This lack of awareness could hinder their ability to leverage these resources for their academic and research needs. It is the researcher's observation that even among those students who are aware of the electronic information resources, there may be a significant portion that does not fully utilize them in their academic endeavors. This underutilization could be attributed to various factors, such as inadequate information literacy skills, limited training, or misconceptions about the relevance of electronic resources.

In light of these challenges, there is a pressing need to assess the awareness and utilization of electronic information resources by undergraduate students in public university libraries in Nigeria. Addressing these issues is essential to enhance the academic experience of

undergraduate students in public university libraries in Benue State. By understanding the level of awareness and utilization of electronic information resources and identifying the underlying challenges, library administrators, educators, and policymakers can design targeted interventions to bridge the gaps and empower students to harness the full potential of these resources for their educational and research needs. This study hence sought to assess the awareness and utilization of electronic information resources by undergraduates in public universities in Benue State.

The Concept of University Library

A university library is a specialized library located within a university or a higher education institution. It serves as a central information hub and resource center that supports the teaching, learning, research, and scholarly activities of students, faculty, staff, and researchers associated with the university. Yusuf and Iwu (2010) described a university library as the nerve center or the hub around which scholarship revolves, while Ajibero in Momodu (2015) see university library as the heart of the university using the human and material resources at its disposal to support teaching, learning and research objectives of the institution. Supporting this, Okunu, Akalumhe and Monu in Nkamnebe, Udom and Nkamnebe (2014) also asserted that the university library is the ‘heart and blood’ of the university. This means a university cannot function without a well-equipped library to provide needed information resources for students, lecturers and researchers. A university library aims at serving students and researchers at all levels, hence, librarians must be ready to acquire and make available necessary databases for teaching and research for the university communities (Urhiewhu, Okeke, & Nwafor, 2015). The university library is primarily set up for the achievement of the university’s set goals and objectives by providing information resources and services which satisfies the information needs of the entire university community. Apart from the fact that university libraries provide needed information sources and reading materials, they also promote other activities such as loan services, interlibrary lending services, current awareness services and selective dissemination of information among others.

Similar view have been expressed by Adewale, Obadare, Akunniyi and Iweha (2006) who highlighted the relevance of the university library in actualizing the goals of the university by stating that the library is the heart of any academic institution and its objectives revolve round the institution’s objectives. They further stated that the body cannot perform its proper functions efficiently in case its heart is weak and has not developed fully. In consonance with this

assertion, Campbell in Abubakar and Kacholom (2017) averred that university libraries are complex institutions with multiple roles. They provide not only books, but also services to facilitate research activities such as bibliographies, information literacy, ICTs among others.

According to National Universities Commission as cited in Nkamnebe, Udem and Nkamnebe (2014), a functional library is central to the academic activities of universities. The commission therefore insists that the university library should be funded at a level that provides effective reading service to students and staff. University libraries are also expected to provide current reading materials, conducive reading rooms as well as internet services. Singh and Kaur in Ababukar (2011) stressed that preservation and access to knowledge and information is the main mandate of academic libraries alongside supporting the mission of their parent institutions which is learning, teaching and research. This means the library is an indispensable instrument for intellectual development, being a store house of information to which users (students as well as lecturers) may turn to for accessing their information needs.

Oyewusi and Oyeboade cited in Habib, Enite and Aworo (2015) emphasized that the primary purpose of university libraries is to support teaching, learning and research in ways consistent with, and supportive of the institution's mission and goals. In other words library resources and services should be sufficient in quality, depth, diversity and currency to support the institution curriculum. Therefore the use of electronic information resources in the university libraries is aimed at broadening the range of available information within the library and adding value to the content by making them accessible through digital means so that students, researchers, and the entire members of the university community can access them remotely.

University libraries' basic academic function therefore is to support the teaching, learning and research activities of the parent institution. As such the university libraries store information resources such as books and other types of information resources and materials in print, non-print, and in electronic formats. The main purpose of the University Library is to support the objectives of the University, which is to promote teaching, learning and research. The university library is meant to serve the undergraduates, post-graduates, lecturers and other members of the university community. The quality of a university is measured largely by the quality of its library because of its unique role in the university system. The academic library exists to serve its parent institution to provide resources to meet the needs of different faculties, students and

researchers (David-West (2020)). The library is the house of knowledge and a significant aspect of the university.. For the teaching staff and research fellows, the university library is supposed to provide information resources and services of sufficient quality and diversity. University libraries play a crucial role in fostering an environment of academic excellence by providing resources, services, and support that contribute to the intellectual growth and success of the university community.

Electronic Information Resources

Electronic information resources, often referred to as e-resources, are digital or online materials that provide access to information through electronic means. These resources are available on the internet or through specific online platforms and can be accessed using electronic devices such as computers, smartphones, tablets, or e-readers. Electronic information resources are information materials in the library that can only be accessed electronically, with the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities (Ukachi, 2013). Electronic information resources that are often consulted in the University libraries include: Internet, CD-ROM databases, online databases, Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs), electronic journals, electronic books and digitized materials. Multiple access speed, richer in content, reuse, timeliness and anywhere access are some of the features of electronic information resources. Electronic information resources according to Ani, Ngulube and Onyancha (2014) are simply referred to as electronic resources or e-resources; they are information stored in electronic format in computer or computer related facilities (CD-ROMs, digital libraries or the Internet). Electronic information resources have become a major part of the University libraries collection in the fulfillment of its role of teaching, learning and research.

Electronic information resources are digitized information, facilitated by computers, network connectivity, electricity and other peripheral components and most importantly human beings (Manjack, Danjani, & Fari, 2019). It comes in different formats including text, videos, audio, graphics, tables and pictures. Dhanavandan and Tamizhcheivan (2012) defines electronic resources as resources in which information is stored electronically and it can be accessible through electronic systems and network environment. Electronic Resources are information resources that can be accessed electronically via the Internet or digital media. Electronic resources according to Bankole, Ajiboye and Otunla (2015) consists of information resources

provided in electronic formats such as internet, CDROM databases, e-books e-journals, Online database, Online Public Access Catalogues, and other computer –based electronic networks. According to Yakubu and Olatoye (2015) electronic resources are the information on devices such as net, hard disc, flash drive and CD ROMS. It could be in form of database application created for a particular organization that manages data and allows easy access, fast storage and retrieval of that data.

The term electronic information resources have been defined broadly as “information accessed by a computer and may be useful as bibliographic guides to potential sources, but they appear as cited references in their own right” (Graham, 2003). The change in traditional document delivery services from print to electronic has come about very quickly and libraries and information services have undergone significant transformation in order to effectively deliver electronic resources to their communities (Appleton, 2006). E-resources satisfy the unique needs of students, faculty and research scholars faster and at much lower cost than borrowing or purchasing low cost because they are readily available online and the delivery of the resources virtually to one’s desktop saves time and expense on physical trips to the library (Ankrah & Acheampong 2017). Additionally, electronic resources have the potential power to increase students’ learning opportunities, because the interactive and multimedia components provided by the electronic media offer multiple learning experiences than print documents. Teaching materials in electronic formats tremendously enhance teaching possibilities by providing students with various exercises and making courses much more interactive, engaging and lively (Ankrah & Acheampong, 2017). E-resources often also enable instant real time feedback to and from students and enhance their ability to understand concepts more clearly and easily by providing or hyper-linking several supporting and supplementary resources for the courses so that students can easily access, experience and learn diverse content without facing much difficulty in accessing and understanding. Electronic resources provide access to information that might be restricted to the users because of geographical location or finances. They also provide access to current information because they are frequently updated. Through their various search techniques, electronic resources provide extensive links to explore additional resources or related content. In addition, electronic resources are convenient to use since users are able to access information from the library, internet cafe’, and offices or at times from the comfort of their homes at any time of the day”. E-resources reach their subscribers well before the conventional

documents, besides their ability to reach all their subscribers simultaneously. Electronic resources solve the missing issue problem that library acquisition departments often face. Articles in electronic formats can be downloaded and printed simultaneously by several readers depending on access rights and permissions. This is a gain for big campuses, particularly ones with hundreds of readers and many departments. These are some of the many reasons “e-journals, online databases, e-books, web based resources and a variety of other electronic resources are fast replacing the traditional resources of modern libraries” (Mohamed, 2007).

The emergence of technological advancement has made users to be more diverse in information seeking; university libraries are challenged to meet these needs by providing appropriate electronic information resources. The transition from print documents to e-resources in recent times has been quite rapid globally, and academic libraries have been undergoing tremendous transformation in order to effectively deliver e-resources to the user communities. E-resources add great value to library collections and satisfy the unique needs of students, faculty and research scholars with less risk and time. The use of electronic resources ensures easy retrieval of information and helps to expand students’ knowledge base. Electronic resources also carry the potential power of increasing the learning opportunities offered to students in particular.

Awareness of Electronic Information Resources

Awareness of electronic information resources refers to the extent to which individuals, in this context, undergraduate students in public university libraries in Benue State, Nigeria, are knowledgeable and informed about the existence and availability of digital or online materials accessible through electronic means. It involves understanding what electronic information resources are, where and how to access them, and the potential benefits they offer for academic and research purposes. Awareness is to know that something exists or to understand a situation or a subject at current moment found on information/experience (Okon & Ahiazu, 2008). It can also be understood as knowledge of a situation, truth, conscience, knowledge, achievement, understanding and perception. In this level of consciousness, sense data can be confirmed by an observer without necessarily implying understanding. Awareness of a new technology and its potential benefit when used is what instigate people to try their hands on them (Wood, 2011). On the other hand Dourish and Belloti (2009) defined awareness as an understanding of the activities of others which provides a context for own activity. Awareness in research networks, however,

concerns itself not solely with re-establishing face-to-face situations and direct impacts on bettering task performance. In Research Networks, awareness has a broader meaning and is related to trend-spotting, alerts to research results in a certain domain, changes in the structure of a network, personal changes within a project as well as knowledge about objects that may help carrying out one's task. Awareness in Research Networks "is mainly to know what sort of people in the same field are doing" or "is to know what is important to me and filter out what is not important to me".

Assessing the awareness of electronic information resources among undergraduate students is essential to identify gaps in knowledge and provide targeted interventions to enhance their understanding and utilization of these resources.

Utilization of Electronic Information Resources

The utilization of electronic information resources refers to the effective and efficient use of digital or electronic materials to access, retrieve, analyze, and apply information for various purposes. Tariq and Zia (2014) asserted that utilization of electronic information resources refers to the use of electronic information resources with full extent for getting required information through internet.

The utilization of electronic information resources in the University libraries is aimed at broadening the range of available information within the library and adding value to the content by making them accessible through digital means so that students, researchers, and the entire members of the university community can access them anytime and anywhere (Olajide and Adio, 2017). The more a student uses the library the more familiar he becomes with its resources including its electronic resources. Oyedapo and Ojo (2013) carried out a study on the use of electronic resources at Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria and under-utilization of electronic resources was observed. The major reason for the under-utilization of electronic resources was poor searching skills. Baro, Endouware and Ubogu (2011) also studied the awareness and use of online information resources by medical students at Delta State University in Nigeria and found that scholarly electronic journal databases were under-utilized. Users cited lack of awareness of the existing resources as the primary problem they had. Okello and Magara (2008) supported this notion of under-utilization and found that the obstacle to access and utilization of electronic

journals by Makerere students in Uganda as well as students in other higher learning institutions was lack of awareness about the resources.

Overall, the utilization of electronic information resources has transformed the way we access and consume information, providing unparalleled opportunities for learning, research, and professional growth. However, it is essential to be cautious about the quality and validity of the information obtained from these resources and to adhere to ethical guidelines for their use.

Challenges Hindering Effective Use of Electronic Information Resources

The emergence of computer-based services has not been without difficulties. The major barriers to the use of e-journals were the lack of subscriptions in specific fields of some students, lack of user orientation/training and limited bandwidth needed for improving the availability of and effective access to e-resources (Dilek-Kayaoglu, 2008). The problems identified in a study of online searching of scientific information in science and technology libraries by Ali (2005) in Delhi, India include lack of knowledge about the resources, lack of trained staff and inadequate computer terminals.

There are several challenges facing the use of electronic information resources. Bhatt and Rana (2011) identified that the most common problems with e-resources are low speed connectivity, lack of awareness about statutory provision for accessing e-resources by the institutions, technical problems, unavailability of sufficient e-resources, doubts in permanency, high purchase price and lack of legal provision. A similar study by Egberogbe (2011) revealed that some of the factors hindering the use of e- resources in university libraries include; lack of strategic planning, adequate or reliable funding, lack of use of internet to provide information services to users and a lack of consistent training for users in new ICT services.

Several studies have identified a number of problems associated with the use of EIRs. These problems range from lack of or inadequate resources, mainly computers, and poor internet connectivity, inappropriate usage to lack of appropriate skills among users. In the study of Kwafoa, Osman and Afful-Arthur (2014) found that the challenges facing faculty members in using online academic resources are charges to access EIRs (18.31%), lack of proper guidance (19.31%), slow nature of the internet (35.92%) and lack of knowledge about tools and techniques used for searching and retrieving EIRs (8.45%). This meant that there is the need to intensify

awareness creation and education on the accessibility and usage of the library's online academic databases. Alhassan and Macaulay (2015) reported in their study that, limited access to computer terminals, lack of Information Technology knowledge to effectively utilize the services, non-assistance from library staff to facilitate easy access and network failure were some of the hindrances to effective use of EIRs in University libraries.

Ahmed, (2013) indicated that usage of e-databases in developed countries is more than in developing countries basically because of poor ICT infrastructure and huge cost of such resources. Anaraki and Babalhavaeji (2013) also pointed out that where students are not aware of existence of e-databases they tend to use general search engines to meet their information needs. A study by Manjack, Danjani and Fari (2019) showed that the challenges students encountered the most in accessing electronic information resources were power outage, poor internet connectivity, inadequate computers in the library, lack of information on how to use E-resources, limited subscribe titles, non-availability of required information and insufficient search skills.

Lack of information literacy skill, slow Internet connectivity in the institution, uneven power supply, less number of computers, poor infrastructure of library, less space for reading in library, inadequate assistance from library staff are reasons due to which users are facing problems while using the e-resources (Prasad & Singh, 2017; Musa, Ahmad, Yunusa & Hamisu, 2015). University library should take a leading role to create more awareness and give more publicity about subscribed electronic resources by conducting training and retraining programs, organizing workshop, conferences and seminars, so as to increase the use of the services. Islam & Habiba (2016) found out in the study that faculty members and students were unsatisfied with the limited numbers of computers in library, slow download speed of internet and less number of journals titles subscribed by the library. This constraint affects the use of internet and library resources by the users. Satpathy & Rout (2010) suggested that more number of electronic journals and facility of high speed internet by library will improve the usage.

Conclusion

University library is one of the most important organs of the University. The academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of any University depend largely upon the state of health and excellence of its library. Libraries are now shifting from traditional printed resources to the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and other electronic-driven resources

and services thereby giving new dimension in learning and hence affecting education in many ways.

The importance of electronic information resources to students and university libraries cannot be over emphasized. Though not without challenges, the benefits of these resources far outweigh the challenges hence all hands must be on desks at ensuring a full adoption of these resources in public university libraries in Nigeria

Recommendations

Based on the findings discovered from literatures, the following were recommended.

1. **Improve Awareness Strategies:** Despite the high level of awareness, continuous efforts should be made by the University Librarians to enhance awareness among undergraduates about the availability and benefits of electronic information resources. This can be achieved through targeted orientation programs, workshops, and promotional campaigns to highlight the value of digital resources in academic research and learning.
2. **Enhance User Training:** To address the challenges related to information retrieval skills and lack of knowledge about electronic information resources, University Librarians should provide regular training sessions for undergraduates. These sessions can focus on search strategies, database usage, and critical evaluation of electronic sources to empower students with the necessary skills for effective utilization.
3. **Upgrade Infrastructure:** In order to mitigate the challenges of erratic power supply and poor network connectivity, University management should invest in reliable power backup systems and improve internet infrastructure particularly in the university libraries. Adequate power supply, provision of computers and internet access points will ensure that students can access electronic resources without interruption.

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