

Availability and Use of Library Resources by Distance Learning Students in National Open University of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Education is provided through formal and informal means. In formal settings, the conventional (face-to-face school instruction) and distance education (offered with separation in terms of physical location of instructions and students) have been used to provide educational opportunities to recipients. Distance learning in Nigeria has facilitated access to education by more adults that could not have had the opportunity for the conventional type. A well established library is essential for any academic institution and as a focal point for teaching, learning and research, it is expected to provide standard information resources. It is on this basis that this study investigates availability and use of library resources by distance learning students in National Open University of Nigeria, Ibadan Study Centre.

Two hundred and sixty (260) questionnaires were drawn and administered to respondents out of which two hundred and twenty nine (229) copies were recovered and analyzed making a response rate of 88.07%. The descriptive research design survey was used for this study. Two research questions as well as one hypothesis were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

The result of the findings shows that library resources at the National Open University of Nigeria, Ibadan Study Centre are inadequate and thus might account for the respondents not using it. The findings also show that there is significant relationship between the availability of library resources and use. The study is concluded by recommending that the efforts be made to acquire specific information resources needed by users and that the centre authorities should work with other libraries in form of inter-library co-operation so as to cater for the needs of the students.

Keywords : Information, Information use, Undergraduates, National Open University, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Education is provided through formal and informal means. In formal settings the conventional (face-to-face school instruction) and distance education (offered with separation in terms of physical location of instructors and students) have been used to provide educational opportunities to recipients. The library defines distance learning as either Synchronous or Asynchronous study or learning offered away from the main campuses in traditional or non-traditional format.

Distance education courses that requires physical on-site presence for any reason including the taking of examinations is considered to be a hybrid or blended course of study. This emerging technology is becoming widely used in universities and institutions around the globe. With the recent trend of technological advancement, distance learning is becoming more recognized for its potential in providing individualized attention and communication with students internationally. Several terms are used interchangeably to refer to distance education. These terms include distance learning, distance teaching, correspondence study education, home study, external study and independent study.

Distance learning is used as a term to describe the student-centeredness of distance education and it deals with the use of print and electronic technologies to present individual lessons to learners at a distance. Distance teaching refers to the didactic strategies of delivery of instruction to students, and this is instructor-centred. A major feature of distance learning systems is interactivity, both between the tutor and the students, and between the students themselves (Federal Ministry of Education, 2002).

Historically, the learning process takes place with the infrastructure of institutions such as schools, university campuses, technical colleges, etc. The need to be part of such institutions was driven by the notion that to access information and knowledge, a learner had to be present where the teacher was. The first separation between the teacher and the student occurred with correspondence education, which offered information and knowledge mediated by some form of media, usually print. This early form of distance education moved the learning frontiers to the learners' home. Successful distance education system involves interactivity between teachers and students, between students and the environment, and among students themselves, as well as active learning in the classroom.

Correspondence study entails distance education through the postal sub-groups. That is, learning at home and communicating with instructors using the print materials as fundamental element of distance education. External study is a form of education that is external to but not separated from the faculty staff of the institution offering distance education programme. Independent study is used for a range of teaching-learning activities, which indicates students' control over learning time, pace and place. However, this is misconstrued as independence from an educational institution which is not usually the case (Kaufman, Watkins and Guerra; 2001).

Distance education therefore means the delivery of useful learning opportunities at convenient place and time for learners, irrespective of the institution providing the learning opportunity (Kaufman, Watkins and Guerra, 2001).

Generally, distance education has four major characteristics as identified by ADEA Working Group on Distance Education and Open Learning (2002). These characteristics are: institutional accreditation where learning is certified by an institution or agency; use of variety of media for instructional delivery; provision of two-way communication to ensure tutor-learner, and learner-learner interaction; and possibility of face-to-face meetings for tutorials for learner-learner interaction, laboratory or practice session or library study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Distance education not only shares the goals of conventional education, but it also aims at providing access to historically under-served, place bound, and highly motivated population Yusuf (2006). Distance education is said to be open because of students' freedom and programme flexibility. It is flexible and open in terms of its admission requirements, that is, not as rigid as in conventional institutions, freedom in terms of place of study, time, place, and composition of study programme, content and didactic approach. It is intended to offer useful learning opportunity to recipients at a time and local environment convenient to them.

Open/distance education though not new in Nigeria has been given much prominence of recent. Many Nigerians benefited through the open education (correspondence) of Rapid Result College, and Exam Success Correspondence College, among others (Yusuf, 2006). In fact, like the Universal Basic Education (UBE), distance education is one of the major pivots, on which the present Federal administration in Nigeria hopes to improve the quantity and quality of instruction in Nigerian schools. It is also a means of providing access to basic and tertiary education for Nigerians. Policy statements and actions have given fillip to the determination of the government to make a success of the programme.

The revised National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN 2004) detailed the goal of distance education as to:

- provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied.
- meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place.
- encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula.
- ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work.

To achieve these goals, it is stated that the Federal Government of Nigeria shall ensure that distance education programme are equivalent in structure and status to those offered by face-to-face mode of instruction, and that the government shall encourage and regulate distance education programme in Nigeria.

Distance students' characteristics are different from students in traditional universities. They are generally adult learners, mature, employed, and have family responsibilities. Have higher motivation and are willing to take responsibility for their own education. Their goals are often more clear cut. Distance students are self-directed, study on independent basis, Learn in a variety of ways and take control over their learning. They often experience a feeling of isolation and remoteness from other students. Conventional or distance education programme is dependent on good communication for successful learning to take place. Good communication promotes needed interactions (teacher-teacher and student-student) in teaching/learning situation. This is because interaction is essential to students' learning and to the overall success and effectiveness of distance education.

A well established library is essential for any academic institution. As a focal point for teaching, learning, and research, it is expected to provide standard information resources. Today, academic libraries are struggling to keep their place as the major source of inquiry in the face of emerging digital technology. Digital technology has revolutionized not only the way information is packaged, processed, stored, and disseminated, but also how users seek and access information.

Availability and Use of Library Resources by Distance Learning Students in National Open University of Nigeria

Academic libraries no longer restrict themselves to print services such as collection development, cataloguing and classification, circulation and reference services, current awareness, selective dissemination, and other bibliographic services, but have extended their efforts to the use of ICT for service delivery. As observed by Campbell (2006), “numerous creative and useful services have evolved within academic libraries in the digital age. That is, the provision of quality learning spaces, creating metadata, offering virtual reference services, teaching information literacy, choosing resources and managing resource licenses, collecting and digitizing archival materials, and maintaining digital repositories”.

Academic libraries presently are faced with not only the decision on what books and journals to acquire to satisfy faculty and students but also on how to remain relevant in the digital era, mindful of low budgets and resentment on the part of institutional administrators. There is also the issue of library users opting for alternate, more convenient, and “qualitative” sources of information (the Internet). As Lombardi (2000) notes, users will prefer more computer content, more and more computer indices, digitized finding aids, digital repositories of articles, online access to newspapers, etc. Libraries also struggle with when, how, who, and where to begin digitization efforts, while keeping in mind that hesitation in the digitization of institutional archives will.

Availability of information sources means ensuring their presence in libraries for immediate use (Aguolu and Aguolu 2002). Almost every literature concerning this domain of study is concerned about the inadequacy (even outright absence) of essential services and infrastructure. Obviously, electricity, internet, computers, telecommunications and postal services must be developed to levels that could support the declared scale of open and distance education (COL International, 2001; Yusuf, 2006). Possibly, another most grave challenge facing distance education at this level is the need for the integration of new ICT knowledge into academic courses and programs.

Learning materials might be available, that is, the library has acquired them, but inaccessible to those who need them for whatever reasons (un-cataloged, missed cataloged, missed shelved, etc.) will amount to mean those materials are equally not available. 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 addition, library resources and services should be sufficient in quality, depth, diversity and currency to support the institution’s curriculum. As a result of this, university libraries are often considered the most important resource center of an academic institution. The growth of research in all fields of human endeavor is becoming increasingly detailed and sophisticated, faculty members and students have realized that the library has great roles to play in the provision of information necessary for their day to day research. Moreover, the library acts as a medium of getting the latest scientific and technological information either in print or electronic form. According to Whitmire (2002) academic library resources are considered a good measure of an institution’s excellence and quality. Popoola (2008) affirmed that the information resources and services available in institutional information systems must be capable of supporting research activities among the students and faculty members. These resources include not only traditional print-on-paper media like books, journals, newspapers, and maps, but also audiovisual materials like records, audiocassettes, video cassettes and projectors. Libraries maintain collections that include not only printed materials but also art reproductions, maps, photographs, microfiches, CD-ROMs, computer software, online databases, Internet, electronic books and e-journals etc. In addition to maintaining collections within library buildings, libraries often feature telecommunications links that provide users with access to information at remote sites (Halsey, 2006).

A study carried out on three Nigerian Universities by Mabawonku (2004) found out that the Universities had their main libraries and as well had branches in faculties and departments to facilitate learning of students. At the University of Ibadan, the distance learning students were given library cards. This enabled them to gain access and use library materials in the library; which included books, journals, CD ROM search and so on, but were not allowed to borrow materials out of the library. At the University of Lagos such situation prevailed, except that the University allowed book loans for students and there were arrangements for inter-library loans. At the University of Ilorin, the distance learning students were not allowed to use the library and they could not enjoy loan facilities. She further pointed out the following: that resource in the libraries of Nigerian Universities was already overstretched and inadequate for the needs of the academic and research staff and full-time students. Most of the textbooks were outdated, the journal subscriptions were irregular and there were very few functional audio-visual and ICT resources in the libraries. The library services were just been computerized in most cases and not networked with other offices on the campuses.

Distance learning students were not encouraged to share from the inadequate information resources. Although the distance learning students (like the full-time students) took the required course on “the use of libraries” in the general studies course, which they only learnt the theoretical aspects. They do not do any practical in the libraries, Mabawonku (2004). She then when further no orientation or use of library programme normally organized for freshers in universities was provided for the distance learning students by at least two of the universities. Yet, they earned the same degree with the full-time students. Nigeria is facing a critical challenge in meeting new demands of the 21st century, with its ever increasing population growth, inadequate library facilities, resources and insufficient funding. Adequate library resources and services, at the appropriate level for degrees offered should be made available to support the intellectual, cultural, and technical development of the student.

Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) argued that availability should be viewed from both national and instructional levels. They attributed the lack of availability of information resources to the steady proliferation of universities: (federal, state, and private) in Nigeria along with increases in students and faculty, and the diversification of courses and academic and research programmes, without adequate information sources to meet the actual and information needs. Iyoro (2004) found out that availability of serials at the University of Ibadan was 94 percent, with 242 of 256 respondents agreeing that serial publications were available and readily accessible. Ajayi and Akinniyi (2004) found frustration among information seekers due to the non-availability of sources. Oyediran-Tidings (2004) studied information needs of library users at the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, and observed low use of the library by the students, which was “attributed to the expressed unavailability of desired information resources.” The paper suggests seeking user input for the acquisition process and policy.

Oladokun (2002), quoting ARRL 1998, wrote that distance learning students are entitled to library services and resources equivalent to those provided to students and teachers/lecturers in the normal university setting regardless of where the students and programmes are located. The students are also expected to have access to a full range of library materials and services, which include reference assistance, computer based bibliographic and information services, document delivery and inter-library loan services and so on. The implication of this is that arrangements should be made for the students to have access to library resources from designated areas, for example: branch or satellite libraries.

Availability and Use of Library Resources by Distance Learning Students in National Open University of Nigeria

They are also to enjoy virtual services, internet services and other forms of services to enhance their skills and development. But, Oladokun (2002) found out that the Open University of Tanzania, learners depended more on the existing library stocks of public and private library system and the stocks of the libraries were not quite relevant. At the University of Nairobi, Kenya, students on the programme were urged to make their personal arrangement for using other university libraries apart from the University of Nairobi library, British Council Libraries, Theological College Libraries and learning resource centers in teacher training colleges. Students were encouraged to contribute some amount to argument the available stock and to also make their personal arrangement with other libraries.

In an academic community, librarianship is very important in terms of the role the library is expected to play. Therefore, the academic library has to build a strong collection of information resources in physical and digital formats to cater for the knowledge requirements of students, faculty members, research scholars, and scientists of the academic institution. To remain indispensable, libraries must come to define and fulfill a reconfigured set of roles for serving their institutions. To be sure, some elements of the future have the familiar cast of tradition as libraries continue to support the core research and educational purposes of the academy. To act on these core purposes in today's academic environment, however, requires that libraries move beyond parameters of earlier times to pursue new modes of serving their institutions (Rajendran and Rathinasabapathy, 2005)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the library resources available for Distance learning students?
2. What is the frequency of use of library resources by Distance learning students?

HYPOTHESIS

Ho1 There is no significant relationship between the availability of library resources and the use of library resources by the students.

The null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significances.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the descriptive research design of survey. The study population of this study comprises of distance learning students from the various departments and faculties of the National Open University of Nigeria, Ibadan study centre. A random sampling technique was used to select 260 distance learning students among which 229 copies were returned and analyzed giving a response rate of 88.7%.

The data was collected through the use of questionnaire designed for that purpose. In order to ensure effective distribution and administration of the questionnaire and collection from the field, the researchers engaged the services of two research assistants so as to have a full spread of the questionnaire among distance learning students present on campus and at the Moniya distance learning centers. Data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency count to provide answers to the research questions and chi-square analysis to test the hypothesis formulated at 0.05 level of significance.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The distribution of the respondents by sex shows that male respondents are 122(53.3%), while their female counterparts are 107(46.7%). Distribution of the respondents by age range shows that 171(74.7%) are of age range 20-30 years, 24(10.5%) are of age 31-40years, 22(9.6%) are aged 41-50 years, while 12(5.2%) are between 51-60 years respectively. Again, the distribution of the respondents by highest educational qualification shows that majority 125(59%) are degree holders, 77(33.6%) are SSCE holders, while 17(7.4%) are diploma certificate holders. Distribution of the respondents by their level revealed that 96(41.9%)are in 200 level,81(35.4%) are in 100 level, 44(19.2%) are in 300 level while 8(3.5%) are in 400 level. The distribution of the respondents by marital status revealed that majority 153(66.8%) are single, while 76(33.2%) are married.

Table 1: Demographic distribution of respondents

Variables		School of Art & Social Sciences		School of Business Human Resources & Management		School of Education Science Education/ Art & Humanities Teacher Education		School of Science Technology		School of Law		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sex	Male	13	10.7	14	11.5	58	47.5	33	27.0	4	3.28	122	53.3
	Female	14	13.1	13	1	52	48.6	25	23.4	3	2.80	107	46.7
Age	20-30years				11.7								74.7
	31-40years				20.0								10.5
	41-50years	23	13.5	20	8	84	49.1	39	22.8	5	2.92	171	
	51-60years	1	4.17	5	9.0	6	25.0	10	41.7	2	8.33	24	9.61
Highest Educational Qualification	SSCE				13.0								33.6
	Diploma	11	14.3	10	6	32	41.6	18	23.4	6	7.79	77	
	Degree	2	11.8	3	10.0	8	47.1	3	17.6	1	5.88	17	7.42
Religion	Christianity	14	10.4	14	4	70	51.9	37	27.4			135	59.0
	Islam				12.7								72.5
		21	12.7	21	9.5	77	46.4	46	27.7	1	0.6	166	27.4
		6	9.52	6	2	33	52.4	12	19.0	6	9.52	63	7

Availability and Use of Library Resources by Distance Learning Students in National Open University of Nigeria

					13.67.29								
	100 level	8	9.88	11	15.	37	45.7			3	3.70	81	41.9
	200 level	14	14.6	7	9	46	47.9	22	27.2	3	3.13	96	19.2
	300 level	4	9.09	7	25.	23	52.3	26	27.1			44	
Level	400 level	1	12.5	2	0	4	50.0	10	22.7	1	12.5	8	3.49
					9.80								
Marital status	Single	19	12.4	15	15.	79	51.6	35	22.9	5	3.27	153	66.8
	Married	8	10.5	12	8	31	40.8	23	30.3	2	2.63	76	33.2

Table 2 shows the availability of library resources at the National Open University of Nigeria, Ibadan Study Centre. The result of the study shows that 122(53.3%) of the respondents are of the opinion that books are not available at the centre’s library. 143(62.4%) of the respondents were of the view that journals/magazines were not available at the centre’s library. It was also shown that 98(42.8%) of the respondents stated that reference materials are not available while 166(71.2%) computer systems were not available.

Research Question 1: What are the Library resources available for Distance Learning students?

Table 2: Availability of library resources

Availability of library resources	School of Art & Social Sciences				School of business human resources & management				School of Education				School of science				School of law			
	Books	magazines	Reference materials	Computer system	Books	magazines	Reference materials	Computer system	Books	magazines	Reference materials	Computer system	Books	magazines	Reference materials	Computer system				
Readily available	1	1	8	0	1	1	6	1	15	15	31	3	3	1	12	0	0	0	0	
Available	5	2	9	3	7	0	11	1	32	17	20	8	14	9	16	0	4	1	4	2
Not readily available	2	3	0	3	4	8	1	6	7	15	0	28	10	10	3	9	2	3	0	2
Not available	16	18	7	18	7	20	11	2	58	65	53	73	30	37	24	48	1	3	3	3
No response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	24	24	24	24	2	29	29	2	112	112	104	11	57	57	55	57	7	7	7	7

Table 3 shows the use of library resources at the National Open University, Ibadan study centre. The table indicates that 111(48.5%) respondents were of the view that they did not make use of books at the centre’s library in any way. While 133(58.1%) respondents indicated that they were not using the library’s journals. Again, 106(46.3%) respondents were of the view that they are not using the library’s reference resources. Lastly, 183(79.9%) respondents noted that they are not using computer systems at the centre’s library. This result shows that if distance education will achieve its aims and objectives in bridging gap in knowledge, much is still needed to be done. The reason for their non-use may be hinged on the fact that library resources were not available at the centre’s library.

Research Question 2: What is the frequency of use of Library resources by Distance Learning students?

Table 3: Use of library resources

Use of library resources	School of Art & Social Sciences								School of business human resources & management				School of Education				School of science				School of law		
	Books	Journals/ magazines	Reference materials	Computer system	Books	Journals/ magazines	Reference materials	Computer system	Books	Journals/ magazines	Reference materials	Computer system	Books	Journals/ magazines	Reference materials	Computer system	Books	Journals/ magazines	Reference materials	Computer system			
Frequently	1	0	7		3	0	2		15	3	11		3	1	5		0	0	0				
Sometimes	7	1	1		3	3	2		17	17	15		16	5	9		3	1	2				
Occasionally	2	4	2	2	0	2	3	0	12	14	15	7	3	6	10	0	1	3	3	1			
Not at all	1	2	17	12	20	11	12	10	17	57	63	56	90	28	38	26	50	3	3	2	6		
No response	2	2	2	2	12	12	12	12	15	15	15	15	7	7	7	7	0	0	0	0			
	2	4	24	24	24	29	29	29	29	11	11	2	2	112	112	57	57	57	57	7	7	7	7

H0: There is no significant relationship between the availability of library resources and the use of library resources. The critical region rejects null hypothesis if and only if significant value is less than 0.05. Using the Pearson Chi-Square from the table 4, since P value (.000) is lesser than 0.05. The Null hypothesis which says that there is no significant relationship between the availability of library resources and the use of library resources by distance learning students is rejected. Therefore it could be concluded that there is significant relationship between the availability of library resources and the use of library resources.

Table 4 Relationship between availability and use of library resources

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.537E2 ^a	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	135.783	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.234	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	229		

DISCUSSION

The information gathered from the study centre's librarian signified an obsolete nature of library resources. But, students at the centre only use the library occasionally when urgent need arises. This implies a negative effect on the use of the centre's library. According to Agaba (2005) the shift from printed forms of information resources to electronic information materials should lead to better quality, efficient and effective research if used by academic staff and students. This study also corroborates with the findings by Weber and Flatley (2008), who found in their study that most students go to the internet first when conducting research. According to Weber and Flatley, this is not a bad idea instead; however it is an opportunity to continually market and offer library's services and resources through channels that are familiar to students. The above statement implies that since students at the NOUN, Ibadan study centre are used to filling forms, making use of the internet for their registration and accessing most of their programme status. They will rather make use of the internet for their information needs due to the familiarity build up in relation to the nature of the whole programme. The findings confirmed that the library resources at the National Open University of Nigeria, Ibadan study centre were not really available and that there was a relationship between the availability of library resource materials and their use by students at the centre. This brings the need for libraries in Nigerian universities and Distance Learning centre to regularly evaluate the quality, adequacy and use of their library information resources in other to meet up with the quality of library services stipulated by IFLA.

CONCLUSION

Library resources at the National Open University, Ibadan study centre are not readily available hence, the accessibility of library resources at the centre's library cannot be achieved. The non availability and inaccessibility of library resources has resulted to the negative effect on the use of the library at the centre. Since the library is only equipped with obsolete books and other information resources, the enthusiasm for the use of library is not encouraging, thereby, resulting in the isolation and neglect of the library by most of the students and the staff of the centre. The underlying factor for this, might not be unconnected with the problem of inadequacy of funds as being experienced by other conventional universities in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigerian Distance Learning administrators and decision-makers should use the result of this findings to improve the provision and effectiveness of library resources at the different Distance Learning Centres in the country.

The researcher suggested the following recommendations:

1. The National Open University of Nigeria needs to review its library policies so as to meet the student's demands and its ever increasing student population.

2. That efforts should be made to acquire specific information resources that users are in need of but, that were not readily available at the centre's library.
3. That the centre's authorities should try to work hand in hand with other libraries in form of consortium or inter-library co-operation so as to cater for the pressing needs of its students.
4. The introduction of a compulsory library course work for distance learners at the centre, in order to cultivate the habit of library use amongst students of the centre is highly recommended.
5. The renovation of the centre's library so as, to attract positive patronage by distance learners at the centre.

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