

Awareness and Usage of Online Databases among Postgraduate Students in Library and Information Programmes in Universities in South-South, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This work examines awareness and use of online databases among postgraduate students in library schools in South-South Nigeria. A survey was conducted using questionnaire to collect data from a total of 121 postgraduate students in the three library schools accredited by the NUC and the LRCN to offer Library and Information Programmes at postgraduate level in South-South Nigeria. Data collected were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings indicate that the level of awareness of online databases among LIS postgraduate students in the three institutions under study is low and this affected their usage as they were underutilized. Furthermore, the findings of the study identify lack of awareness of the existence of relevant online databases, inconsistency of electricity supply, lack of/inadequate information (Internet) skill as major impediments to the access to and use of online databases. This paper, therefore, recommends that libraries intensify their awareness campaigns for the online databases which they subscribed to and ensure that they subscribe to relevant online databases in order to avoid their underutilization which is bound to occur if libraries keep subscribing to online databases that are not relevant to disciplines within the institutions. In addition, the study recommends that libraries organize user education and workshop on the use of online databases and provide constant electricity supply.

Keywords: *Online databases, Awareness, Usage, Postgraduate students, Universities*

INTRODUCTION

Postgraduate study is connected with further studies that someone does at a university after receiving their first degree with the aim of further exploring a subject in order to attain a high level of proficiency (Olibie, Agu and Uzoechina, 2015). Therefore, the library is mandated to facilitate the goal of postgraduate studies with the provision of print and non-print resources especially access to online databases. According to Sinh

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and Nhung (2012), online databases have become an essential source of information that has contributed to the quality of postgraduate research work. Hence, libraries have long advocated the use of scholarly databases because of their richness in academic material (Mbabu, Bertram and Varnum, 2012) and provide access to online databases to support postgraduate research. Online databases provide a platform for postgraduate students to search for scholarly information which consists of several journals in particular disciplines and can be accessed online. Online databases are usually subscribed to by universities in order to support the research works among postgraduate students (Sinh and Nhung, 2012). Due to the importance of online databases, the universities under study subscribed to a number of online databases which include EBSCO Host, Science Direct, AGORA, MEDLINE, HINARI and a host of others. It is based on the availability of these online databases that the researcher investigates the level of awareness and usage of online databases. This study will provide insight into ways practitioners can facilitate and encourage the usage of online databases in the various institutions under study.

Online databases, also known as electronic databases, are a collection of electronic information sources by publishers from various fields and disciplines and can be accessed through a computer network. Khan and Haridasan (2015) define online databases as records of related digital information concerned with either general information or any specific subject field, which is arranged in a uniform format to retrieve information easily through internet or online networks. Online databases can also be defined as “electronic collections of information accessible via the internet, often containing journal articles, or references to such articles” (Guruprasad, Marimuthu and Khaiser, 2012). They are usually updated files of digitised information, in which the content is revised usually on a regular basis to provide current information to users. It may contain indexes to and abstracts of articles and/or links to the full-text articles. Online databases are organised sets of scholarly and professional publications (e-journals/e-books) in an electronic form that provides a platform for the user to access scholarly information where it consists of several journals and e-books in different disciplines (Aina, 2014). “Online databases are regarded as an excellent tool for information retrieval, referencing, and sharing of data” (Uwimana and Melius, 2010).

The importance of online databases in an academic environment cannot be over emphasized as it provide immense opportunities for academicians, researchers as well as students to find and access current literature for academic purposes. Online databases contain more comprehensive and scholarly work compared to e-resources available on the web through search engines such as Google (Teymourikhani, 2017). With the ubiquity of Google, it is even more important that students appreciate the



significant differences between information sources found on the web and those found in online databases (MeryDeFrain, Kline and Sult, 2014:71). Information sources available in online databases are credible as they are from reputable publishers from various fields and disciplines. In addition to the credibility of information sources available in online databases, it allows users gain remote access to information simultaneously through timesharing process irrespective of time and their locations. Hence, they have emerged as very valuable and useful sources for time-saving in research and development activities. Aina (2014) posits that online databases store information in electronic records that may be searched, retrieved, and organised in countless ways.

They are organised in a variety of ways to include title, author, subject, and keyword to retrieve precise information without wasting precious time (Aina, 2014). The use of online databases improves the quality of research and academic work by providing enriched contents on different subjects of study. Online databases are widely available and can be accessed from anywhere and by many users at the same time. Hence, they have become important and useful information sources for libraries and information centers. To support this view, Dongardive (2015) posits that online databases remain the most effective way to provide access to electronic books/journals in university libraries. Some of these databases are provided free of charge to libraries in developing countries by the publisher or vendor while others are usually subscribed to by university libraries to support research activities (Aina, 2014). Libraries have long advocated the use of scholarly databases because of their richness in academic material (Mbabu, Bertram and Varnum, 2012).

Many universities across the world are currently building extensive collections of full-text journals, and continue to provide access to several online databases. The use of these databases had broadened the scope of many researches by providing wide range of literature in facilitating the research activities in such a way that was not possible with print journals (Komolafe-Opadeji, 2011). Hence, online databases are extensively used as sources of information for research and other related academic activities. Users from different disciplines all over the world use online databases to seek latest information in their areas of study, to consult different electronic resources.

Aina (2014) noted that although, the use of online databases in academics has grown substantially in recent years, lack of awareness and skills, problems of access and applicability of information as well as lack of adequate ICT infrastructure and sheer attitude of users remain barriers to the effective use of online databases in Nigerian universities. These barriers could be responsible for the underutilization of online databases as most students access electronic resources using search engines rather than online databases. As universities spend significant portions of their annual budget



on subscription to these databases, it is only proper and economical that these databases are optimally utilised to contribute to the academic achievement of students and faculty and to obtain value for huge allocation for subscription (Aina, 2014). However, Komolafe-Opadeji (2011) investigated the use of internet and electronic resources among postgraduate students of a private Nigerian university and discovers that postgraduate students regularly access the internet using free online resources from Google and Wikipedia compared to subscribing to online databases like HINARI, EBSCO Host, JSTOR, Questia, and High Beam. Moreover, He, Wu, Yue, Fu and Vo (2012) argue that students used more of online academic search engines such as Google and Cite Seers than university subscribed online databases such as EBSCO, Emerald, Pubmed, and JSTOR. There are different reasons responsible for the underutilization of online databases despite their value and availability in most university libraries in Nigeria. However, lack of awareness remains one of such major barriers that have received little attention by researchers. Lack of awareness seems to be a major gap between availability of online databases and its usage.

Online databases can be maximally utilised only when users are aware of its existence and availability (Kwadzo, 2015). Anaraki and Babalhavaeji (2013) note that where students are not aware of the existence of online databases, they tend to use general search engines to meet their information needs. Ahmed (2013) also finds that postgraduate students from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and undergraduate students from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology used free electronic resources more than university subscribed online databases because of lack of awareness of subscribed ones. As such, it is very essential to ascertain the level of awareness which is as important as the value of online databases.

The overall objective of this paper is to examine the level of awareness and use of online databases among LIS postgraduate students in selected universities in South-South Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- Ascertain the level of awareness of online databases among LIS postgraduate students in South-South Nigeria.
- Examine the extent to which online databases are been used by LIS postgraduate students in South-South Nigeria.
- Identify impediments to access and use of online databases by LIS postgraduate students in South-South Nigeria.

METHOD

The descriptive survey was adopted for this study. The targeted population for this study was 126 postgraduate students admitted for the 2017/2018 academic year for



the three universities under study. The universities under investigation include Delta State University in Abraka, the University of Uyo in Uyo, and the University of Calabar in Calabar. These are the only institutions in the region accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) to offer Library and Information Programmes at postgraduate level.. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The census technique was adopted in the distribution of the questionnaire. One hundred and twenty-six (126) copies of Questionnaire were administered among the LIS postgraduate students with 96% return rate. The data collected were analysed using Statistical tools such as frequency count and simple percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected showed that there are more male respondents (59.5 %) than female respondents (40.5%). This denotes that there are more male LIS postgraduate students than female in South-South Nigeria. Table 1 shows that out of the 126 copies of questionnaire that were administered, 121 (96%) were completed and returned for analysis. Data analysis revealed that 41(97.6%) were returned from DELSU, 36(97.3%) from UNICAL, and 44(93.6%) from UNIUYO. This indicates that DELSU and UNICAL had the highest response rate. Figure 1 depicts the level of awareness of online databases among LIS postgraduate students in the three institutions under study. Majority of the respondents 49(40.5%) were not aware of the availability of online databases in their institutions. Similarly, 27.3% were scarcely aware of the availability of online databases. However, 14.9% of the respondents were fully aware of the availability of online database in their institutions, while 17.4% indicated that they were averagely aware. From the findings, it is observed that the level of awareness of online databases availability among LIS postgraduate students in the institutions is low.

Figure 2 clearly indicates that the online databases available in the institutions under study were underutilised. Findings reveal that 44(36.4%) of the respondents were not utilising online databases, while 35(28.9%) were scarcely utilising online databases. This finding corroborates Aina's (2014) study where he noted that some online databases were not utilised by the academic staff of Babcock University Business School. However, 23(19%) of the respondents were averagely utilising online databases, while 19(15.7%) indicated that they fully utilised online databases available at the institutions. Table 2 indicates that there are various impediments hindering access and use of online databases. The findings of the study identify Lack of awareness of the existence of relevant online databases as a major impediment to the access and use of



online databases with 42.1% and 23.1% affirmation of strongly agree and agree respectively. Similarly, 41.3% and 21.5% of the respondents strongly agree and agree that inconsistency of electricity supply is another major impediment to access and use of databases. Lack of/inadequate information (Internet) skill to access and use online databases was another major impediment with 38% and 21.5% indication of strongly agree and agree respectively. Other impediments include cost of access and usage of online databases with 36.4% and 19.8% affirmation of strongly agree and agree respectively. Lack of access to the internet as an impediment got 27.3% and 30.6% strongly agree and agree responses respectively. Lack of user education on the access and use of relevant online databases got 23.1% strongly agree and 46.3% agree responses. The least impediments as indicated by respondents are lack of access to computers with 13.2% strongly agree and 23.1% agree responses while non-subscription to relevant databases by the University Library got 14.9% strongly agree and 17.4% agree as affirmative responses.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Libraries are subscribing to a large number of online databases in order to meet the increasing demands of its users. However, the findings of this study revealed that the level of awareness of the availability of online databases in the institutions is still low. The study also concludes that the online databases available in the institutions under study were underutilized. Furthermore, the study found that there are various impediments hindering access and use of online databases. The findings of the study identify lack of awareness of the existence of relevant online databases, inconsistency of electricity supply, and lack of/inadequate information (Internet) skill as major impediments to the access and use of online databases.

Therefore, the study recommends that the libraries need to intensify their awareness campaigns about the online databases that the library subscribed to. This is because creating awareness about online databases available in the library is crucial to its overall usage. The study also recommends that the libraries should ensure that they subscribe to relevant online databases in order to avoid their underutilisation, which is bound to occur if libraries keep subscribing to online databases that are not relevant to disciplines within the institutions. Finally, the study recommends that libraries organise user education and workshops on the use of online databases in order to equip them with the necessary skills to effectively use online databases as well as provide constant electricity supply that is essential in powering computers that are used in accessing online databases.



Table 1: Response rate from the three institutions

Institutions	Expected Respondents (N=124)	Actual Respondents (N=115)	% of Actual Respondents
DELSU	42	41	97.6
UNICAL	37	36	97.3
UNIUYO	47	44	93.6
TOTAL	126	121	96.0

Figure 1: Awareness of online databases subscribed by the university Libraries

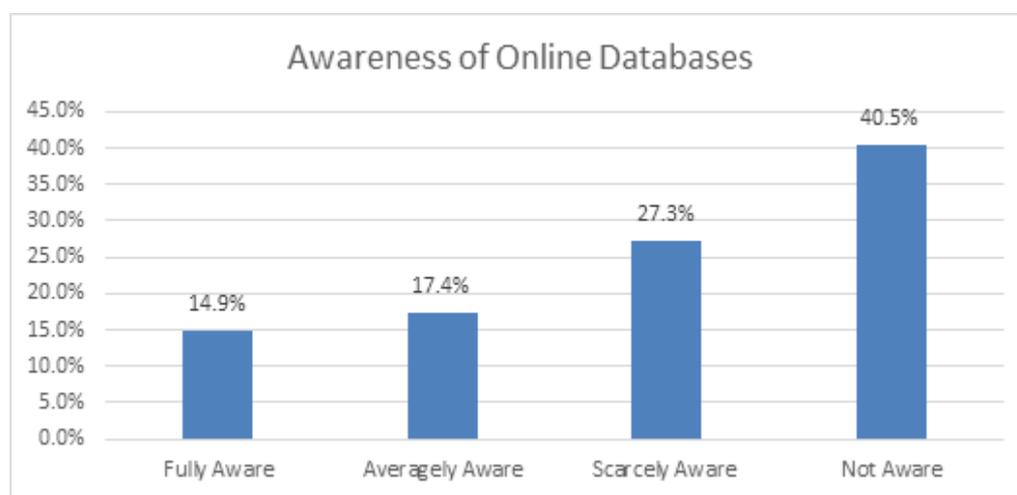


Figure 2: Use of online databases by LIS postgraduate students

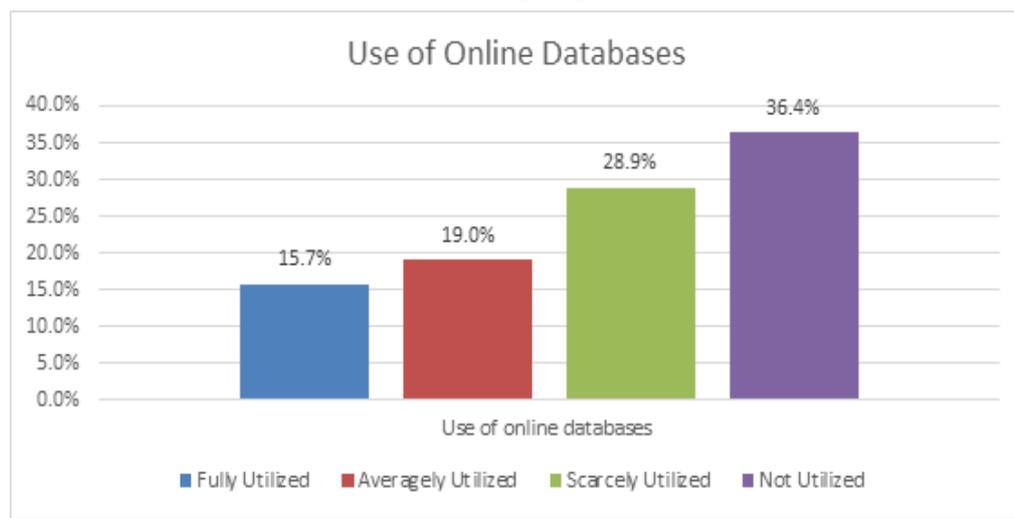


Table 2: Impediments to the access and use of online databases by LIS postgraduate students

Impediments	Responses						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Neutral	Non-response	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Lack of awareness of existence of relevant online databases in my field	51 42.1%	28 23.1%	23 19.0%	19 15.7%	0	0	99.9
Lack of/inadequate information (Internet) skill to access and use online databases	46 38.0%	26 21.5%	24 19.8%	23 19.0%	0	2 1.7%	100
Cost of access and usage of online databases	44 36.4%	24 19.8%	25 20.7%	21 17.4%	3 2.5%	4 3.3%	100.1
Lack of access to relevant online databases	28 23.1%	14 11.6%	42 34.7%	34 28.1%	1 0.8%	2 1.7%	100
Lack of access to computers	16 13.2%	28 23.1%	46 38.0%	31 25.6%	0	0	99.9
Non-Subscription of relevant databases by the University Library	18 14.9%	21 17.4%	39 32.2%	41 33.9%	1 0.8%	1 0.8%	100
Lack of user education on access and use of relevant online databases	28 23.1%	56 46.3%	19 15.7%	15 12.4%	2 1.7%	1 0.8%	100
Lack of access to Internet	33 27.3%	37 30.6%	30 24.8%	19 15.7%	1 0.8%	1 0.8%	100
Inconsistence of electricity supply	50 41.3%	26 21.5%	18 14.9%	27 22.3%	0	0	100

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