

Full Length Research

A Survey of Availability and Accessibility of Print Information Resources by undergraduate Students of the University of Calabar, Calabar, South-South Nigeria

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This was a cross-sectional survey of availability and accessibility of information resources among undergraduate students of the University of Calabar using a self-administered questionnaire. Of the 155 respondents, which cut across several faculties, male accounted for 80 while female were 75 giving an approximately equal gender ratio. Majority of the students were within the 21-25 years age group (n= 64; 41.3%); this was followed by the 26-30 years (n=46; 29.6%). First year students were observed to use the library more, followed by the 400 Level students and then the 500 level undergraduate students. More students (n=84; 54.2%) agreed that print information resources were not readily available with reference to their discipline than those who disagreed (n=58; 37.4%). Similarly, 73 (47.1%) of the students agreed that information resources were not easily accessible against 71 (45.8%) students who disagreed. On the effect of non-availability and inaccessibility, over half (n=84; 54.2%) of the respondents agreed that their usage of the library was negatively affected while the remaining 71 (45.8%) disagreed with the statement. The results of the study showed that students of the University of Calabar also experience the problems of non-availability and inaccessibility to print information resources in the course of their use of the university library. It is recommended that the University should sustain and place more emphasis on educating the students, especially freshmen and women, on needed skills in using the library. In addition, regular workshop for both faculty members and students to update them on newly subscribed online databases, e-books, e-journals and print materials in the library's collection, as well as the skills needed to access them is advised.

Keywords: Availability, Accessibility, Print Information Resources

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INTRODUCTION

University of Calabar was one of the seven universities established in 1975 by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, as part of its 3rd National Development Plan. The university grew out of the Calabar Campus of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) which began functioning as such in the 1973/74 session. In October, 1976, when the newly established university became

autonomous, it inherited over 3,000 volumes of books and skeletal staff from the defunct Calabar Campus of the UNN.

These formed the nucleus of the university of Calabar Library which assumed full status as a University Library and has been operating in that capacity ever since. As a central element in the university's educational role, the library supports and facilitates the achievement of programmes offered in the faculties, institutes and

colleges through the provision of books, journals and other information resources for teaching, learning and research. The library's total holdings comprised of over 150,000 volumes of books, over 9000 volumes of bound and 14,322 current journals as well as 4,400 titles of monographic and other serials holdings to support the academic and research works of both students and faculty members in the university. The library's skilled and dedicated staff members continue to acquire, catalog, preserves and provide access to the institutions' collection. Services rendered by the library includes: lending, reference, user education, current awareness/selective dissemination of information, display of newly acquired materials and information technology (IT) services.

With the explosive increase in the quest for university education in Nigeria coupled with the current dwindling of financial resources, users of most academic libraries in Nigeria are constantly faced with the challenges of availability and accessibility of information resources (Aina, 1985; Marama and Ogunrombi, 1996; Aguolu and Aguolu, 2002). Accessibility may also largely be due to ignorance on part of library users in retrieving relevant materials as observed by Aguolu and Aguolu (2002). Knowledge of availability and accessibility of information resources, no doubt is a common problem that students and researchers in most institutions in Nigeria often encounter. While a number of works have been carried out in some Nigerian institutions, research in the area of availability and accessibility of print information resources appeared not to have been conducted among students of the University of Calabar.

RESULTS

A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed out of 155 were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 77.5%. Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants according to age and gender. Of the respondents, male accounted for 80 while female were 75 giving an approximately equal gender ratio. Majority of the students were within the 21-25 years age group (n= 64; 41.3%) and this was followed by the 26-30 years (n=46; 29.6%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Age according to Gender of Students

| Age Group (Years) | Male | Female | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| 16-20 | 21 | 25 | 46 | 29.6 |
| 21-25 | 34 | 30 | 64 | 41.3 |
| 26-30 | 20 | 19 | 39 | 25.2 |
| 31-35 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 3.9 |
| 36-40 | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 80 | 75 | 155 | 100 |

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the Knowledge about availability of Print Information Resources among undergraduate students in the University of Calabar.
2. To determine accessibility to available print information resources by undergraduate students of the University of Calabar.
3. To determine the impact of availability and accessibility on print information resources on use of library among undergraduate students of the University of Calabar.

METHODOLOGY

This was a cross sectional study of students of the University of Calabar conducted to determine the problems of availability and accessibility to print information resources in the library of the University of Calabar. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to a cross section of students within the library hall and premises. The information obtained included the age, gender, course of study, level of study and how frequent they use the library. In addition question on availability was framed as: "how readily available are the print information resources and what are the relationships between the availability of print information resources and the use of library services"? Accessibility-related question was also asked: "how easily accessible are the print information resources; and is there any relationship between the accessibility of print information resources and the use of library services? The information collected were analyzed using simple frequencies and percentages.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the respondents according to their faculty or discipline. More responses were observed among students from Faculty of Education than from other disciplines. This accounted for 36 (23.2%). The distribution of responses according to other disciplines is shown in Table 2. The least number of responses was from students from the Faculty of Dentistry.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Students according to Faculty

| Faculty | Number of Students | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Medicine | 18 | 11.6 |
| Dentistry | 9 | 5.8 |
| Allied Medical Sciences | 18 | 11.6 |
| Basic Medical Sciences | 22 | 14.2 |
| Education | 36 | 23.2 |
| Physical Sciences | 14 | 9.0 |
| Biological Sciences | 21 | 13.6 |
| Agricultural Sciences | 17 | 11.0 |
| Total | 155 | 100 |

Table 3 shows the distribution of the respondents according to their year of study. First year students were observed to use the library more, followed by the 400 Level students and then the 500 level undergraduate students in that order. Six hundred level students (medical students) were found to have the least response (Table 3)

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Students according to Level of Study

| Level of Study | Number of Students | Percentage |
|----------------|--------------------|------------|
| 100 | 38 | 24.6 |
| 200 | 22 | 14.2 |
| 300 | 23 | 14.8 |
| 400 | 34 | 21.9 |
| 500 | 25 | 16.1 |
| 600 | 13 | 8.4 |
| Total | 155 | 100 |

Table 4 shows the distribution of students according to pattern of library attendance. Majority of the students visit the library 4-5 times a week and this accounted for 43 (31.6%) students. This was closely followed by those who use the library on a daily basis (n=43; 27.7%).

Table 4. Distribution of Students according to Frequency of Library Usage

| Frequency of Usage | Number of Students | Percentage |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Daily | 43 | 27.7 |
| 4-5 Times a Week | 49 | 31.6 |
| 1-3 Times a Week | 29 | 18.7 |
| 1-3 Times a Month | 21 | 13.5 |
| 1-3 Times in 3 months | 13 | 8.4 |
| Total | 155 | 100 |

Table 5 shows the frequency distribution of responses to research questions related to availability and accessibility of print information resources in the university library. Over half of the students (n=84; 54.2%) agreed that print information resources were not readily available with reference to their discipline than those who disagreed (n=58; 37.4%) (Table 5). Similarly, 73 (47.1%) of the students agreed that print information resources were not easily accessible against 71 (45.8%) students who disagreed (Table 5). On the effect of non-availability and inaccessibility of print information resources on use of library services, over half (n=84; 54.2%) of the respondents agreed that their usage of the library was negatively affected while the remaining 71 (45.8%) disagreed with the statement (Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Response to Questions on Availability and Accessibility of Print Information Resources and its Effect on Library Usage

| Variables | Agree N (%) | Disagree N (%) | Not Sure N (%) |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| How readily available are print information resources in your discipline? | | | |
| Not readily available | 84 (54.2) | 58 (37.4) | 13 (8.4) |
| How easily accessible are print information resources in your discipline? | | | |
| Not easily accessible | 73 (47.1) | 61 (39.4) | 21 (13.5) |
| Effect of non-availability and inaccessibility on library usage | | | |
| Does not influence my usage of the library | 84 (54.2) | 71 (45.8) | - |

DISCUSSION

The study evaluated the availability and accessibility of print information resources among undergraduate students of the University of Calabar. The demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that first year and final year undergraduate students attend the library more regularly than students from other levels. This is not unexpected as first year students are usually more motivated and excited in the new environment than older students. Besides, the whole environment is strange and at this period of their study, they are more conversant with lectures venues and perhaps the library and the result is that more of them are inclined to using the library. For the final year students, they are more likely to go searching for information related to their projects and this may account for the more frequent use of the library than other groups of students.

Availability of Print Information Sources and Library Services

The results of the present study have shown that more

students believed that print information resources within the university library were not readily available, and when available the books, journals or other print materials may not be current editions. The result is similar to those of Marama and Ogunrombi (1996), who noted high unavailability of library and information science (LIS) collections in most Nigerian university libraries, which had a negative effect on the use of information resources in the libraries studied. The implication is that the librarians cannot conduct quality research and get published, and students cannot even use library services. Unomah (1987) conducted a study at the former Bendel State University to determine the unavailability rate in the library and to find out its causes. The survey revealed an unavailability rate of 34 %. One effect on the use of library service was that 300 users (71.4%) gave up and went away frustrated. On acquisition performance, the survey showed that the library acquired only a little more than half the items requested. A similar study by Okiy (2000) showed an unavailability rate of only 7.5%. Iyoro (2004) found that availability of serials at the University of Ibadan was 94 percent, with 242 of 256 respondents agreeing that serial publications are available and readily accessible. In contrast, Aina (1985) analyzed the

availability of periodical titles used in Nigerian libraries, and found that only 67 (11.5%) of the 578 periodical titles studied were not available in any of the major libraries, and confirming a high availability rate.

Accessibility of Print Information Resources and Library Services

In this study, a pattern similar to that observed for availability of information resources was also seen with regard to accessibility of print information sources. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) observed that resources may be available in the library and even identified bibliographically as relevant to one's subject of interest, but the user may not be able to lay hands on them. One may identify citations in indexes, but may not have access to the sources containing the relevant articles. The more accessible information sources are, the more likely they are to be used. Readers tend to use information sources that require the least effort to access. These observations have been proven by empirical studies such as those of Slater (1963), and Allen (1968). Five possible types of inaccessibility, that the user may possibly encountered have been identified. These are conceptual, linguistic, critical, bibliographic, and physical inaccessibility. Osudina (1974) evaluated the relationship between accessibility and library use by undergraduates in Nigeria and noted that the problem of Nigerian students is not the question of wanting to use the college library, but whether or not the university library can provide for their needs, and whether there is access to the available materials.

Library usage has been shown to be strongly associated with availability and accessibility of relevant information resources in an academic library. The results of this study supported this assertion with slightly more students averse to using the library because of non-availability and inaccessibility of information resources relevant to their course of study. Library generally have had poor reputation based on users' perception, and this has been attributed to lack of accessibility of information resources (Olowu, 2004). Oyediran-Tidings (2004) at Yaba College of Technology, Lagos in his study, observed low use of the library by students and this was attributed to accessibility problems. Neelamegham (1981) identified accessibility as one of the prerequisites of information use, while Kuhlthau (1991) argued that the action of information seeking depends on the needs, the perceived accessibility, sources, and information seeking habits.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed that students of the University of Calabar also experience the problems of non-availability and inaccessibility of print information resources, and that these challenges tends to have negative effect on their use of the university library.

LIMITATION OF STUDY

One major limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size of participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results of the study, it is recommended that the University should sustain and place more emphasis on educating the students, especially freshmen and women, on needed skills in using the library. With the advent of e-library services, courtesy of information and communication technology (ICT), the university library should organize regular workshop for both faculty members and students to update them on newly subscribed online databases, e-books and journals in the library's collection, as well as the skills needed to access them. In addition, regular update on newly acquired print materials such as textbooks, journals, periodicals as well as other relevant print materials cutting across different disciplines should be provided, and these should be conspicuously displayed to gain users' attention.

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