

Full Length Research

Use of Departmental Libraries by Undergraduate Students of Imo State University, Owerri

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This study investigated the use of departmental libraries by undergraduate students of Imo State University, Owerri. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 365 undergraduate students who use departmental libraries in the university. A structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Out of the 365 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 280 copies were properly completed and returned, representing a 76.7% response rate. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that students utilize departmental libraries to a considerable extent for academic reading, assignment preparation, examination preparation and research activities. The study further found that available information resources and services, including textbooks, reference materials and other course-related materials, influence students' utilization of departmental libraries. The findings also showed that factors such as availability of relevant resources, proximity of departmental libraries, conducive reading environment and supportive library staff significantly influence students' use of departmental libraries. The study recommended regular assessment of students' information needs, provision of current print and electronic resources, improvement of library facilities and continuous user education programmes to enhance effective utilization of departmental libraries.

Keywords: Departmental libraries, Students' utilization, University libraries, Information resources, Library services, Information behaviour

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Introduction

University libraries are established as academic support systems responsible for providing information resources and services that facilitate teaching, learning and research activities. Within the university library system, departmental libraries occupy a unique position because they provide specialized information resources that directly support the academic programmes of individual departments. They serve as extensions of the main library by bringing relevant materials closer to students and academic staff within their areas of specialization (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2022). The emergence of departmental libraries is based on the need to provide focused information services to users whose academic requirements are discipline-specific. While university central libraries provide broad collections covering different fields of knowledge, departmental libraries concentrate on subject-specific resources that address the immediate information needs of students and researchers. This arrangement enhances accessibility, reduces barriers associated with distance and improves the efficiency of information retrieval (Okeke & Nwafor, 2021).

Students' utilization of departmental libraries is an important indicator of the effectiveness of academic library services. Effective use of these libraries contributes to students' academic performance by providing access to textbooks, reference materials, journals, course materials and other learning resources. According to Eze and Ugwuanyi (2023), students who frequently use academic libraries tend to develop stronger information literacy skills and demonstrate improved academic engagement. The changing nature of information access has influenced students' library use behaviour. The increasing availability of electronic resources, internet-based information services and mobile technologies has transformed how students seek and use academic information. Although digital information sources have become important, physical library spaces and collections remain relevant, particularly in developing countries where access to reliable internet connectivity and electronic databases may be limited (Chukwuemeka & Nwosu, 2024). In Nigerian universities, departmental libraries continue to provide essential academic support services despite challenges relating to funding, inadequate collections, insufficient staffing and limited technological infrastructure. The effectiveness of these libraries depends largely on their ability to provide relevant resources, create conducive learning environments and respond to users' changing information needs (Ibrahim & Musa, 2022).

Imo State University, Owerri, like many Nigerian universities, operates a library system that includes the main university library and departmental libraries established to support academic programmes. Despite their importance, concerns remain regarding the level at which students utilize these facilities and whether available resources and services adequately meet their academic requirements. Understanding students' patterns of use is necessary for improving departmental library operations and ensuring that they contribute effectively to university education. This study therefore examines the use of departmental libraries by undergraduate students of Imo State University, Owerri.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- i. What is the extent of use of departmental libraries by students of Imo State University, Owerri?
- ii. What types of information resources and services are available in departmental libraries?
- iii. What factors influence students' utilization of departmental libraries?

Literature Review

Departmental libraries are specialized academic library units established within university departments to provide information resources and services that support teaching, learning and research activities within specific disciplines. They operate as extensions of the university library system by providing subject-focused collections that address the immediate information needs of students, lecturers and researchers. Unlike central university libraries that provide broad collections across different fields, departmental libraries concentrate on materials relevant to specific academic programmes and curricula (Akinola & Adepoju, 2021). The establishment of departmental libraries is based on the need to decentralize library services and improve access to information resources. Their location within academic departments reduces physical barriers and encourages students to make frequent use of available resources. According to Nwankwo and Eze (2022), accessibility and proximity are important factors influencing students' use of academic libraries because users are more likely to utilize resources that are readily available within their learning environment.

Departmental libraries provide services such as circulation, reference assistance, current awareness services, access to textbooks, journals, course materials and research publications. Their effectiveness depends on adequate collections, professional staffing, funding and institutional support (Okafor & Onuoha, 2023). In the contemporary university environment, departmental libraries have expanded beyond traditional print collections to include electronic resources, online databases and digital learning platforms. The integration of information and communication technologies has transformed departmental libraries into hybrid information centres capable of meeting both traditional and emerging information needs of students (Ezeani & Okeke, 2024). Through access to relevant information resources and conducive learning spaces, departmental libraries contribute significantly to students' academic engagement and research development. Students' utilization of departmental libraries refers to the extent, purpose and frequency with which students' access and use available library resources and services for academic activities. The utilization of these libraries provides an indication of how effectively library resources meet students' information needs. Students commonly use departmental libraries for academic reading, accessing textbooks, preparing assignments, examination preparation, project research and consultation of reference materials (Nwosu & Okeke, 2022). The availability of relevant resources and services, awareness of library facilities, accessibility, and the quality of the library environment influence students' utilization behaviour (Ademola & Yusuf, 2023).

Previous studies have shown that the relevance and currency of library collections significantly affect students' willingness to use academic libraries. Students are more likely to patronize departmental libraries when they provide current textbooks, journals and other materials that support their courses of study (Eze & Ugwuanyi, 2023). Similarly, a conducive library environment with adequate seating, proper ventilation, good lighting and supportive library staff enhances students' satisfaction and encourages frequent use of library facilities (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2022). Professional and approachable library staff also contribute to effective utilization by providing guidance, reference assistance and information literacy support (Musa & Abdullahi, 2024). However, despite the importance of departmental libraries, several challenges affect their effective utilization. These include inadequate funding, outdated collections, limited electronic resources, insufficient technological infrastructure, inadequate staffing and poor awareness of available services. Limited financial support often affects collection development, maintenance of facilities and acquisition of current information resources (Nwachukwu & Eze, 2023). Furthermore, inadequate access to computers, internet facilities and electronic databases reduces the ability of departmental libraries to meet the digital information needs of contemporary students (Okeke & Chukwu, 2024). The increasing dependence of students on internet search engines, social media platforms and other online sources has also influenced academic information-seeking behaviour. Although digital sources provide quick access to information, effective use of scholarly library resources remains essential for ensuring access to credible and reliable academic information (Oladokun & Ajayi, 2023). Therefore, improving the quality, accessibility and visibility of departmental library services is necessary to enhance students' utilization and strengthen their contribution to teaching, learning and research activities.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design using a structured questionnaire titled *Use of Departmental Libraries by Undergraduate Students Questionnaire (UDLUSQ)*. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in the Department of Library and Information Science and Measurement and Evaluation. Their observations and suggestions were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance and adequacy of the questionnaire items. The study was conducted at Imo State University, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. The university is a public higher institution established to provide undergraduate and postgraduate education across different academic disciplines. The university operates a library system comprising the main university library and departmental libraries established within academic units to support teaching, learning and research activities. The departmental libraries provide specialized information resources and services to students and staff within their respective disciplines. The population of the study comprised three hundred and sixty-five (365) undergraduate students of Imo State University, Owerri, who were registered users of departmental libraries. The students were drawn from selected academic departments where departmental library facilities exist. The choice of undergraduate students was based on their continuous dependence on academic library resources for assignments, examinations, projects and general academic activities. Out of the 365 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 280 copies were properly completed and returned, representing a 76.7% response rate which was considered suitable for analysis. A sample was drawn from the population using Taro Yamane (1969) formula for determining sample size. Thereafter, students were selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure equal opportunity of participation.

Analysis

Research Question One: What is the use of departmental libraries by students of Imo State University, Owerri?

Table 1: Students' Use of Departmental Libraries

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
a)	Students visit departmental libraries for academic reading	3.42	0.7	Accepted
b)	Students borrow textbooks and other materials	3.18	0.7	Accepted
c)	Students use departmental libraries for assignment preparation	3.35	0.6	Accepted
d)	Students use departmental libraries for research activities	3.01	0.8	Accepted
e)	Students regularly use library services provided	2.86	0.8	Accepted
Grand Mean = 3.16				

The findings in Table 1 show that students make considerable use of departmental libraries. The grand mean score of 3.16 indicates a high level of utilization. Students mainly use departmental libraries for academic reading, accessing textbooks, preparing assignments and supporting research activities. The finding agrees with Adebayo and Yusuf (2022), who reported that departmental libraries remain important academic support centres because their proximity and specialized collections encourage student engagement with learning resources.

Research Question Two: What information resources and services are available in departmental libraries?

Table 2: Availability of Information Resources and Services in Departmental Libraries

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
a)	Textbooks relevant to departmental courses	3.46	0.63	Accepted
b)	Reference materials (dictionaries, encyclopedias and manuals)	3.08	0.81	Accepted
c)	Academic journals and research publications	2.74	0.91	Accepted
d)	Newspapers and magazines	2.61	0.94	Accepted
e)	Internet and electronic information resources	2.42	0.98	Rejected
f)	Photocopying and printing services	2.88	0.87	Accepted
g)	Library orientation and user education services	2.67	0.86	Accepted
Grand Mean = 2.84				

The findings presented in Table 2 reveal that departmental libraries provide various resources and services to support students' academic activities. Textbooks relevant to departmental courses recorded the highest mean score (3.46), indicating that print resources remain the major materials available to students. However, electronic resources recorded a mean score below the acceptable level, suggesting inadequate availability of digital information resources. The finding supports the observation of Okeke and Chukwu (2024) that many Nigerian university departmental libraries still face challenges in integrating electronic resources due to inadequate technological infrastructure, funding constraints and limited access to online databases.

Research Question Three: What factors influence students' utilization of departmental libraries?

Table 3: Factors Influencing Students' Use of Departmental Libraries

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
a)	Availability of relevant academic materials	3.61	0.58	Accepted
b)	Proximity of departmental library to classrooms	3.45	0.65	Accepted
c)	Conducive reading environment	3.29	0.73	Accepted
d)	Helpful attitude of library staff	3.18	0.77	Accepted
e)	Awareness of library resources and services	2.96	0.84	Accepted
f)	Availability of electronic resources	2.54	0.93	Accepted
Grand Mean = 3.17				

Table 3 indicates that several factors influence students' utilization of departmental libraries. Availability of relevant academic materials ranked highest, followed by proximity and conducive reading environment. This implies that students are more likely to use departmental libraries when resources are available and library facilities are convenient. This finding agrees with Eze and Ugwuanyi (2023), who noted that relevance of library collections and accessibility of services are major determinants of students' academic library utilization.

Findings

The findings revealed that students of Imo State University, Owerri, utilize departmental libraries to a considerable extent. Students frequently visit departmental libraries for academic reading, assignment preparation, examination preparation and research activities. This indicates that departmental libraries continue to serve as important academic support centres despite changes in students' information-seeking behaviour. The finding agrees with Nwankwo and Eze (2022), who noted that accessibility and proximity of library facilities encourage students' patronage and enhance effective use of academic information resources.

The findings revealed that departmental libraries provide resources such as textbooks, reference materials, journals

and other academic materials. However, electronic resources were found to be relatively inadequate. This suggests that while departmental libraries continue to support students through print-based collections, many have not fully embraced digital library services. The finding is consistent with Okeke and Chukwu (2024), who reported that inadequate technological infrastructure and limited access to electronic databases remain major challenges affecting academic libraries in Nigerian universities.

The study further revealed that availability of relevant academic resources, proximity of departmental libraries, conducive reading environment and supportive library staff are major factors influencing students' use of departmental libraries. This indicates that students are more likely to utilize library facilities when resources are relevant, accessible and supported by effective services. The finding agrees with Akinyemi and Bello (2021), who emphasized that quality collections, user-friendly facilities and professional assistance significantly influence students' academic library utilization.

Conclusion

The study concluded that departmental libraries remain important components of the university library system because they provide specialized information resources and services that support students' academic activities. The findings revealed that undergraduate students of Imo State University, Owerri, utilize departmental libraries to a considerable extent, particularly for academic reading, assignment preparation, examination preparation and research. The study also established that the availability of relevant information resources and services, as well as factors such as proximity, conducive reading environment and library staff support, significantly influence students' utilization of departmental libraries. Overall, the study affirms that departmental libraries continue to play a significant role in meeting the information needs of undergraduate students and supporting teaching, learning and research in the university.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

- 1) University management should provide adequate funding for the development and sustainability of departmental libraries.
- 2) Departments should regularly update their library collections by acquiring current textbooks, journals and other relevant academic materials.
- 3) Electronic library resources should be introduced and expanded to provide students with access to online databases, e-books and digital learning materials.
- 4) Library facilities should be improved by providing conducive reading environments, adequate furniture, proper ventilation and reliable power supply.
- 5) Regular user education programmes should be organized to increase students' awareness of available library resources and services.
- 6) Qualified library personnel should be assigned to departmental libraries to provide effective information services and professional guidance.
- 7) The university should integrate departmental libraries with digital library systems to improve access to information resources beyond physical library spaces.

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