Strategies for Effective Utilization of Library Resources and Services by Distance Education Students in National Teachers Institute in Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: *This study examined the strategies for effective utilization of library resources and services by distance education students in Nigeria. It sought to find out the purpose to which the distance education students utilize library resources and services; problems associated with the distance education students' utilization of library resources and services and ascertain the strategies that could be used to enhance effective utilization of library resources and services by the distance students.*

Design/Methodology/Approach: *A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of 4000 students and 12 librarians. The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire and observation checklist. Percentages, mean scores and frequency tables were used in analyzing the data.*

Findings: *The findings revealed that NTI students use the library for the purpose of acquisition of knowledge, consulting reference materials in the library, writing assignment, reading for examinations, consulting journals among others. It equally revealed that they had little or no knowledge on how to utilize library services, poor cataloguing and classification method, Time constrain due to the nature of the programme, inadequate number of staff, Insufficient power supply, Cost of materials like e- books and journals, Poor funding among others are some of the factors affecting effective utilization of library resources and services.*

Implications: *Suggested solutions to issues affecting effective utilization of library resources and services by distance education students in Nigeria include organizing seminar, conferences, workshops for users by professionals in order to learn new skills, provision of adequate power supply by library management, expansion of the library for more space by the library administrators, provision of sufficient and up-to-date textbooks and journals, employment of more library staff among others.*

Originality/VALUE: *It was recommended that adequate budgeting should be specifically set aside to cater for distance education libraries. Secondly, there is need for the introduction of library use into their curriculum in order to teach them on how to effectively access the information resources that are available in the library. Thirdly, there is need for the provision of alternative power supply to enable the library provides online services to their clients.*

Keywords: *Utilization, Library Resources, Library Services, Distance learning students, Distance Education, Library and information service delivery.*

Paper type: *Empirical research*

Introduction

Today more than ever, libraries are the one place where there are no barriers to learning. Schools and academic libraries provide books and technological resources to students who otherwise cannot afford them, and many of them serve local communities as well. The provision of library services to those who study at a distance from the campus adds to the quality of the education provided by an institution and ensures that the programs delivered in the distance environment will be comparable to those offered on campus. Off-campus students often need instruction in academic research and in the effective use of resources, particularly those available via electronic technologies. These include not only those library resources available through the parent institution but those available at the local site libraries. Dudgan (1991) and Rodrigues (1996) in separate studies noted that the library needs of distant learners

are not unique; they have the same library and

Distance education on the other hand implies that a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone removed in space from the learner. Ogili (1996) defines distance education as a system of learning process where the isolated learner is separated from the facilitator most of the time, irrespective of social and geographical base. Distance education is seen as an alternative or a supplement to formal education system where the learner and the teacher are always in contact. The normal school situation is usually not benefited by all who need it, because of one reason or the other. As a result of this, the alternative is to register for a distance education programme. In addition to this, Okeem (1990) expresses that since the conventional means cannot be provided to all who need it the alternative should be made, which is the distance education. In practice, distance teaching usually involves a combination of the media. While teachers may be in direct contact with their students through telephone and audio and video – conferencing, the physical separation means that the teacher must teach using some media of some kind (Keegan, 1997). The distinguishing characteristic of distance education from other forms of education is the physical separation that exists between the students, their tutors and the institution of instruction. More often, the learners are located in remote settings where access to library resources and services are limited. This separation has been termed the "tyranny of distance" within the literature of distance education. It is this factor of distance that redefines the role of libraries in distance education and leads to the specialization, "distance librarianship" (Watson, 1992). Distance learning has become more popular in recent times because it is cost saving for universities to reduce the number of residential and full-time students, distance learning normally should demand much use of library resources, audio-visual media and information and communication technology (Mabawonku, 2004). She added that these are essential for communicating with a large group of people especially in distance locations. They also make for interactive sessions with groups and individual students. On the other hand, the learners also need to read all kinds of texts and information materials when they are not in school. This is to prepare them for the course content and examinations. Thus, the students

information needs as on campus students. need to use libraries and information centers for reading and for information search.

According to Hart and Kingston (2012) library services offered to part time and distance learners include but are not limited to book collection services, photocopy services and proxy loan authorization services. These services deals specifically with books and photocopy requests and other enquiries received from part-time and distance learning students. Similarly, Pace (2001) identified that distance library services include virtual reference service, simplified access to licensed indexes and full text purchase of electronic texts, document delivery and reciprocal borrowing with other libraries. Also Watson (1996) observed that the expanded use and role of technology in the delivery of library and information services has served to reduce the barriers to library and information services that are occasioned by distance for these students. In order to take library services to distance learners, many libraries in these institutions have placed most of their services online. The digitalization of information makes it possible to take library and information services to distance students regardless of their location. In addition to online public access catalogues (OPACs), students are able to search databases, examine abstracts and in some instances read full text documents. Some of these networked services also include non-print resources in their information databases.

Improvement in library services for the distance learners can be achieved through focus on user needs, appropriate use of information technology, resource sharing, enhancement of user information literacy and constant performance assessment and evaluation of the service. Library staff plays a critical role in enhancing quality and therefore should be given the responsibility for quality and be made accountable for the quality of individual output. In order to perform effectively, staff should be aware of products and services offered by the library and its parent organization as well as understand user needs (John, 1997).

The library has the primary responsibility for identifying, developing, coordinating, providing and assessing the value and effectiveness of resources and services designed to meet both the standard and unique informational skills, developmental needs of distance learning

community (Ossai, 2009). Concerns for ensuring the delivery of equivalent library services to college and university faculty students and other personnel in the remote setting was the basis of this investigation. This stems from the increasingly critical factors such as non-traditional study having rapidly become a major element in higher education, an increase in diversity of educational opportunities, an increase in the number of unique environments where educational opportunities are offered; an increased recognition of the need for library resources and services at locations other than main campuses; an increased demand for equitable services for all students in higher education no matter where the classroom is located, may be a greater demand for library resources and services by faculty and staff at distance learning sites and an increase in technological innovations in the transmittal of information and the delivery of courses.

Institutions that are involved in Distance Education Programmes should create learning resource centres in all the study centres where access would be provided for course materials, computers for computer-assisted instruction and other supplementary learning materials for the learners. There is need to train staff regularly through seminar, conference, workshops, short and long-term training. The training would help them to meet up the demand of learning materials like the new information technologies.

Distance Education institutions should ensure that there is technical back-up for learners where they would be properly guided and advised. Also, the administrative set-up would be such that opportunities would be opened for all to have access in the delivery and dissemination of knowledge. Government, on her own part, should ensure that power supply is a thing of the past, as regular supply of electricity would mean regular use of the information and communication technology and other learning facilities (Hart and Kingston, 2012). Government should ensure international connectivity because for Nigeria to be fully integrated into the global communications system, it needs an infrastructure connected to systems abroad through international links to form part, ultimately, of the global networks. This places opportunities that exist elsewhere in the world within the grasp of Nigerians for wider access to knowledge.

Recruitment of well-trained personnel in the use of resource materials and even the Information and Communication Technology should be done. Efforts should be made to protect learning materials/gadgets that were installed. This means that adequate security is needed. Regular maintenance culture on the learning materials should be encouraged to avoid redundancy of materials.

With regard to high education, an aspect of the policy encourages distance education that may be received outside the university environment to be organized and delivered by tertiary institutions and study centres in Nigeria. The distance mode of educational delivery has become a very trendy method of popularizing education and breaking down the narrow-mindedness and the elitism of the typical conventional university. Hence the need for the study which is designed to identify strategies for effective utilization of library resources and services by the students of National Teachers Institute, Enugu.

Objectives of the Study

The broad aim of the study is to examine the strategies for effective utilization of library resources and services by the students of National Teachers Institute, Enugu. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the purpose to which the distance education students utilize library resources and services.
2. Examine the problems associated with the distance education students' utilization of library resources and services.
3. Ascertain the strategies that could be used to enhance effective utilization of library resources and services by the distance students.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study encompasses the strategies for effective utilization of library resources by students of National Teachers Institute, Enugu. The study was carried out in eight (8) different National Teachers' Institute centres located in Enugu state. They are: National Grammar School Nike Enugu, Boys Secondary School Umueze Agbani, Corpus Christy College Achi, Nsukka High School Nsukka, Girls High School Nenwa (NEW), Queens School Enugu (PGDE), Enugu State

College of Education (Technical) Enugu (PGDE), and ESUT Barracks Nsukka (PGDE).

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used for the study with a population of 4000 distance education students and 12 librarians. Sample size of 400 was drawn for the study. This is line with Uzoagulu (1998) as cited by Ezeh (2005) that for a population of few thousands, a sample

of 10% be used to ensure fairness to the entire population. A purposive sampling technique was used in sampling while the whole 12 librarians were used. The instrument for data collection was Likert-styled structured questionnaires with 4 points for strongly agree (SA), 3 for agree (A), 2 for disagree (DA) and 1 for strongly disagree (SA). Percentages, mean scores and frequency tables were used in analyzing the data.

Analysis of Data

Table 1: Distribution and return rate of the questionnaire

Location address of centre & program	NO Students	Sample Size	No of Questionnaires Returned	% Returned
National Grammer School Nike Enugu	550	55	51	14.2
Boys Secondary School Umueze Agbani	450	45`	43	11.9
Corpus Christy College Achi	561	56	47	13.1
Nsukka High School Nsukka	491	49	46	12.8
Girls High School Nenwe	400	40	39	10.8
Queens School Enugu	450	45	44	12.2
Enugu State College of Education Technical Enugu	540	54	45	12.5
Esut Barracks Nsukka	558	56	45	12.5
Total	**4000**	**400**	**360**	**100**

The return rate for Boys Secondary School was 11.9%, Queens School Enugu was 12.2%, Enugu State College of Education Technical Enugu was 12.5%, Esut Barracks Nsukka got 12.5% while National Grammer School Nike Enugu got 14.2%, Nsukka High School Nsukka got 12.8% Corpus Christy College Achi was 13.1%, and Girls High School Nenwe got 10.8% respectively. From the table a total of three hundred and sixty (360) questionnaires were returned and correctly filled. A percentage score of 50%was used as a bench mark.

Table 2: Librarians responses on the purpose of distance education students' utilization of the library

List of Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
For acquisition of knowledge	12				4.0	Accept
To consult reference materials in the library	7	5			3.2	Accept
To borrow books			10	2	1.8	Reject
To write assignment	12				4.0	Accept
To read for exams	5	7			3.4	Accept
To consult journals		8	4		2.6	Accept
To read newspapers	12				4.0	Accept
To read their own books (self study)	12				4.0	Accept
To hold discussion with classmates			6	6	1.5	Reject
To consult online resources				12	1.0	Reject

Table 2 above shows that NTI students uses the library for the purpose of acquisition of knowledge (4.0), consulting reference materials in the library(3.2), write assignments(4.0), read for exams(3.4), consult journals(2.6), read newspapers(4.0) and read their own books. The result shows that borrowing books from the library (1.8), holding discussion with classmates (1.5) and consulting online resources (1.0) is not among the major purpose distance education students visit the library.

Table 3: Librarians responses on the problems associated with distance education students' utilization of library services

List of Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Little or no knowledge on how to utilize library services	12				4.0	Accept
Poor cataloguing and classification method discourages some students	7		5		3.2	Accept
Time constrain due to the nature of the programme			2	10	1.8	Reject
Insufficient power supply	12				4.0	Accept
Cost of materials like e- books and journals	12				4.0	Accept
Poor funding	12				4.0	Accept
Inadequate space for users	12				4.0	Accept
Inadequate tables and chairs for users	12				4.0	Accept
Lack of trained library staff			5	7	1.5	Reject
Inadequate reading materials				12	1.0	Reject
Inadequate number of staff	12				4.0	Accept

Table 3 highlights the problems associated with distance education students' utilization of library services. It shows that little or no knowledge on how to utilize library services (4.0), Poor cataloguing and classification method (3.2) and inadequate number of staff constitute problems to distance education students utilization of library services. It also shows that lack of trained library staff does not constitute a problem to the utilization of library services.

Table 4: Librarians responses on strategies that could be used to enhance the utilization of library services for distance education programme.

List of Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Organizing seminars, conferences workshop for users by professionals in order to learn new skills	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Provision of adequate power supply by the library management	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Provision of conducive environment by the library management	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Expansion of the library for more space by the library administrators	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Provision of effective online access to NTI libraries for users	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Provision of sufficient and up-to-date textbooks and journals	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Employment of more library staff	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Introduction of modern means of cataloguing and classification method	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Online courses should be introduced	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Internet connectivity should be provided	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept
Introduction of library orientation for users	12	-	-	-	4.0	Accept

Table 4 above shows the strategies for enhancing NTI students utilization of the library services, it shows that all the items listed as strategies are necessary for enhancing NTI students utilization of library services.

Discussion of Findings

It was also discovered that NTI students uses the library for the purpose of acquisition of knowledge, consulting reference materials in the library, write assignment, read for exams, consult journals, read newspapers and read their own books. They do not borrow books from the library, hold discussion with classmates and consult online resources.

It was also discovered that little or no knowledge on how to utilize library services, poor cataloguing and classification method, Time constrain due to the nature of the programme, inadequate number of staff, Insufficient power supply, Cost of materials like e- books and journals, Poor funding, Inadequate space for users, Inadequate tables and chairs for users, and Inadequate number of staff constitute problems to NTI students utilization of library services

while lack of trained library staff and Inadequate number of staff does not constitute a problem to utilization of library services. This agrees with Watson (1992) and Appleton (1997) who listed some of the problems as follows: Lack of online services, Poor library orientation services, Limited library resources, Lack of support from the library staff, Competition for materials, Restrictive library hours, Lack of current services, Lack of adequate reading space and High cost of library charges. Many writers Mabawonku, (2004), Cullen (1994) and Morgan (1996) at various times in separate studies had also agreed that these problems hinder the effective use of library operations and services.

The problems identified in the utilization of library services by distance education students notwithstanding, this study recognizes that organizing seminar, conferences, workshops for users by professionals in order to learn new skills, provision of adequate power supply by library management, expansion of the library for more space by the library administrators, provision of sufficient and up-to-date textbooks and journals, employment of more library staff, introduction of modern means of cataloguing and classification method and introduction of library orientation for users are measures to be taken to enhance students utilization of library resources. Ossai (2009) observed that the library has the primary responsibility for identifying, developing, coordinating, providing and assessing the value and effectiveness of resources and services designed to meet both the standard and unique informational skills, developmental needs of distance learning community.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The major challenge that has continued to agitate the minds of educational planners, administrators and the government has been how best to cope with the increasing population of students as well as provide well-qualified teaching personnel that would help empower the individual students through the acquisition of knowledge and skills and would enable them to participate fully and actively in nation building. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made to improve the situation.

1. Adequate budgeting should be specifically set aside to cater for distance education libraries

2. There is need for the introduction of library use into their curriculum in order to teach them on how to effectively access the information resources that are available in the library.
3. There is need for the provision of alternative power supply to enable the library provide online services to their clients.

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