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JOURNAL UTILIZATION BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE LIBRARIES OF THE UNIVERSITIES OF AGRICULTURE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the extent to which postgraduate students of the Universities of Agriculture libraries in Nigeria utilize journals in their libraries for research purposes. Survey research design was adopted. A total of 1,275 copies of a questionnaire were distributed among the postgraduate students of the three Universities of Agriculture in Nigeria of which there were 914 (71.69%) responses. The questionnaire sought for information on how often they use journals, constraints to the use of journals, the kinds of journals they preferred most (printed or electronic) and the currency and relevance of journals to their field of research. The result indicated that the greatest frequency usage of journals was three times a week with MOU recording highest usage (58.6%), while UNAAB and UAM had 40.8% and 40.9%, respectively. Universities of Agriculture libraries should make adequate provision for relevant and current electronic databases to make research activities easy for researchers. The Libraries should form Inter Library Loan (ILL) network for the exchange and sharing of their resources.

Keywords: Agricultural libraries, journals utilization, postgraduate students, university Libraries, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The aim of postgraduate programmes in the universities of agriculture is to impart specialized knowledge and skills leading to the attainment of a high level of expertise in specific areas of agriculture. The objectives of the programmes are, therefore, attained through the institution of appropriate mix of advanced courses, provision of excellent research and library facilities. If these aims are to be actualized, postgraduate students will need information to help them with their course of studies particularly their research programmes. The most important information sources needed at this level are journals and this is because journals provide recent and very often, original information.

Academic journals have long formed the back-bone of research in academic and university libraries because of the currency of the information they contain. They are treasured because they are primary source materials. Information therein are relatively factual and current (Aboyade, 1979; Agbaje, 2003). Journals are, perhaps, the most current vehicles of new ideas, knowledge and breakthrough in scientific development (Omekwu and Atinmo, 1998).

The key aspects to academic achievement are the resources available, students' ability to access these resources and students' utilization of information resources obtained. Osundina (2004) studied 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 libraries, but whether or not the university library can provide for their needs and whether there is access to what is provided. The underlying theory is that the more available and accessible resources are, the more they would be utilized. Reading culture among university students is dwindling daily, leading to a decline in academic standard, which may adversely affect national and socio-economic development (Braithwaite *et al.*, 1997). Aboyade (1982) discovered some lapses in the ability of postgraduate students in the use of the library. All these then call for investigation on how journals, which are the main source of research, are utilized by the postgraduate students. The study therefore, examined the degree of utilization of journals by postgraduate students of the universities of agriculture in Nigeria.

The Universities of Agriculture in Nigeria

In 1988, two Federal Universities of Technology were converted to full-fledged Universities of Agriculture at Abeokuta and Makurdi. The third Agricultural University was established in 1992 at Umudike. Their establishment was an entirely new concept for promoting agricultural education and services for agricultural development and attainment of self-sufficiency in food and fibre. The three universities are:

- The University of Agriculture Abeokuta, (UNAAB) Ogun State situated in the western part of the country.
- The University of Agriculture Makurdi, (UAM) Benue State, situated in the middle belt of the country.

- Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, (MOU) Abia State, situated in the Eastern part of Nigeria

The universities run collegiate system. In this system, the major academic units (departments) are grouped into colleges which are semi-autonomous.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The mark of academic excellence and scholarship lies in the student's ability to find new facts for himself to supplement whatever he gets from the teacher. In order to build an inquiring mind, library utilization becomes indispensable. At the tertiary level, Gibbs (1985) stressed that library serves more as a place for independent work because at this level, the users should be able to locate, assess, use, compare and contrast as well as evaluate information for meaningful educational inquiry. In essence, through this process, the user is able to develop critical and analytical skills. Wells (1996) reviewed university libraries performance in response to research, which demonstrates that library usage contributes to the academic achievements of undergraduates. The three key aspects according to him are the resources available, student's ability to access these resources and student's use of information obtained.

Many African countries are experiencing the hard effect of global economic recession, which is making acquisition of relevant and up-to-date books and journals a difficult task for most university libraries. Correspondingly, the reading culture among university students is dwindling daily, thus leading to the debasement of academic standards which may adversely affect national and socio-economic development (Braithwaite *et al.*, 1997). Unomah (1988) conducted a survey

of students' utilization of two academic libraries in Nigeria and found that majority of the students did not make use of the library resources. He recommended the introduction of "Use of books and library" as a compulsory course in addition to aggressive 'user education' programme for the students as ways of ameliorating the situation.

Postgraduate students' work is more or less of research work and the postgraduate school is the place where research workers of a country are trained (Fletcher, 1994). Writing on the obligation of the postgraduate student, Aboyade (1982) expressed the view that he is engaged in an inquiry spread over a year or more in which he is left on his own but under the supervision of a faculty member. She expressed the view that many students do not know the effective use of the library; however, he has access to stacks where he browses among the collections in his subject area and picks books in a haphazard manner. Olajo and Akewukereke (2004) noted that students constitute the largest group of information users and research is very vital to both undergraduate and postgraduate students but the latter are expected to use the materials more intensively. This is in a situation where the materials are readily available in the library and retrievable with minimum efforts.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was drawn up and distributed among the postgraduate students at the universities of agriculture in Nigeria. Postgraduate students were sampled and stratified according to whether they were undergoing PhD, Masters or Postgraduate diploma studies. The questionnaire further sought for information on kinds of journals used mostly for research, factors influencing

the use of journals and inhibitors to the use of journals. The study used the whole target population of 1,275 from the 3 universities of which there were 914 (71.69) responses.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to assess the use of journals by postgraduate students of the Universities of Agriculture libraries. Specifically, the study: describes the pattern of journal usage; describes the factors that may inhibit the use of journals in the Universities of Agriculture libraries and determines the rating of e-journals by the postgraduate students at the Universities of Agriculture libraries in Nigeria.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Postgraduate Education

In order to determine the level of the respondents' involvement in research, respondents were asked to indicate their level of postgraduate education.

Table 1 shows the level of education of the respondents. As expected students in the PhD group are least in number (15%). The figures obtained for the masters (44%) and postgraduate diploma (40.8%) groups are very suggestive of an emerging trend in university education in Nigeria today where graduates clamour for postgraduate degrees probably to satisfy Nigeria's love for and emphasis on paper qualification. Postgraduate diploma classes are often populated by students who made poor degrees of pass (such as 3rd class or ordinary pass) and who would like to make the postgraduate diploma programme a stepping stone to a master's level programme. Also, in Nigeria today, more and more students go back to the university because they are unable to secure jobs after their first degrees.

Table 1: Distribution of the Responses on Level of Education

PG Education	UNAAB		UAM		MOU		ALL	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
PhD	90	13.5	27	20.5	18	15.5	135	14.8
Masters	303	45.5	55	41.7	48	41.1	406	44.4
PGD	273	41.0	50	37.9	50	43.1	373	40.8
Total	666	100.0	132	100.0	116	100.0	914	100.0

Factors that influence/ inhibit the use of journals by the postgraduate students

In order to establish factors that influence/ inhibit the use of journals, some questions were asked on how often the students use the journals, kind of journals used mostly for research, currency and relevancy of the journals to postgraduate students' area of research.

The result in Table 2 shows that the greatest frequency usage of the journals was three times a week with MOU recording the highest usage (58.6%), while UNAAB and UAM had 40.8 and 40.9%, respectively. It also showed that the frequency of usage was between once a week to three times a week (UNAAB 64.4%, UAM 61.3% and MOU 70.7%) The frequency rate of those who used the journals between four and five times a week was low in the 3 universities (UNAAB 11.3%, UAM, 10%; and MOU 9.%), while those who used it when necessary was 25.4% in UNAAB, 38.6% in UAM and 26.7% in MOU. The mean values 2.9, 3.1, and 3.3 for UNAAB, UAM and MOU respectively shows that the frequency of library use is similar among the postgraduate students at the universities of agriculture libraries in Nigeria.

In order to ascertain the factors influencing the use of journals, questions were asked on the currency and relevance of the journals to their research work.

The study tried to find out factors that may inhibit the use of journals in the libraries by the respondents, the results as indicated in Table 3 showed that major inhibition to the use of journals was non-availability of relevant journals for research at UAM and MOU (68.2 and 69.0%, respectively). There were more relevant journals at UNAAB than at the other two libraries. On the currency of journals in the libraries, the results indicated that the journals at the Universities of Agriculture libraries in Nigeria were not current enough for research. This implies that postgraduate students using the libraries very often make references to out-dated journals.

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they use other libraries when unable to get journals needed from their own university libraries. The results showed that majority of the respondents (78.3%) use other institutional libraries around to get information for their research work.

Table 2: Distribution of Responses on Journal Usage

Variable	UNAAB		UAM		MOU		TOTAL	
	Fre- quency	%	Fre- quency	%	Fre- quency	%	Fre- quency	%
Once a week	31	4.7	11	8.3	Nil	Nil	42	4.6
Twice a week	119	17.9	16	12.1	14	12.1	149	16.3
Thrice a week	272	40.8	54	40.9	68	58.6	394	43.1
Four times a week	52	7.8	Nil	Nil	9	7.8	61	6.7
Five Times a week	23	3.5	Nil	Nil	1	0.9	24	2.6
When necessary	169	25.4	51	38.6	24	20.7	244	26.7
Total	666	100.0	132	100.0	116	100.0	914	100
Mean of library usage	2.9 ≈ 3 times		3.1 ≈ 3 times		3.3 ≈ 3 times			

Table 3: Distribution of Responses on Factors that may inhibit the Use of Journals

Variables	UNAAB		UAM		MOU		TOTAL	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
No relevant journals	54	8.1	90	68.2	80	69.0	224	24.5
Lack of current journals	10	1.5	33	25.0	32	27.6	75	8.2
Prefer internet sources out side the library	46	6.9	2	1.5	Nil	Nil	48	5.3
Non Conducive environ- ment	37	5.6	6	4.5	4	3.4	47	5.1
No Response	519	77.9	1	0.8	Nil	Nil	520	56.9
Total	666	100.0	132	100.0	116	100.0	914	100.0

The cost of using the e-journals could also inhibit its use; it was found that none of the libraries charged users for the use of e-journals. However, users pay fifteen naira (N15) per print page from CD-ROM at UNAAB, while ten naira (N10) was being charged at MOU. There were no print-out services yet at UAM. The study revealed

that none of the libraries had Internet facilities for the use of on-line journals. The implication of this is that postgraduate students would have to go outside to use public cyber cafés for their research activities which could be very expensive and time consuming. This finding corroborated the findings of Akunbundo (2008) in his study of Michael Okpara

University of Agriculture Library that the library lacks adequate hardware to access information sources in non-print and electronic forms.

This research also focused on the kind of journals used mostly by postgraduate students for their research work. Table 4 shows that more respondents (71.79%) use print journals to electronic journals, which are preferred by 28.2% of the respondents. This can be said to stem from the fact that more print journals were at the disposal of the respondents relative to electronic materials. Also the use of electronic materials is still an innovation that has not really gained ground in Nigeria. Considering the numbers of hours spent at the cyber café, the cost of

its use and irrational power supply from Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), users do feel frustrated with the use of electronic materials in Nigeria.

Determination of the rating of the e-journals in the libraries

Respondents were also requested to rate the e-journals in their area of research. The Likert summated ratings were used to rate the e-journals in the study areas vis-a-vis ease of retrieval of the e-journals, relevance of the e-journals to research work and currency of the e-journals. This is based on a 5-point scale which is: Very good =5, Good=4, Average=3, Poor=2 and Very poor=1.

Table 4: Distribution of Responses on the kind of Journals used most for Research

Kind of journals used mostly for Research	UNAAB		UAM		MOU		TOTAL	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Print journals	461	69.2	107	81.06	88	75.9	656	71.79
E -journals	205	30.8	25	18.9	28	24.1	258	28.2
Total	666	100.0	132	100.0	116	100.0	914	100.0

Table 5: Rating of the E-Journals in their Areas of Research

	UNAAB	UAM	MOU	TOTAL
Ease of retrieval of the e-journals	3.23	2.37	2.34	2.50
Relevance of e- journals to research work	3.50	2.26	2.56	2.78
Currency of e- journals	3.46	2.68	2.54	2.70

Respondents rated the ease of e-journal retrieval, its relevance to their specific areas of research as well as its currency as below average (2.50, 2.78, and 2.70, respectively) as shown in Table 5. The implication here is that students' research activities may suffer as a result of difficulties they experience in accessing relevant and current electronic journals in their respective areas of research. The mean rating as reported above is obtained based on the formula:

$$\sum_{i=1}^{I=n} \frac{f_x}{n_x}$$

where,

\sum = summation of ratings of the i^{th} respondent

$n = 1,275$ respondents

f_x = sum value of ratings of n respondents.

n_x = total number of respondents.

The decision criterion is such that from 1.0 to 3.0 = below average and from 3.1 and above = above average.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the study that postgraduate students patronize their libraries very well as well as other libraries when unable to get journals from their own libraries. The libraries lacked relevant and current journals for postgraduate students' research. It was also established that students did not rely much on their university libraries but on other sources such as cyber café for internet access outside their libraries and visit other libraries to supplement informa-

tion obtained from libraries in their universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Universities of Agriculture libraries should make adequate provision for relevant and current electronic databases to make research activities easy for researchers. They need to pay more attention to the acquisition of relevant journals for their libraries. There is no library that is self sufficient; therefore, the libraries should form Inter Library Loan (ILL) network for the exchange and sharing of their resources so that students would not have to be travelling about in search of information for their research work.

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