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Challenges in using information resources: a case study of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture library, Nigeria

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Abstract

The utilization of information resources holds significant importance in the realm of undergraduate education. However, undergraduates often encounter diverse challenges when it comes to accessing and effectively utilizing these resources. This study aims to investigate the specific challenges faced by undergraduates in their usage of information resources, focusing on the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Library as a pertinent case study. The study seeks to discern the types of information resources commonly employed by undergraduates, identify the obstacles they encounter in the process of accessing and utilizing these resources, and explore potential strategies to overcome these challenges.

In pursuit of these research objectives, a total of 150 questionnaires were disseminated to a carefully selected sample of undergraduate students from the aforementioned university. The questionnaires served as the primary instrument for data collection. The obtained results shed light on various noteworthy aspects. Notably, a significant majority of undergraduate students (86%) reported visiting the library weekly. However, it was found that only a comparatively smaller proportion (36%) of students indicated frequent utilization of electronic resources, such as e-books and online journals.

The most prevalent challenges included inadequate availability of resources (52%), poor Internet connectivity (46%), limited proficiency in information literacy skills (38%), and restricted access to relevant materials (34%). These findings underscore the need to address these challenges to facilitate enhanced access to and utilization of information resources among undergraduate students.

In conclusion, by examining the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Library as a case study, the study provides valuable insights on how to mitigate the challenges observed such as providing Improved Library Resources and Better Internet Connectivity utilized by undergraduates.

Keywords: Information; Undergraduate; Library; University of Agriculture

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1. Introduction

The utilization of information resources is a fundamental component of undergraduate education as it empowers students to acquire knowledge, foster critical thinking abilities, and engage in research endeavors (Abubakar & Mutawakilu, 2016), However, the effective utilization of information resources often encounters various obstacles confronted by undergraduates. These challenges encompass a wide range, from inadequate access to information resources to insufficient knowledge regarding their location and utilization (Oluwatayo, 2013).

The University of Agriculture Library plays a pivotal role in supporting the academic and research needs of undergraduates by providing an extensive array of information resources, including books, journals, electronic databases, and online materials (Chowdhury,2012).

The use of information resources denotes the extent to which users make use of a library's resources to fulfil their information needs (Kavulya & Munyao, 2018). This process commences with visiting the library, perusing the collection through browsing, seeking assistance from library staff, successfully locating valuable information, borrowing books within the library premises, studying personal materials at the library, and so forth (Okoro, 2005). The criterion of use serves as a key determinant for retaining a document within a library's collection, playing an indispensable role in guiding the library's collection development efforts. Popoola and Haliso (2009) describe information resources as materials that bear information in both printed and electronic formats, including textbooks, journals, indexes, abstracts, newspapers and magazines, reports, CD-ROMs, databases, the Internet/E-mail, video tapes/cassettes, diskettes, magnetic disks, computers, microforms, and so forth.

Information resources play a crucial role in the academic success of undergraduate students. However, their effective use is often hindered by various challenges, including inadequate resources, poor internet connectivity, lack of information literacy skills, and limited access to relevant materials. Several studies have examined the challenges faced by undergraduate students in accessing and using information resources in Nigerian universities (IGI-Global, 2018).

Abdulahi, Liman, and Shettima (2016) conducted a study at the Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Nigeria, and found that undergraduate students faced challenges such as inadequate resources, poor internet connectivity, and lack of information literacy skills. Similarly, Akinnagbe (2015) also discovered that undergraduate students at a Nigerian university experienced limited access to electronic resources, despite their availability in the library. These findings suggest that challenges in accessing and using information resources are not unique to the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Library.

Abdulahi, Liman, and Shettima (2016) investigated the utilization of academic library resources by undergraduate students at Modibbo Adama University of Technology in Nigeria. Their study revealed that undergraduate students encountered challenges in accessing library resources, including inadequate library facilities, insufficient materials, and a lack of internet connectivity. Similarly, Onifade (2016) found that undergraduate students at a Nigerian university faced challenges in utilizing library resources and services, including inadequate resources, a weak reading culture, and a lack of information literacy skills.

Oluwatayo (2013) examined the information literacy skills of library users at Babcock University in Nigeria. The study revealed that undergraduate students lacked sufficient information literacy skills, including the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information. Similarly, Tella and Mutula (2014) assessed the information literacy skills of undergraduate students at the University of Agriculture in Nigeria and found that they lacked adequate information literacy skills, which affected their ability to utilize information resources effectively.

Akinnagbe (2015), investigated the use of library resources and services among undergraduate students at a Nigerian university. The study revealed that undergraduate students encountered challenges in accessing library services, including a lack of adequate library staff, limited opening hours, and a lack of orientation programs for new students. Similarly, Kaur and Pathania (2015) examined the problems faced by library users at Panjab University in India and found that undergraduate students encountered challenges in utilizing library services, including long waiting times, inadequate library facilities, and a lack of assistance from library staff.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the challenges faced by undergraduate students in accessing and using information resources at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Library, Nigeria. By understanding these challenges, appropriate measures can be implemented to enhance the effectiveness of resource utilization and ensure that the library adequately meets the needs of its undergraduate student users.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Study Area

- The Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, commonly known as MOUAU, is a federal university situated in Umudike, a town located in Abia State, Nigeria. Established in 1992, the university was named in honor of Dr Michael Okpara, the former premier of the defunct Eastern Region of Nigeria.
- MOUAU is renowned for its emphasis on agricultural education, research, and development. The institution's overarching vision is to become a Centre of excellence in agricultural education, research, and outreach. Its mission encompasses providing high-quality, practical-oriented education to students, conducting research aimed at addressing significant agricultural and rural development challenges, and engaging in community service and outreach programs that promote sustainable agriculture and rural development. Research and innovation in agricultural and rural development lie at the core of MOUAU's commitments. To support these endeavours, the university has established several research centers and institutes, including the Center for Sustainable Development, the Center for Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering, and the Institute for Food Security, Environmental Resources, and Agricultural Research.
- The MOUAU library provides a range of hybrid services to its patrons, including lending, inter-library loan services, reference services, reprographic services, indexing, and current awareness services (CAS), among others. However, it should be noted that these services are contingent upon the availability of resources. The library boasts an impressive count of over 1500 registered users during each academic session (https://www.mouau.edu.ng).

2.2. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to procuring data from a cohort of 150 undergraduate students who frequented the library at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture. The data collection was facilitated through the administration of a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire encompassed a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions, encompassing a broad spectrum of aspects about the utilization of information resources. These aspects encompassed the frequency of library visits, the categories of resources accessed, as well as the obstacles encountered by the students in the process of accessing and utilizing information resources.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the returned questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis, which involved frequency counts and percentages. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 was used to compute the data captured. Descriptive statistical analysis provides a summary of the data collected, enabling the identification of patterns and trends in the data. SPSS is a commonly used statistical software package that enables researchers to analyses data and draw meaningful conclusions from it. The results obtained from the analysis are presented in tables and charts to facilitate easy interpretation and understanding of the data.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the frequency of library visits among the undergraduate student population at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture. The table indicates the percentage distribution of students based on their frequency of visits to the library. The data shows that a small portion of students visit the library daily 14%, indicating a consistent engagement with library resources and a reliance on the physical facilities and services provided. The majority of students 86% visit the library every week, demonstrating a regular utilization of the resources and an understanding of their importance in their academic pursuits. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents reported monthly visits, suggesting a preference for more frequent interactions with the library.

Table 2 data indicates that the majority of respondents 64% primarily rely on printed books and journals for their academic needs, emphasizing the continued value placed on physical texts due to their accessibility and familiarity. Electronic resources, such as e-books and online journals, were utilized by 36% of the respondents, highlighting their popularity among a significant portion of the undergraduate population. Interestingly, no respondents reported using audio-visual materials, suggesting a lack of engagement with this resource category. This finding is consistent with previous studies which have shown that despite the increasing availability of electronic resources, students still prefer to use print materials (Abubakar & Mutawakilu, 2016; Adetoro & Oladele, 2018).

Table 1 Frequency of Library Visits

Frequency of Library Visits	Percentage
Daily	14%
Weekly	86%
Monthly	0%

Table 2 Type of Resources Used by Undergraduates

Type of Resource	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Printed Books and Journals	96	64%
Electronic Resources	54	36%
Audio-Visual Materials	0	0%

Table 3 reveals that the most prevalent challenge reported by students is inadequate resources, with 52% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with the availability of materials in the library. This indicates a need for the university to expand its collection and ensure a wide range of resources to meet the demands of students. Another significant challenge identified by 46% of respondents is poor internet connectivity, which hinders their access to online resources. To address this issue, improvements in the network infrastructure within the library are necessary to provide students with reliable and high-speed internet access.

The lack of information literacy skills is reported as a challenge by 38% of students. This suggests the need for incorporating information literacy programs, workshops, and online tutorials to equip students with the necessary skills to effectively search, evaluate, and utilize information resources. Limited access to relevant materials is identified by 34% of respondents, indicating the need for increased efforts to provide resources that align with students' academic needs. Collaboration with other institutions, inter-library loan services, and the promotion of digital repositories or open-access resources can enhance access to relevant materials.

Inadequate study space 12% and library staff 8% are also recognized as challenges. This highlights the importance of ensuring sufficient study spaces within the library and maintaining an adequate number of knowledgeable staff members to support and assist students.

Table 3 Challenges in Accessing and Using the Information Resources

Challenge	Percentage of Respondents
Inadequate Resources	52%
Poor Internet Connectivity	46%
Lack of Information Literacy Skills	38%
Limited Access to Relevant Materials	34%
Inadequate Study Space	12%
Inadequate Library Staff	8%

Table 4 outlines the strategies suggested by students to overcome these challenges. Improved library resources, including diversifying the collection, is the most commonly suggested strategy, indicated by 68% of respondents. Better internet connectivity is also a significant strategy, emphasized by 62% of students.

Information literacy programs and workshops are suggested by 44% of respondents, emphasizing the importance of developing students' information literacy skills. Enhanced access to relevant materials 42%, more study space 22%, and increased library staffing 14% are additional strategies proposed by students.

This finding was consistent with previous studies which have identified a lack of resources as a major challenge faced by library users and recommended the acquisition of more resources as a way of improving library services in developing countries (Chowdhury, 2012; Akande & Popoola, 2015; Kavulya & Munyao, 2018).

Table 4 Strategies to Overcome the Challenges Faced by Accessing and Using Information Resources

Strategy	Percentage of Respondents
Improved Library Resources	68%
Better Internet Connectivity	62%
Information Literacy Programs and Workshops	44%
Enhanced Access to Relevant Materials	42%
More Study Space	22%
Increased Library Staffing	14%

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings from the analized data indicate that undergraduate students at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture value the library as a resource for their academic pursuits. The majority of students visit the library every week, highlighting the regular utilization of resources and their understanding of the library's importance. Printed books and journals remain the primary source of information, while electronic resources also hold significance for a considerable portion of the student population.

However, several challenges impede students' access to and utilization of information resources. Inadequate resources and poor internet connectivity are the most prevalent challenges, emphasizing the need for the university to expand the collection and improve the network infrastructure. The lack of information literacy skills and limited access to relevant materials further hinder students' effective use of resources.

To address these challenges, students suggest strategies such as improved library resources, better internet connectivity, information literacy programs and workshops, enhanced access to relevant materials, increased study space, and adequate library staffing.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare there have no conflict of interest

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