

Competencies Possessed by Distance Learners to Access Information Resources in three Distance Learning Federal University Libraries in Nigeria

By

Patricia Ngozi Ofodu (CLN)

pofodu@noun.edu.ng/ofodupat@gmail.com

Department of Library and Information Science,
National Open University of Nigeria-Abuja

&

Prof. Victor N Nwachukwu

victor.nwachukwu@unn.edu.ng

Department of Library and Information Science,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

The study on competencies possessed by Distance Learners to access information resources in three distance learning Federal University Libraries in Nigeria. The study was guided by three research questions that examined the availability of information resources, competencies possessed by distance learners and the challenges militating the retrieval of information resources. The design adopted for this study was descriptive survey. The population of the study was 8,600 learners. The sample size was 38 from UNILABUJA, 33 from DLCABU and 38 from CDLMAUTY. The researcher used a self-developed questionnaire, validated by three experts. The copies of the questionnaire distributed and retrieved were 109. The data collected were analysed using frequency count and simple percentages. Findings from the study reveal that there are some unavailable information resources, which could have been of great assistance to the learners. The study also discovered that some learners lack some competencies that hinder their information retrieval. Challenges militating against the effective retrieval of information are lack of adequate information resources, unstable power supply, lack of finance etc. Recommendations made were: there should be provision of fund, create avenue of training for users and provision of alternative power supply etc. for easy retrieval of information resources by distance learners for their academic pursuit.

Keywords: Competencies, Distance learners, Information resources, Distance learning, University libraries

Introduction

Education is vital to the development of the individual and the nation at large, which contributes immensely to the growth of a country and its citizen. As such, very important that no one want to be in the dark, that is why distance learning emerged to cater for the youth that missed the opportunity of education in their youthful age. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is the system of teaching and learning where the student is separated from the instructor by physical distance, but in contact by means of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Nwezeh (2010) averred that open and distance learning (ODL) is often described as the formalised learning received while the student is on a location outside the university campus that has potential and capacity to provide general and professional education using mobile devices or other ICT facilities. It is normally described as those who has passed the ages of admission into regular universities to continue their education with less stress, possibly at youngsters beyond school age, who are qualified and desire to earn a university degree. It includes employed youths that enrol for additional qualification to abreast their knowledge and promotion in offices. Open and Distance Learning universities have a digital library with electronic information services for the benefit of their learners that learn at a distance. They normally have access to various resources via an updated database and its links, which are usually made virtual for easy retrieval, more especially because of the uniqueness of their programme that need online retrieval for their academic work and research.

Digital library is a collection of digital representations of information content of libraries, including the hardware, software and personnel to support the functions of library online activities for the better functioning of the electronic infrastructures within the library. Perdana and Prasajo (2019) argued that the essence of the digital library practice is the impact of information technology development, which its emergence offers more advantages for each user, especially users from the education sector such as students who obviously need a library to support their learning process. It promises new social benefits, one of it is the removal of time and space restrictions in accessing knowledge and information from library. Ibinaie (2012) is of the opinion that digital resources should open- up opportunities in the ODL libraries in this Digital Age for an improved searching and skillful use of information with improved facilities for information sharing, timely access to information and improved collaboration.

Low availability and accessibility of library resources in the ODL libraries make learners to consider library use as a waste of time and energy. This calls for an improvement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and services for easy accessibility of library resources for those learning at a distance. Ideally, the learners ought to be at any convenient location to access whatever e- resources they need for their academic work. It was observed that accessibility of resources in the library is not fantastic, either because of no knowledge of the availability of such resources, lack of access, lack of ICT skills and remote area syndrome.

Information is a processed data for knowledge sake. It is really meant for users of such particular information to meet their needs. Dee and Kathleen (2017) inferred that for information to be useful it must be accessible, accurate, timely, complete, cost effective, verifiable and useful to students that use the library. It is of importance for libraries to acquire information resources for their users. These learners can access library resources from their different locations, without visiting the libraries with the aid of an electronic resources and Internet facilities. Damilola (2013) affirmed that accessibility of library resources and information is vital, as it is very useful in supporting the educational programme of the learners.

Information resources are vital tools for the distance learners in their academic pursuit, hence the main purpose of a university library is to support the objectives of a university, in learning, teaching, and research with a prompt information resources and service delivery to their patrons. Ofodu, (2019) opined that those digital libraries supposed to be attached to distance learning institutions, for the learners' effective use of online resources and accessibility of information for their academic pursuit. In order to achieve this, university libraries (digital) ought to make available information resources in both print and non-print resources, a well organised collection for the users of the library.

Information retrieval generally is the art of extraction of information from the overcrowded storage, offline or online to meet one's information need. As librarianship and its functions stands, information needs to be organised properly following a systematic rule, packaged and repackaged in so many disciplines for different user group for use (Ofodu, 2022). In a library setting, librarians make information/resources available for their users, without the exception of ODL library (digital library), ensuring the provision of information resources for the distance learners in electronic format.

Students who use a wide range of resources in various media for learning have the opportunity to approach issues or topics of study in ways which allow for a range of learning and access to the topic through cognitive or affective appeals. Some distance learners face much challenges in the library due to inadequate information resources. Adetimirin and Omagbhe (2011) revealed that adequate attention has not been given to the effective use and retrieval of information in the library by distance learners.

Information retrieval generally is the art of extraction of information from the overcrowded storage, offline or online to meet one's information need. The digital library permits the users to get easy accessibility of resources from any location, even in remote areas. Alijani and Khasseh (2015) inferred that access to and information retrieval of adequate information resources is essential to the attainment of efficient academic skills. The authors also added that digital libraries for distance learners need to use e-services for such provision and dissemination of information resources /links in order to assist the users to have access to information without disruption. Retrieval of resources also gave room for the measuring of optimal access to library resources for optimum use. Horava (2010) stated that there is an increasing importance of digital resources for distance learners, through information handling and the growing availability of free digital resources that are deemed valuable to users, and other researchers for access and retrieval. Gakibayo, Ikoja- Odongo, and Okello-Obura (2013) opined that the emergence of online resources has created impact and tremendously transformed information handling in academic environments and in ODL libraries in particular to aid access to information.

Distance Learning Centre Libraries

Distance Learning Centres (DLC) in universities have digital libraries with electronic information services for the benefit of their learners that learn at a distance. They normally have access to various resources via an updated database and repositories, including links, which are usually made virtual for easy dissemination, access and retrieval. More especially because of the uniqueness of their programmes that mostly need online retrieval for their academic work and research. Libraries have resources for distance learners' academic programmes, including the accessibility to those resources, which must be provided to the users to portray the vision of the library because the information is out of place when access to it is not provided.

Digital resources should open- up opportunities in the DLC libraries in this Digital Age for improved searching and skillful use of information with improved facilities for information

sharing, timely access to information and improved collaboration (Ibinaiye, 2012). Low availability and accessibility of library resources in the DLC libraries make learners consider library use as not worth doing and visiting. This calls for an improvement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and services for easy accessibility of library resources for those learning at a distance. The use of ICT will enhance the accessibility and retrieval of those information resources, no matter the location you found yourself. The digital library allows the users, to get easy accessibility to resources from any location, be it remote or urban. Moreso, Ofodu (2017) opined that technology has been and continues to be a powerful driver for changes in activities in libraries for effective service delivery and information retrieval. It provides a chance for both librarians and patrons to improve in information services and retrieval.

Statement of the Problem

Learners that are in different locations supposed to access library resources from their respective location. As such, the library management should have enhanced retrieval tools for easy accessibility. Provision of adequate information resources for the distance learners is the responsibility of the ODL university library.

From the researcher's observation, they often complain of difficulty in accessing the library's information resources

However, information retrieval has remained a major challenge for the distance learners. Is it possibly because of lack of adequate competencies to access and retrieve the information, or that there are no information resources to access? This is what this study deems right to address.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Identify the information resources available to distance learners for information retrieval.
2. Ascertain the competencies possessed by distance learners for information retrieval.
3. Identify some challenges militating against the effective retrieval of information resources by distance learners.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the information resources available to distance learners for information retrieval?

2. What are the competencies possessed by distance learners for information retrieval?
3. What are the challenges militating against the effective retrieval of information resources by distance learners?

Literature Review

Information resources are vital tools for the distance learners in their academic pursuit, hence the main purpose of a university library is to support the objectives of a university, in learning, teaching, and research with a prompt information resources and service delivery to their patrons. Information retrieval is the accessibility of library materials and resources by library users from an information bank/library. This has to do with someone being in need for a particular knowledge or information. Information retrieval is concerned with representing, searching, and manipulating large collections of electronic data. Accessibility to those resources is paramount, the users should be importuned to retrieve any information as needed. Nkamnebe, Udem and Nkamnebe (2014) stressed that access to information and library resources is of great importance in librarianship, which librarians should endeavour to uphold and ensure that those resources are organized and well put in place to ease retrieval by users. For it to be feasible, university libraries (digital) ought to make available information resources in both print and non-print resources, so that the users can have access to any format they wish to and retrieve information with ease.

The library provides an electronic organised collection for learners' retrieval of information. Alijani and Khasseh (2015) inferred that digital libraries for distance learners need to use e-services for such provision and dissemination of information resources /links in order to assist the users to have access to information. Accessibility works hand – in – hand with resources in the library, because information resources are really not useful, if access to them is limited. User satisfaction with resources, facilities and services of the library must be the key interest of the library and the dedicated staff. Ntui and Uдах (2015) stated that it is assumed that if information is accessible in libraries, it could be used effectively, so the main mission of libraries is for users to gain access to its abundant wealth of information resources. Availability of information resources also entails acquiring and also providing means by which users could get necessary information resources needed. It tries to ensure that every user gets document, which could satisfy his/her quest for information (Nwachukwu, Abdulsalami and Salami, 2014)

For effective use of OPAC, patrons should be trained and given some tips on how to make use of the library OPAC services, such competencies facilitate the effective use of OPAC services for information retrieval. It is of great need for the distance learners to acquaint themselves with such competencies for the use of OPAC services for information accessibility, retrieval and use. Some of the skills identified by Oguche; Lamidi and Gabasa (2017), are as follows:

- i. Technical skill- use of computer & information tools and use of internet & computer communication network.
- ii. Information retrieval skill.
- iii. Personal skill.
- iv. Communication skill, including database search skill, bibliographic compilation skill, accessibility skill, information gathering skills, Analytical – thinking skills, collaborative skills and basic computing skills among others.

An information retrieval system is a mechanism to access an accessible online knowledge content, which enhance retrieval. Rashid (2020) stressed that online information retrieval system is the technique that helps users to retrieve their desired information from different machine-readable online databases by using several devices. The author itemised the characteristics of online information retrieval system as thus: direct access; conventional mode; two-way communication; centralised storage; centralised control; rapid response; real-time communication; modern process and effective communication.

Research Methodology

The design adopted for this study was descriptive survey, with a well-structured questionnaire, designed in line with the objectives of the study as an instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was constructed on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA, 4Points); Agree (A, 3Points); Disagree (D, 2Points); Strongly Disagree (SD, 1Point).

The population of the study is 8,600, comprising learners from Northern zone, North Central - Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education, University of Abuja, library; North-west – Distance Learning Centre, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Library and North-east – Centre for Distance Learning, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Library. The data on the

population was obtained from registration record of learners in the ODL federal University Libraries in Nigeria (NUC, 2018).

The sample size for this study is 109 learners, 38, 33 and 38 learners from the three ODL federal university libraries, respectively, designed by using Yamene statistical formula: $n = N/1+N(e)^2$.

The copies of 109 questionnaires were administered to distance learners and retrieved by the research assistance, each for the three ODL federal university libraries, who distributed and retrieved them for analysis. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and simple percentages were used for the analysis and presentation of results for proper understanding.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

Research Question 1: What are the information resources available to distance learners for information retrieval?

Table 1: Information resources available to distance learners for information retrieval

S/N	Information resource available	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Periodicals	7	3	6	6	22
2	Current Awareness Resources	5	4	7	5	21
3	Academic Journals	12	5	6	6	29
4	Online Literature	4	4	4	6	18
5	E- Books	3	4	4	9	20
	Total					110

Result in **Table 1** shows that 12(11%) of distance learners disagreed that periodicals are available for use in their libraries, while 10(9%) of the same universities agreed on the availability of periodical as an information resource for their information retrieval. 12(11%) learners disagreed on the availability of current awareness resources, while 9(8%) agreed. 17(15%) of distance learners agreed that there is availability of academic journals, while 12(11%) disagreed. 10(9%) disagreed on the availability of online literature, while 8(7%) agreed. 13(12%) learners disagreed on the availability of E-books, while 7(6%) agreed.

Research Question 2: What are the competencies possessed by distance learners for information retrieval?

Table 2: Competencies possessed by distance learners for information retrieval

S/N	Competencies possessed	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Information Retrieval Competency	4	3	6	8	20
2	Communication Competency	4	4	5	6	19
3	Innovation Competency	7	5	7	7	26
4	Internet Surfing Competency	6	6	7	4	23
5	Information Management Competency	8	4	4	4	20
	TOTAL					108

The result in **Table 2** indicates that 14(13%) of distance learners disagreed on the possession of information retrieval competency for information retrieval, while 7(6%) agreed. 11(10%) learners disagreed on the possession of communication competency for information retrieval, while 8(7%) agreed. 14(13%) distance learners disagreed that innovation competency can assist them in information resource retrieval, while 12(11%) agreed. 12(11%) learners agreed that internet surfing competency possession is one of the competencies that assist distance learners for information resource retrieval, while 11(10%) disagreed. 12(11%) distance learners agreed that possession of information management competency can assist them in retrieval of information resources, while 8(7%) disagreed.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges militating against the effective retrieval of information resources by distance learners?

Table 3: Challenges militating against the effective retrieval of information resources by distance learners

S/N	Challenges militating against the effective retrieval of information	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Lack of Adequate Information Resources	7	5	2	6	20
2	Lack of Appropriate Competencies	6	4	4	6	20

3	Unstable Power Supply	6	8	6	4	24
4	Inadequate Internet Connectivity	9	4	4	3	20
5	Lack of Finance	12	3	5	5	25
	Total					109

The result in **Table 3** reveals that distance learners expresses challenges militating to the effective retrieval of information resources. 12(11%) learners from agreed that lack of adequate information resources is one of the challenges to effective retrieval of information resources, while 8(7%) disagreed. 10(9%) learners disagreed that lack of appropriate competencies could be a challenge against the effective retrieval of information resources, while 10(9%) agreed. 14(13%) distance learners of the same universities agreed that unstable power supply is a challenging factor to information resource effective retrieval, while 10(9%) disagreed. 13(12%) distance learners agreed that inadequate internet connectivity is a challenging factor to the retrieval of information resources, while 7(6%) disagreed. 15(14%) learners agreed that lack of finance could be a challenging issue to distance learners not effectively retrieve information resources, while 10(9%) disagreed.

Summary of the Findings

The findings from the study indicated that UNIABUJA, ABU and MAUTY distance learners need information resources available for their academic pursuit, and also need to possess some competencies to aid their accessibility of those resources and the retrieval of the needed information.

In table 1, the study revealed the responses of some learners from the university under study that there are non-availability of some information resources, such as periodicals, current awareness resources, online literature and E-books, which could be of help to the distance learners for their studies and need to be made available. This is in line with Alijani and Khasseh (2015), who inferred that access to adequate information resources is essential to the attainment to superior academic skills. The author also stated that distance learning students need to use e-reference services and e-books; such provision of information resources and links assists users to have access to the

information. This could be that the learners lack awareness to the available resources, even when they are provided and so cannot take advantage of them for their studies and research.

Table 2 respondents emphasizes that they don't possess some competencies to enable them aid information retrieval, such as: information retrieval competency, communication competency and innovative competency. These mentioned competencies are highly valuable for learners for information retrieval and they need to be trained to be highly skilled in those areas. Emiri (2015) asserted that these innovative and information retrieval skills as supposed in digital library resources of information technology aid research and information search / retrieval much easier and faster, which characterized the influence of the use of library facilities. Also, Kumar (2019) opined that it may be possible that some users do not access some resources because of not being skillfully equipped to do so, and sometimes they do not get help from library staff, they might not have attended any training program or the libraries have not organised any orientation program on the use and could bring some of the problems that cause non-accessibility of such resources. In table 3 respondents from the universities under study revealed that a lot of challenges are militating against the effective retrieval of information resources, such as lack of adequate information resources, unstable power supply, inadequate internet connectivity and lack of finance. All these should be taken-care of and supply it for the benefits of the learners, to enable them have access to information resources within and far from their location, since they learn at a distance. It is the obvious truth that the cost of alternative power supply is very high and is often unaffordable, but emphasized by Ogbole and Atinma (2017) that erratic power supply affects every bit of all the activities in the library sustainability and use. There is need to keep on check all the factors that could affect the use of information resources by distance earners.

Conclusion

Information and resources in the library are meant for the users of the library. And must be available for their accessibility. The most important thing about library/information resources is the accessibility, retrieval and possibly make use of them. Efforts should be made, to enhance retrieval in order to enable users to utilize the information, knowing fully well that information is out of place if access to it is not provided.

Recommendations

The researcher made the following recommendation deduced from this study.

1. The library management needs to make adequate information resources available and create awareness for the benefit of the learners.
2. There should be avenue for the training in the library, for learners on the competencies that will enable their information retrieval with ease.
3. There should be alternative source of power supply to avoid lack of electricity.
4. There should be adequate provision of fund for the library from the concerned authority.

References

Adetimirin & Omagbhe (2011). Library habits of distance learning students of the university of Ibadan,

Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*:
<http://unllib.unl.edu/LPP/>.

Alijani, R. & Khasseh, A. A. (2015). Distance learners' familiarity with the concept of digital libraries: A case study of virtual university of Shiraz, Iran. *Library Philosophy and Practice*.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1214/>

Aruleba, K. D; Akomolafe, D. T & Afeni, B (2016). A full text retrieval system in a digital library environment. *Intelligent information management*.
https://file.scirp.org/pdf/IIM_2016011315264145.pdf.

Damilola, O. A (2013). Use of electronic resources by distance students in Nigeria: The Case of the National Open University, Lagos and Ibadan Study Centers. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/915>.

Dee, M. & Kathleen, M. (2017). Introduction to information, information science, and information system. <https://bit.ly/2JZ2XPa>.

- Emiri, O. T. (2015). Influence of demographic factors N use of online public access catalogue (OPAC) by undergraduates in selected university libraries in Southern Nigeria. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 4 (7). <http://bit.ly/2oXTOzf>
- Gakibayo, A., Ikoja-Odongo, J. R., & Okello-Obura, C. (2013). Electronic information resources utilization by students in Mbarara University Library. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)* 4. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/869>.
- Horava, T. (2010). Challenges and possibilities for collection management in a digital age 54(3) <https://journals.ala.org/lrts/article/view/5556>.
- Ibinaiye, I. D. (2012). Challenges and prospects of digitization of library resources in Nigerian universities: The experience of Kashim Ibrahim library. *European Journal of Globalization and Development Research*, 5(1) <http://www.bestairboattours.com/search>
- Kumar, R (2019). Use of OPAC in central university of Haryana, Mahendragarh and Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak: A study. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac>.
- Nkamnebe, E. C; Udem, O. K & Nkamnebe, C. B (2014). Evaluation of the use of university library resources and services by the students of Paul University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journals)*. 1147. <http://digitalcommon.unl.edu/libphilprac/1147>
- Ntui, A. I & Udam, A. E (2015). Accessibility and utilization of library resources by teachers in secondary schools in Calabar education zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: An Arts & Humanities- Psychology*, 15 (8). https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume15/1-Accessibility-and-Utilization.pdf

NUC (2018). The list of approved distance learning Centres in Nigeria.

<http://nuc.edu.ng/distance-learning-centers/>

Nwachukwu, V.N Abdulsalami, T. Lucky & Salami, P. F (2014). Availability, Accessibility and Use of Information Resources and Services among Information Seekers of Lafia Public Library in Nasarawa State. *Information and Knowledge Management* 4(10)
<http://www.iiste.org/journals/>

Nwezeh, C. (2010). *Libraries and distance education in Nigerian universities: A revisit*. New review of academic librarianship. Nigeria, Taylor and Francis Group 103.

Ofodu, P. N (2017). Availability and utilization of mobile technology for effective library service delivery in open and distance learning in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Development*. University of Uyo, Nigeria. 20 (1).

Ofodu, P. N (2019). Competency on the use of library resources for learning by noun students in south- east, Nigeria. *West African journal of open and flexible learning* 8 (1). A publication of the regional training and research institute for distance and open learning (RETRIDOL), National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning.

Ofodu, P. N (2022). Use of online public access catalogue (OPAC) by distance learners for effective information retrieval in open and distance learning federal university libraries in Nigeria. A thesis submitted to the department of library and information science in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in library and information science.

Ogbole, J. S & Atinma, M (2017). Factor affecting online public access catalogue provision and sustainable use of undergraduates in two selected university libraries in Ogun and Oyo State, Nigeria. *Journal of research and method in Education*, 7 (4). <https://bit.ly/3n5JRcE>

Oguche, D; Lamidi, A. D & Gabasa, P (2017). Capacity building for library and information professionals: Core skills and competence. *International Journal of Applied Technologies in Library and Information Management* 3 (2). [http/ www.jatlim.org](http://www.jatlim.org).

Perdana, I. A & Prasajo, L. D (2019). Digital library practice in university: Advantages,

challenges, and its position. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 401. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Rashid, H. A (2020). Online information retrieval system: Characteristics, merits and demerits of online information. <https://limbd.org/online-information-retrieval-system-characteristics-merits-demerits-of-online-information-retrieval-system/>.

Yamane, Taro (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis*, 2nd Ed. New York: Harper and Row. 886.