ASSESSMENT OF WEB SEARCHING BEHAVIOUR OF UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN DISTANCE LEARNERS

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Abstract

Purpose*: The study was carried out to assess web searching behaviour of University of Ibadan distance learners*

Design/Methodology/Approach*: Descriptive survey research design of the correlational type was adopted for the study. The population comprised 5200 distance undergraduates in three faculties; Education, Arts and Social Sciences. Stratified sampling technique was used to group the undergraduates into strata (100-500) Systematic random sampling technique was used to select every 10th elements of the population and the copies of questionnaire were randomly administered on them during class-contact hours at Sasa, Ibadan. Out of 520 copies of questionnaire distributed only 392 copies which constitute 75% return rate were found usable for the study; it was analyzed with the aid of frequency counts and percentages*

Findings*: The results revealed that the undergraduates of DLC use web-based information for academic and research activities. The findings further indicated that a significant number of respondents maintained negative web search strategies.*

Implication: *Low bandwidth, poor ICT skills, poor ICT facilities and non-reliability of web-based information are some of the constraints that must be addressed while teaching web search strategies in Distance Learning programmeof University of Ibadan.*

Originality/Value*: The need to up-scale efforts at enlightens the learners on varying web-search strategies they could inculcate to enhance their learning and research capability was suggested. The paper will add to the body of knowledge in the area of information technology through web searching particularly among the distance learners in order to be in tune with global best practices.*

Keywords*: Web searching behaviour, Distance Learning Centre, Undergraduates, Learning, Research.*

Paper type: *Empirical research*

Introduction

Information has been classified as one of the factors of production. It occupies a significant position in the administration of land, labour, capital and entrepreneur. This development facilitates human active involvement in information searching/seeking. Information searching/seeking deals with those activities an individual engages in when identifying the needs for information and develop a search pattern, use and transfer for better decision-making (Srivastava & Tiwari, 2016). The undergraduates whether in regular or part-time programme are expected to seek information in various forms for the enhancement of their class and home assignments, formulation of term papers, for projects writing and for the performance of other academic activities. Soyemi and Oshineye (2015) noted that in the past, undergraduates depended solely on library as an information source to satisfy their information needs, however, with the advancement of Internet /web technology the situation has changed to the extent that the information searching is being done on internet/web.

Tsai (2009) stressed that the university communities have widely accepted web through the Internet as a veritable platform for information seeking. Students have also developed a positive disposition towards the Internet and find enjoyment in using it for academic and personal purposes. Nevertheless, the use of internet/web is also posing some difficulties to learners/undergraduates when searching for information. Some of the noted challenges faced by undergraduates while searching for information include the disorientation, inability to evaluate web-based resources and specify search terms, among others. Kinley (2013) described web searching behaviour as information seeking on the web

which requires the user to interact with web search engines for information retrieval. Information searching processes required include chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring, extracting and verifying activities. Therefore, a search must have a start and an end point, without necessarily occurring in a chronological order. On the other hand, information searching strategies on the web include basic skills and approaches required for Internet manipulation which are found in three main domains, namely: behavioural, procedural and metacognitive (Tsai & Tsai 2003). Behavioural domain describes search strategies aspects like control and disorientation required for basic Internet navigation. The procedural domain is concerned with general strategies of searching content on the web like problem-solving and trial and error while metacognitive domain indicates skills involved in higher-order and content-related cognitive activities on the Internet such as purposeful thinking, ideas selection and evaluation.

Observation shows that undergraduates/learners are capable of playing with technology, but are not necessarily using it efficiently for academic purposes. Although, they can search on Google yet they fall short of the necessary searching skills, strategies and tactics to locate the information needed effectively. They also lack the needed skills to verify the authenticity of information accessed. As a result, there are concerns about how distance learners search for information on the Internet and how instructors can guide the abilities of distance learners to utilize searching strategies effectively. This development therefore, calls for the need to assess the web searching behaviour of learners' with reference to University of Ibadan Distance Learners.

Objectives of the study

Specifically, the study sought to:

i. ascertain web search strategies adopted by the University of Ibadan Distance Learners;
ii. determine the purpose of using web information sources by University of Ibadan Distance Learners; and
iii. establish the barriers to web information searching among University of Ibadan Distance Learners.

Literature Review

Distance learners like their colleagues studying in regular or full-time basis have information needs and devised various information searching strategies. One of the strategies devised is the use of Web or the Internet. According to Oladokun (2014) the Web or the Internet can be regarded as a technological device commonly applied for searching and delivery of information to meet varying users' needs. It constitutes a significant tool for the effective operation and delivery of open and distance education. In literature, the term information seeking behaviour was used as an umbrella term to explain information needs and search pattern of users. However, the present study was limited to web searching pattern of distance learners and the construct explains the use of internet and search engines for information in order to enhance the academic activities of learners.

A number of studies have been conducted on information needs, web searching behaviour of distance learners. For instance, Larson & Owusu-Acheaw (2016) examined the information needs of distance learners with reference to Winneba Study Centre of the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. Questionnaire was administered on 206 respondents and their responses were analyzed with frequencies and percentages. Their findings indicated that distance learners depend solely on the course materials and lecture notes as the only source of information due to their tight schedule. They also reported that distance learners do not make use of web-based resources and libraries to support their learning and other academic activities due to the lack of search and library use skills.

Vighnarajah, Farzanah, Norhasni, & Ooi (2016) employed Wilson's model of information behaviour to summarize the information-seeking behaviour of their distance students in using library resources in their research and learning activities. Four hundred and thirty five (435) copies of questionnaire were retrieved from open undergraduate and postgraduate students. The authors reported a significant difference in the use of the university's MyDigital Library and physical library to satisfy information needs by the respondents. They further noted that a significant difference exists

between first-year and post-first-year students in using internet search engines as part of their information-seeking process. Hochstotter & Koch (2009) evaluated standard parameters for searching behaviour in search engines. Standard parameters to which search engines can be measured and compared were established to reflect the online searching behaviour of search engine users. The authors reported that some patterns remained stable on a number of different search engines and suggested new patterns to which shorter analyses can be achieved.

In Nigeria, Oladiran & Ogunleye (2012) assessed the information needs, seeking behaviour and sources used by the Distance Learning Students of University of Lagos. Stratified random sampling was used to select respondents from the study population of 10,457 in three departments. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection and analysis with percentages and frequencies. Their analysis showed that 26.7% of the respondents accessed information on financial matters, 20.7% accessed information on education matters and 16.0% of the respondents accessed information on sports. Also, 54.9% of the respondents had been using the library as source of information for the past five years and 60.0% of the distance learners agreed that newspapers/magazines and TV/Radio were frequently used as source to information. Soyemi & Oshineye (2015) examined web seeking behaviour of final year students of Babcock University, Ilishan, Nigeria. Questionnaire was used as data collection instrument from 303 respondents. Frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the study's data. Their findings showed that the Final year students of the University relied significantly on information sources available on the Internet for the enhancement of their academic activities such as term paper, project development among others. The need to further educate the students on how best to source web information for their information needs was recommended for strengthening.

University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre-Stylized Facts

Distance education, long or open distance learning is the kind of education offer to students who may not always be physically present. Traditionally, the distance education was created as a sort of correspondence courses to take care of educational needs of working class. University of Chicago, the United States of America was the first institution to establish a correspondence programme in 1800s as a platform for both teachers and learners to relate at different locations. By 1858, the University of London floated external programme with intention of offering distance learning degrees. Today, there is long/open and distance education for students to learn online. Just like their counterparts from the developed parts of the world, the University of Ibadan through the Department of Adult Education joined the league in the year 1972. The University present Distance Learning Centre started as External Study Programme of the Department of Adult Education in 1988 and other departments such as Guidance and Counselling, Teacher education, Special Education, Library, Archival and Information Studies, Educational Management as well as Physical and Health Education which joined later on.

By 1998, the programme was extended to Faculty of Agriculture. Other faculties such as Arts, Social Sciences and Science have since joined. The programme was renamed Distance Learning Centers in 2002 as a way of keeping pace with global development. Moreover, the programmes in Distance Learning Centers are the same as in regular programmes except that Distance Learning Centers is designed to suit those in the working class whose schedules, distances, financial and other situation may not permit to undergo full time studies at the university. Students of the Centre are expected to read their study-packs (print & e-copies), search information on the Web at their convenience, communicate with their lecturers from time to time and also have a contact-hour for at least six weeks in a year for revision and examination. From inception till date, the Centre has graduated over 6,000 candidates.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design of the correlational type was adopted for this study.

The population comprised 5200 learners in the three faculties of Education, Arts and Social Sciences that are enrolled in the Distance Learning Programme of University of Ibadan. Stratified sampling technique was used to group the undergraduates into strata (100-500). Further, systematic random sampling technique was used to select every 10th elements of the population and this gave a sample size of 520 and copies of questionnaire were randomly administered on them during class-contact hours at Ajibode, Sasa, Ibadan, Oyo State and retrieved same on hand-to-hand basis. Out of 520 copies of questionnaire distributed only 392 copies which constitute 75% return rate were found usable for the study. The instrument for the study was based on web searching behaviour of undergraduates. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze the data.

Results Presentation

Table 1: Socio-demographic profiles of the respondents

Demographic profiles	Classification	Frequency	Percentages
Age range	18-27	26	6.6
	28-37	188	47.9
	38-47	99	25.2
	48 and above	79	20.2
Gender	Male	163	41.6
	Female	229	58.4
Faculty	Arts	139	35.5
	Education	164	41.8
	Social Sciences	89	22.7
Level of study	100	88	22.4
	200	117	29.8
	300	103	26.3
	400	84	21.4
	500	-	-

The results of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents as presented in Table 1 indicated that 188 (47.9%) were in age-bracket 28-37 and 79 which constitute 20.2% of the respondents were 48years old and above. In terms of faculty of study, the results showed that 164 (41.8%) of the participants were from Faculty of Education and only 89 (22.7%) were from Faculty of the Social Sciences. Moreover, the findings showed that 117(29.8%) of the respondents are in 200 level, 103(26.3%) in 300 level and only 84 (21.4%) in 400 level. The implications of this findings are that majority of the study's participants are in 200 level which constitute middle level of their course of studies as well as fairly in working age.

Objective One: The study sought to ascertain web search strategies adopted by the University of Ibadan Distance Learning undergraduates and the results is as presented in Table 2. Note: VT= Very True, T=True, ST= Seldomly True, NT= Not True.

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Table 2: Web search strategies adopted by the University of Ibadan Distance Learning undergraduates

S/N	Variables	VT	%	T	%	ST	%	NT	%
I	I always type URL/hyperlinks in the address bar for possible location of information on the web	29	7.4	52	13.3	224	57.1	87	22.1
Ii	I always follow links on starting pages to access content related sites	57	14.5	43	10.9	198	50.5	94	23.9
Iii	I do browse in pre-selected sources on specified topics of interest	72	18.4	164	41.8	87	22.1	69	17.6
Iv	I always scan comprehensively diverse sources available on the Web/internet	68	17.3	79	21.8	201	51.2	44	11.2
V	I know how to utilise advanced-search functions provided by search engines.	67	17.1	101	25.8	96	24.5	128	32.6
Vi	I do not need to select useful pages by bookmarking, printing or copying	51	31.0	156	39.8	53	13.5	132	33.7
Vii	I always rely on my colleagues for web-based information	259	66.1	23	5.8	59	15.1	51	31.0
Viii	I do not follow step by step provided by search engines for information gathering system on issues	18	4.6	88	22.4	75	19.1	211	53.8

The results of web search behaviour exhibited by University of Ibadan Distance Learning students were as presented in Table 2. The results showed that 198 (50.5%) of the respondents seldom follow links on starting pages to access content related sites while searching for course-related information and 282(89.9%) rely mainly on colleagues for web-based information. The respondents further claimed that they do not read text on a website comprehensively. It can be deduced from the findings that the students of the Centre (DLC) have poor web searching behaviour.

Objective Two: The second objective of the study aimed at determining the purpose to which web information sourced are being used by undergraduates of University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. The results are presented in Table 3

Table 3: Purpose of using web information sources by University of Ibadan Distance Learning undergraduates

S/N	Variables	VT	%	T	%	ST	%	NT	%
I	I use web-based information for knowledge update	123	31.4	112	28.5	59	15.1	98	25.0
Ii	I use web-based information to complement materials for my class and home assignment	197	50.3	90	22.9	76	19.4	29	7.4
Iii	I use web-based information as a source of leisure and entertainment	67	17.1	88	22.4	97	24.7	140	35.7
Iv	I use web-based information to develop term papers	136	34.7	166	42.3	6	1.5	84	21.4
V	I use web-based information to complement materials on my project and research	177	45.2	100	25.5	87	22.2	28	7.1

Result of purposes of using web information sources by University of Ibadan Distance Learners is as presented in Table 3. The findings showed that 235 (59.9%) of the respondents made use of web-based information for knowledge update, 287(73.2%) to complement

materials for class and home assignments. The analysis further indicated that 302(77.0%) out of 392 respondents for the study made use of web-based information to develop term papers. The inference that could be drawn from the responses is that the DLC students made use of web-based information for their academic and research activities.

Objective Three: The third objective of the study was to establish the barriers to web information searching among undergraduates of University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Inhibitors to the use of web-based information

S/No	Variables	VT	%	T	%	ST	%	NT	%
I	I always encounter restriction in the use of web-based information due to inadequate ICT facilities in my institution	238	60.7	43	10.9	34	8.7	77	19.6
Ii	There is low bandwidth/poor internet connectivity in my institution	282	71.9	11	2.8	61	15.6	38	9.9
Iii	There is no room for me to establish the reliability of information gathered via web	81	20.7	34	8.7	94	23.9	183	46.7
Iv	I possess a low level of ICT skills	45	11.5	119	30.4	107	27.3	127	32.4

The inhibitors to the use of web-based information among the learners of University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre were investigated and the results were presented in Table 4. The analysis carried out showed that 281(71.6%) of the respondents claimed that they encountered restriction in the use of web-based information due to inadequate ICT facilities in their institution/study centres. Further, 293 (74.7%) lamented that poor internet/low bandwidth are the main constraints to their use of web-based information, while 164(41.9%) of the respondents claimed that their low ICT skills serve as restriction to their use of web-based information. The inference from the findings is that undergraduates of the DLC are constrained in the use of web-based information owing to their low level of ICT skills, inadequate ICT facilities and poor internet/bandwidth.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated that web-based information is being used for academic and research activities by the undergraduates of University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre. This implies that the undergraduates of University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre have identified web-based information as a significant source of learning and research. It is noted that significant number of respondents maintained negative web search strategies.

Therefore, there is need to up-scale efforts at enlighten the students on varying web-search strategies they could inlcucate to enhance their learning and research capability. However, challenges such as low bandwidth, poor ICT skills, poor ICT facilities and non reliability of web-based information are some of the constraints that must be addressed while teaching web search strategies in Distance Learning programme of University of Ibadan.

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