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Library Habits of Distance Learning Students of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

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Introduction

Distance learning is often described as the formalized learning received while the student is on a location outside the university campus. Both the teacher and student are expected to have minimal physical contact, but much reliance on electronic communication and independent studying. Distance learning as defined by Oladeji (2000) is an educational programme designed for those who could not, may be for family, financial or some other reasons, attend existing educational institutions to acquire learning without necessarily becoming regular students of such institutions. He stressed that distance education is considered as a branch of adult education where the clientele may comprise of those who have no exposure of any kind to formal education, or those who dropped out of the formal school system and those who wish to supplement their formal education.

Distance learning usually refers to open learning applied to situations in which there is a geographical expiration between the learner and the leaning institution. The focus is on the needs of the individual students and is more learner-centered. The learner chooses the place of study, time and pace of learning. Distance learning is particularly beneficial to the students as they could learn from their chosen locations which could be thousand miles away.

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. However, distance learning normally should demand much use of library resources, audio-visual media and information and communication technology. 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 need to use libraries and information centers for reading and for information search.

Distance learners have characteristics which Akintayo and Bunza (2000) listed as adults with professional responsibilities (jobs), social responsibilities (families), study part time, limited formal education or are a long time away from formal education, highly and intrinsically motivated and who are interested in practical results for career, occupation or life style. Sacchanand (2002) reported that distance students' characteristics are different from students in traditional universities. Their characteristics were listed as: adult learners, mature, employed, have family responsibilities, higher motivation and are willing to take responsibility for their own education. Others include: clear cut goals, self-directed, study on independent basis, learn in a variety of ways, take control over their learning and often experience a feeling of isolation and remoteness from other students.

The library is the nerve centre of any educational institution as it promotes the acquisition of reading, inquiry and independent thinking through the provision of resources to support teaching and learning activities (Mabawonku, 2004). It normally houses information materials in various formats such as electronic information sources like CD-ROM, the internet, etc. Library services are essential support services to distance education students. Most researchers in distance learning are in agreement that library support is a key element (Caspers, Fritts and Gover 2001). Distance learners' expectations of library services as revealed in the literature, demonstrate a great need (Niemi, Ehrhard and Neeley 1998). The library needs of distant learners are not unique; they have the same library and information needs as on campus students (Dugan 1997; Rodrigues 1996), but Rowland and Rubbert (2001) in their study on information needs of distant learners reported that the university libraries did not cater for the specific needs of these students. Apart from the manner in which they are accessed, requested and delivered, the same resources are required, the same questions are asked, and the same quality of service is expected (Rodrigues 1996); and they expect the same level of library service as that provided to their peers on campus (Riggs, 1997).

Distance learners access library and educational resources and services in various ways (Sacchanand, 2002). Access can be direct e.g. face to face, or mediated by printed material, e.g. manuals, brochure, or mediated by technology, using a variety of media such as telephone, radio, the Internet etc. Successful direct access is characterized by flexibility, reliability, availability, user-friendly, portability, efficiency and service ability (Sacchanand, 2002). Kavulya (2004) in his study of distance education in four universities in Kenya opined that some of the students have little or no exposure to library use and this affects their access to library resources. Effective and appropriate services to distance learning communities may differ from, but must be equivalent to those services offered on a traditional campus (ACRL 1998).

Study habits are learning tendencies that enable students to work privately. Azikiwe (1998) describes study habit as "the adopted way and manner a student plans his private readings, after classroom learning so as to attain mastery of the subject". According to her, "good study habits are good asset to learners because they (habits) assist students to attain mastery in areas of specialization and consequent excellent performance, while the opposite constitute constraints to learning and achievement leading to failure". These study habits may influence the library habits of the students in their use of various resources in the library for academic achievement. Olajojo and Akewukere (2004) in their study on study habits of postgraduates in University of Ibadan reported that library habits such as how and inability to locate needed materials in the library affected their learning outcomes.

Koohang (2001) in a study on use of digital library by distance learning students in University of Wisconsin, USA found that the students had positive perception towards the use of digital library. Karim and Hasan (2006) also noted the exponential growth of digital information, which changes the way students perceive, study, read and how printed materials are used to facilitate study. Liu

(2005) and Ramirez (2003) reported that students print materials from the Internet in order to study and read later on. Igun (2005) also found that Nigerians study from materials downloaded from the Internet.

Liu and Yang (2004) reported that distance learners showed preference for easy and fast information retrieval and their field of study also affected their use of institution libraries in a study on graduate students' use of information sources in Texas A. & M. University, Texas, USA. Most distance learning students in Nigeria may not use the library probably because the incentives are not there as the libraries lack current library materials, Internet access (Oladokun, 2002) lack of library use instructions and time to use the library (Mabawonku, 2004). In a study on library use by distance learners in three Nigerian universities by Mabawonku (2004), it was found that many of the students attributed their low use of the library to their tight schedules which were fully occupied with lectures and interactions with lecturers. This may affect their library habits and subsequently their optimal use of the library.

Statement of the Problem

Studies has revealed that adequate attention has not been given to the effective use of the library by distance learning students in Nigerian universities and this has led to some challenges faced by them in their use of the library. Such challenges include: limited access to borrowing facilities and lack of user education. This however may have adverse effects on their library habits. This study is therefore, aimed at investigating the library use habits of the distance learning students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine library use and the habits of distance learning students in a Nigerian university. The specific objectives are therefore to:

1. examine the extent of availability and accessibility of the library resources to the distance learning students.
2. determine the frequency at which the distance learners use the library;
3. investigate the library use habits of the distance learners and
4. identify the factors affecting the use of libraries by distance learners

Research Questions

The following are the research questions for the study.

1. To what extent are the library materials available and accessible to the distance learning students?
2. How often do the distance learners use the library?
3. What are the habits of the distance learners towards the use of library?
4. What are the benefits that distance learning students derive from using the university libraries?
5. What are the various factors affecting the use of libraries by the distance learners?

Methodology

The survey method was used to carry out this research and the target population was registered library users of the distance learning programme in the University of Ibadan (8273). Purposive sampling technique was employed to select one hundred respondents from the Faculties of Education and social Sciences in the University of Ibadan who were using the library at the time of carrying out this study even though the distance learning students were not in session. The questionnaire was the major instrument used for the data collection and it was complemented with observation and the interview of library staff in the circulation department. Data collected was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics such as tables, frequencies and percentages.

Results

A total of one hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered to the library users who were in the Faculties of the Social Sciences and Education and about 94 copies were duly filled and returned giving a response rate of 94% (Table 1).

Table 1. Response rate of respondents in the Social sciences and Education

Faculty	Total administered		Total returned	
	N	%	N	%
Education	80	100	78	97.5
Social Sciences	20	100	16	80.0
Total	100		94	94.0

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Most of the respondents were between the age group of 25 – 29 years in the Social Sciences (62.5%) and 30 – 34 years in Faculty of Education (37.2%). More than half of the respondents in both faculties were single with 62.8% in Education and 56.3% in Social Sciences (Table 2). While the majority of respondents 35(44.9%) in Education were government workers, most of those in Social Sciences 9(56.3%) were private workers and only few 2(12.5%) of them were self-employed.

Table 2 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables				
Faculty				
	Education		Social Sciences	
	N	%	N	%

Age (years)				
< 25 years	10	12.8	2	12.5
25 – 29 years	19	24.4	6	37.5
30 – 34 years	25	32.0	4	25.0
35 – 39 years	15	19.2	3	18.8
40 – 44 years	8	10.3	1	6.2
45 – 49 years	1	1.3	-	-
> 49	-	-	-	-
Sex				
Male	41	52.6	11	68.8
Female	37	47.4	5	31.2
Level of study				
200	3	3.8	16	100.0
300	22	28.2	-	-
400	24	30.8	-	-
500	29	37.2	-	-
Marital Status				
Single	50	62.8	9	56.3
Married	29	37.2	7	43.7
Highest Educational Qualification				
SSCE/GCE	6	7.7	8	50.0
OND	22	28.2	8	50.0
NCE	19	24.4	-	-
HND	4	5.1	-	-

Others	27	34.6	-	-
Religion				
Christianity	65	83.3	9	56.3
Islam	12	15.4	7	43.6
Others	1	1.3	-	-
Type of Employment				
Self employed	30	38.5	2	12.5
Government	35	44.9	5	31.2
Private company	13	16.7	9	56.3

Research Question 1: To what extent are the library materials available and accessible?

Majority of the respondents in Education (80.7%) and Social Sciences (93.8%) agreed to the availability of library materials, while 78.2% of those from Education and 87.6% from Social Sciences attested to the accessibility of materials in the library (Table 3). This implied that the library materials were available and accessible to the distance learning students.

Table 3. Availability and Accessibility of library materials

Variables				
Faculty				
	Education		Social Sciences	
	N	%	N	%
Availability				
Easily available	10	12.8	5	31.3
Available	53	67.9	10	62.5
Not available	10	12.8	1	6.3
Total	73		16	

Accessibility				
Easily accessible	19	24.4	5	31.3
Accessible	42	53.8	9	56.3
Not accessible	12	15.4	2	12.5
Total	73		16	

Research Question 2: How often do the distance learners use the library?

From observation, the respondents were not permitted to borrow library materials, but were given special cards which enabled them use materials within the library. The interview with the circulation librarian revealed that the distance learning students were not given user education. Table 4 revealed that majority of the respondents from Education used the library twice a week (46.2%), while only 50% of those in Social Sciences used the library on a daily basis. While just few 4(5.1%) from Education and 1(7.5%) used the library once a month and twice a month respectively (Table 4). This result is due to the fact that the distance learning program is run on a part-time basis and students only used the library when they are in session.

Table 4. Frequency of library use by distance learning students

Variables				
Faculty				
	Education		Social Sciences	
	N	%	N	%
Frequency				
Daily	17	21.8	8	50.0
Twice a week	36	46.2	4	25.0
Once a week	13	16.7	3	32.5
Twice a month	6	7.7	1	7.5
Once a month	4	5.1	-	-
No response	2	2.6	-	-

Total	78		16	
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Research Question 3: What are the habits of the distance learners towards the use of library?

The result showed that the distance learning students had developed various habits in their use of the library. Such habits included searching through the shelves to get materials in the library, reading with friends in the library, using the library catalogue to search for materials, and visiting the library always because of better assimilation. Others were: using the library to complement what was taught in class, and reading more than three hours at a stretch in the library.

Most respondents in both Faculties; Education 63(80%) and Social Sciences 15(93.7%) indicated that they searched through the library shelves to look for materials. On the contrary, while about half of the respondents 40(51.3%) in Faculty of Education indicated that they always use the library when preparing for exams, only few of the respondents 4(25%) in Social Sciences did this (Table 5).

The library use habits of students from Faculty of Education were common with those in the Faculty of Social Science (Table 5). However, there were variations in some of the habits like using the library only when preparing for exams which is more common to those in Education than in the Social Science. Also, the number of respondents that picked more than two books at a time and reserved seat in the library, visited the library for assignments and used it to complement lectures were more in Social Sciences than Education.

Table 5 Library Habits of distance learning students

Faculty	Education				Social Sciences			
	Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Search shelf for materials	63	80.7	15	19.3	15	93.7	1	6.3
Use catalogue to search for materials	60	77.0	18	23.0	13	81.2	3	18.8
Select more than two library materials At a time	35	45.0	43	55.0	10	62.5	6	37.5
Assimilate better in the library	52	66.7	26	33.3	10	62.5	6	37.5
Prepare for exam	40	51.3	38	48.7	4	25.0	12	75.0
Work on assignments	45	57.6	33	42.3	15	93.7	1	6.3
Complement lecture	33	42.3	45	57.7	13	81.3	3	18.7
Prefer reading alone in the library	60	77.0	18	23.0	13	81.2	3	18.8
Prefer reading with friends in the library	30	38.4	48	61.5	5	31.2	11	68.8

Read for more than three hours at a time	47	60.2	31	39.8	9	56.3	7	43.7
Always reserve seat in the library	20	25.6	58	74.3	7	43.7	9	56.3
Do not use the library because I do not get what I need	5	6.4	25	32.6	-	-	-	-

Research Questions 4: What are the benefits that distance learning students derive from using the university libraries?

The respondents from both faculties derived a number of benefits from using the library. They have access to photocopy facilities conducive reading environment, serials facilities, internet facilities and library orientation (Table 6). Over 77% of the respondents from Faculty of Education (77%) affirmed that they had access to photocopy facilities and conducive reading environment while only 46.2% indicated that they had access to recent titles. For respondents in the Social Sciences, 81.3% of them indicated that they had access to conducive reading environment while 14.6% had access to loan facilities. The result of the interview with the librarian revealed that the respondents were not given loan facilities. The respondents that had access to conducive reading environment were more in Social sciences than in Education, while those that had access to photocopy facilities were more in Education than in Social sciences. However, majority of respondents from both faculties did not have access to loan facilities (Table 6).

Table 6 Benefits of Library Use by Distance learning students

Benefits	Faculty							
	Education				Social Sciences			
	Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Access to photocopy facilities	60	77.0	18	23.0	10	62.5	6	37.5
Access to library materials	41	52.6	37	47.4	10	62.5	6	37.5
Access to loan facilities	7	14.6	41	85.4	5	31.7	11	68.7
Conducive reading environment	60	76.9	18	23.1	13	81.3	3	18.7
Access to Internet facilities	48	61.6	30	38.4	11	68.7	5	31.3
Access to recent titles	36	46.2	42	53.8	10	62.5	6	37.5
Access to reference services	53	68.0	25	32.0	12	75.0	4	25.0

Research Question 5: What are the various factors affecting the use of library by the distance learners?

Major factors affecting library use of the distance learners were those where more than 60% of the respondents agreed to a particular factor. Such factors were inadequate reading materials, non recency of library materials, inadequate library use skills (Table 7). Respondents in Education and Social Sciences agreed that inadequate reading materials and non recency of library materials were limiting factors, while 62.5% of respondents in Social Sciences agreed that inadequate library use skill was a major problem. These factors will no doubt serve as great impediment or constraints to effective library use by the distance learning students.

Suggestions on the improvement of library services to distance learning students were: the respondents should be allowed to have access to loan facilities just like their counterparts in the regular programme and the library should ensure the provision of current textbooks and more facilities like air-conditioners and seats.

Table 7 Factors Affecting the Use of Library of Distance learning students

	Faculty							
	Education				Social Science			
	Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Inadequate reading materials	60	77.0	18	23.0	10	62.5	6	37.5
Library materials are not very recent	51	65.3	27	37.7	11	68.7	5	31.5
Lack of borrowing facilities	39	50.0	39	50.0	7	43.7	9	56.3
Inadequate seating space	37	47.4	41	52.6	5	31.3	11	68.7
Poor lighting facilities	26	33.3	52	66.7	5	31.3	11	68.7
Lack of photocopying facilities	30	38.4	48	61.6	7	43.7	9	56.3
Noise	35	44.8	43	55.2	9	56.3	7	43.7
Inadequate skill	36	46.2	42	53.8	10	62.5	6	37.5
Poor attitude of library staff	30	38.4	48	61.6	8	50.0	8	50.0

Discussion of Findings

Most of the distance learning students in both faculties found the library materials available and accessible to them, and they used the library twice a week when they were in session. Most of the respondents in both faculties used the library

materials after searching through the shelf instead of using the catalogue. Other library habits included: visiting the library because they assimilated best in the library, used the library to complement what they were taught in the class, some read alone in the library, used the catalogue to search for materials and read for more than three hours at a stretch in the library. This result is supported by Olajojo and Akewukereke (2004), Mabawonku (2004) and Azikwe (1993).

Factors affecting Library Use by Distance Learning Students

Some major constraints identified as affecting the use of the library by the distance learners included inadequate reading materials, non recency of library material,s and inadequate library use skills. The result is corroborated by Mabawonku (2004) who reported that lack of library use instructions, borrowing facilities and tight schedules affected their use of the library and Oladokun (2002) that attributed it to lack of current library materials.

Conclusion

The library use habits of distance learning students in University of Ibadan are varied. Majority of the distance learning students rarely use. This is contrary to those in the regular programme, whose habits are more pronounced, owing to the fact that they have a longer period to stay in school and have unrestricted access to all the library services, resources and facilities. Apart from the few benefits enjoyed by the distance learning students from using the library, such as access to photocopy facilities and reading materials, the most significant of the constraints facing the distance learning students is their inability to borrow books in the library which could aid their independent study and lack of library instruction. This constraint and others should be urgently addressed to improve the use of the library by distance learning students as their counterpart in the regular programme.

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